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The Literary Value of the Book of Isaiah

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In this report, I would like to discuss the literary characteristics of a religious text, the Book of Isaiah, which is part of the Old Testament of the Hebrew Bible. This book is held very high both in Judaism and Christianity. It is known to exhibit many literary traits, but the focus of the book is on prophecy.

In this research report I propose to identify, describe and show how a religious text may contain literary traits, how such traits are integrated with the core message and purpose through the use of such literary traits, and how readers of such texts enjoy such texts also for their literary merits. Special attention is given to the use of similes in the Book of Isaiah in this report.

The focus of religious texts is usually more on the ways of life that the faithful should adopt, on whom to worship, how to worship, and why to worship the Deity. The Deity's character, nature and function are interwoven in the message and images of the text. In this process, writers of such religious texts may use a variety of literary techniques and endow their texts with images that become classical and lend themselves to a variety of interpretations from generation to generation. Their images were current originally when they were coined, and they continue to be current for all those who approach such texts with sympathetic, empathic and positive attitude. A very important part of the process is that these assume classical characteristics and the works also become models for other creative writers to emulate.

For example, the medieval Tamil abounds in Saivite and Vaishnavite poems and these are traditionally listed as religious "literature." These follow specific prosody regulations, conditions laid down for the use of metaphors and such other poetic devices, and, in general, they resemble close to their other contemporary literary pieces, and are categorized as part of traditional Tamil literature. They may lack some story content, but they are full of oblique references, imagery and historical information as well. Tamil scholars and modern Tamil textbooks classify this body of literature as religious literature *samaya ilakkiyam*.

The Bible

"The Bible is a collection of books of many different sorts, books which fall into several clear major divisions and which show considerable internal variations"¹. The Bible concerns the activities of men and women in all their tangled complexities. It consists of various types of

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literature beginning with the narrative and continuing with lyric poetry, prophecy, proverbs and philosophy.

The Bible is a collection of the literature and history of great people through different epochs. In it there is a variety of literary forms and genres, some of which are listed below: Narrative, History, Biography, Autobiography, Novel, Shortstory, Letters, Oratory, Lyric poetry, Elegy, Ode, Prophecy, Wisdom literature and the like.

Dr. James L. Vance has eloquently summarized the greatness of the Bible:

History, Poetry, Prophecy, theology, oratory, humour, sarcasm, irony, music, drama, tragedy, strategy, love tales, war tales, travelogues, laws, jurisprudence, songs, sermons, warnings, prayers... was there ever such literature? The Bible begins with a garden and ends with a city. It starts with morning followed by a night, and ends with a day that shall know no night.

It breaks the silence with, "In the beginning God" and it hushes the Universe to sleep with, "The grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all", it finds man at the shut gates of the lost Eden, and leaves him before the open door at the top of the road.²

According to Scott:

The most learned, acute, and diligent student cannot, in the longest life, obtain an entire knowledge of this one volume. The more deeply he works the mine, the richer and more abundant he finds the ore; new light continually beams from this source of heavenly knowledge, to direct the conduct, and illustrate the work of God and the ways of men; and he will at last leave the world confessing, that the more he studied the scriptures, the fuller conviction he had of his own ignorance, and of their inestimable value.³

Billy Graham remarks that, "No other book can touch its profound wisdom, its poetic beauty, or the accuracy of its history and prophecy."⁴ The Prophetic books are among the most difficult writings in the Old Testament. The works are significant for their influence upon human thought which has persisted to this day for a form of surpassing beauty.

The Book of Isaiah – Its Place within the Old Testament

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The Book of Isaiah is the first in the prophetic canon, and it holds the highest place among the other prophetic books. This is due to the loftiness both of language and ideas. The loftiness has been recognized and proclaimed by great musicians and it has been accepted that Isaiah is best known of the prophets.

The Book of Isaiah is like a miniature Bible. There are thirty nine books in the Old Testament and twenty seven in the New Testament. There is something very fascinating about the analysis of this book that has caused it to be referred to as the miniature Bible. The thirty nine chapters are prophetic in harmony with the Old Testament. The twenty seven chapters are messianic, balancing with the New Testament.

In the date and authorship of **The Book of Isaiah** although there is a diversity of opinion as to who wrote the sixty six chapters of Isaiah, all scholars insist on the prophet's historicity and his having at least a significant part in the writing of the book called by his name. Scholars disagree in their views about the authorship of **The Book of Isaiah**.

There are those who reject the concept of the multiple authorship of the Book. They contend that tradition has always held that the book is written by the prophet. They cite the Dead Sea scrolls as more recent evidence supporting the unity of the book since there are no divisions indicated in the Isaiah scroll. Therefore it is contended that until a satisfactory explanation of the tradition is given the authorship by the prophet is defensible.

The Authorship of the Book of Isaiah

Isaiah known as "The St. Paul of the Old Testament"⁵ was evidently from a distinguished Jewish family. This great poet and prophet is seen to be uncompromising, sincere and compassionate. His education is evident in his impressive vocabulary and style. His work is comprehensive in scope and beautifully communicative. The prophet Isaiah pursued his career in Jerusalem between years 741 and 697 B.C. from the end of Uzziah's reign to the beginning of Manasseh's. He lived to see the Northern Kingdom destroyed as he has predicted. He also saw the invasion of the Southern Kingdom by the Assyrians under Sennacherib, and their discomfiture and retreat.

Isaiah was an active public figure, who issued proclamations and advised kings. He was an aristocrat, an educated man, an intimate ruler and a well known figure for many years. His public career came to a climax when his exhortations to faith were followed by the retreat of the Assyrians.

Internal Structure of *The Book of Isaiah*

The Book of Isaiah covers a period of some two hundred and fifty years of Hebrew thought. The prophet's life was a long one, as he was probably born in 760 B.C. and lived on

into the reigns of Hezekiah and probably even into that of his successor Manasseh. Isaiah prophesied in the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. He has been called the evangelical prophet, on account of his numerous and full prophecies.

Of more interest than the details of his career are Isaiah's philosophy and poetry. The three main themes are present in the opening chapters: the denunciation of Judah for its sins, the warning of the destruction of the Northern Kingdom and the presentation of a vision of a great time to come.

The keyword of the book is salvation. The meaning of the name Isaiah is the Salvation of Jehovah, the message of salvation is throughout the book. Isaiah is full of prophecies concerning the coming of the Saviour, and chapter fifty three is the central gem of them all.

The basic theme of this book is found in the name Isaiah that is 'Salvation of the Lord'. The word salvation appears twenty six times in the book. Chapters one through thirty nine portray man's great need for salvation, and chapters forty through sixty six reveal God's great provision of salvation.

A Brief Review of the Content of the *Book of Isaiah*

The Book of Isaiah is decidedly not an arbitrary string of disconnected prophecies. There is a certain chronological arrangement. There is also a certain arrangement according to subject matter, as Prophecies of Condemnation, Historical Parentheses and Prophecies of Comfort.

The first part of Isaiah's prophecy is of condemnation and it aims at his own countrymen at Judah. Chapter one is capsulated message of the entire book. Judah is riddled with moral and spiritual disease. The people are neglecting God as they bow to ritualism and selfishness. But Jehovah graciously invites them to repent and to return to Him because this is their only hope of avoiding judgement. Isaiah's call to proclaim God's message is found in chapter six and this is followed by the Book of Immanuel. These chapters repeatedly refer to the Messiah and anticipate the blessing of His future reign. The prophet moves from local to regional judgement as he proclaims a series of oracles against the surrounding fourteen nations.

The Historical Parenthesis looks back to the Assyrian invasion of Judah in 701 B.C. and anticipates the coming Babylonian invasion of Judah. Judah escapes captivity by Assyria, but they will not escape from the hands of Babylon. God answers King Hezekiah's prayers and delivers Judah from Assyrian destruction by Sennacherib. Hezekiah turns to the Lord in his illness and is granted an extension of fifteen years to his life. But he foolishly shows all his treasures to Babylonian messengers and Isaiah tells him that the Babylonians will one day carry his treasures and be the descendants to their land.

The Prophecies of Comfort deal with Isaiah's comfort of Judah with God's promises of hope and restoration. The basis for this hope is the sovereignty and majesty of God. Of the two hundred and sixteen verses in these nine chapters, hundred and fifteen speak of God's greatness and power. His sovereign character is Judah's confidence of future restoration.

Chapters forty nine through fifty seven concentrate on the coming Messiah who will be their Saviour and Suffering Servant. This rejected but, exalted One will pay for their iniquities and usher in a kingdom of peace and righteousness throughout the earth. All who acknowledge their sins and trust in Him will be delivered. In that day Jerusalem will be rebuilt, Israel's borders will be enlarged and the Messiah will reign in Zion. God's people will be judged, peace, prosperity and justice will prevail and God will make all things anew.

The literary value of **The Book of Isaiah** can be assessed by the innumerable literary forms found in it which will be dealt in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 2 Prophetic Vision and Literary Artistry

In **The Book of Isaiah**, Israel's prophetic literature reaches its zenith in both religious profundity and artistic expression. The narrative technique adopted in the book by the author is both prosaic and poetical. The poetry is exalted, high and rhythmic. The prophetic messages are given in the form of highly sophisticated and exalted poetry. The book is rich with pictorial descriptions, symbols, parables, imagery, metaphors and similes. Indeed, especially within the second part of the book, poetic intensity frequently becomes lyrical possessing a singular beauty matched only by certain of the psalms. The style adopted by Isaiah of Jerusalem is quick, abrupt, hitting home with force.

The Method of Composition – Some Literary Features

The method of composition of the book is introduced at the very outset in Chapter one. Some of the verses reveal that chapter one comprises at least half a dozen paragraphs or separable sections. The words are memorable in the first place, of course, because they are delivered in rhythmic prose. The latter is half-way through being verse; moreover, it often exhibits puns and alliterations that could be easily remembered.

Verses of great poetic grandeur are found in abundance. The chapter twelve is a magnificent psalm of praise, a hymn to be praised and used, as verse one says, once the Day of the Lord has dawned. To quote:

And in the day thou shalt say, O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and comfortedst me... Cry out and shout thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.⁶

The most interesting passage of poetic grandeur is seen in the verses fourteen to sixteen of the forty second chapter. It is a law of life as it is that new life can only spring forth from pain and even the death of the old. A mysterious and difficult utterance indeed to understand is because it is in majestic poetic language. It is significant to note that the poem ends with the reassuring words.

The next poem that the prophet strikes at is another song of praise. Chapter forty four, verses twenty three through twenty eight is in praise of the God who creates order out of chaos and confusion, which is special Providence Himself. Within the section Isaiah 40-55 there lies enclosed four other songs. The first is seen in chapter forty two, verses one through seven. The

second in the series is chapter forty nine verse one through six, the next in chapter fifty verses four through nine, written in first person singular.

The fourth and last poem, however, is chapter fifty two, verses thirteen through chapter fifty three, verses twelve and goes even beyond the insights into God's strange ways reached in the other poems. Its climax declares that the undeserved and uncomplaining suffering is actually God's instruments, in the face of human wickedness, for the redemption of many in this world. A group of exultant poems are to be found in the chapters fifty four and fifty five which are to be shouted joyously in praise of Him who has redeemed his people, Israel.

Lyrical Elements

The abundance of lyrical element in The Book of Isaiah marks it a true piece of literary art. Chapters forty and forty one contain the lyrical songs of joy and announcement of good news from God. In the forty second chapter the great prophet turns to consider for the first time, though not the last, what it means to Israel to hold her extraordinary calling of being servant to the Living God. The new poem begins with God Himself addressing His servant people.

A prose expansion in lyrical vein is seen in the following verses. To quote:

For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem: thou shall weep no more: he will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of the cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee. And though... the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people and healeth the stroke of their wound. ⁷

Chapter two, verses six through twenty two is a poem in several stanzas. The refrain is repeated at verses ten, nineteen and twenty one. The key to the poem is seen in verse eleven.

Pictorial Descriptions

A number of pictorial descriptions enhance the style and beauty of the book of Isaiah by giving several suggestive pictures describing the 'Coming One'. This coming One will be of the royal line (11:1). He would perfectly and completely perform the will of God amongst His covenant people.

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse,
and a Branch shall grow out of his roots; ⁸

He would bring in a reign of righteousness such as would truly embody the righteous purpose of God. The figure would even bear names and descriptive titles that ought to be and were actually at that time applied to God alone (9:6).

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.⁹

Chapter one is a good example of pictorial thinking. It begins by depicting a great landscape. The earth is spread out wide below Isaiah's feet, and the heavens stretch to the horizon over his head. God's people, Israel, are in occupation of the land that he sees. Around and amongst these people are cows and donkeys and mangers and grassy fields. The particular genius of the prophet is of course, to use pictures such as these to convey the truth of God. The Bible and **The Book of Isaiah** are full of picture language from the beginning to the end.

Chapter two, verses one to five gives us a glorious picture of the Coming Day. Jerusalem lies on the skyline of the ridge of hills that run north and south in Palestine. It is indeed a city set on a hill that cannot be hid. Now Isaiah, poetically speaking, sees it lifted upon still higher, in order that all the nations of the earth may see it and flow unto it in joy. Verse two says so:

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of Lord's house shall be established in the top of mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.¹⁰

Symbolic Elements

The Book of Isaiah is marked for its symbolic element. Behind the great prophets there is this symbolic vision. Isaiah in chapter nine envisages the birth of Christ such an event that is to be part of that Coming Great Day of the Lord when out of Darkness- Biblical symbol of all that wars against the purpose of God- a great light would shine forth, just as had happened already in the beginning before men fell into sin, as is described in Genesis chapter three. The verse two of chapter nine of the book of Isaiah states:

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of shadow of death, upon them hath the light shine.¹¹

There are numerous symbols of salvation found in the book, such as, wells of salvation, Day of Salvation, Walls of Salvation, Everlasting, Day of Salvation, Heralds of Salvation, Garments of Salvation, Light of Salvation, Arm of Salvation and Helmet of Salvation.

Parabolic Elements

The Book of Isaiah has also the use of parable in it which is one of the finest modes of literary forms. The moral is explicit giving a complete and convincing picture of life, successfully conveying the truth, religious principle and the moral lesson.

Chapter five, verses one to seven contains Isaiah's famous parable of the vineyard. The care of the Lord over the church of Israel is described by the management of vineyard. The use of parables to enforce a lesson is a common expedient among Orientals and the Jewish people. The parable concerns a vineyard for which the owner has done everything, sparing nothing and yet the result has been tragic. It produced less than he had into it. The parable is followed with its interpretation. It is a picture of the nation's ingratitude. God has done for Israel and Judah everything, but in return, they rejected Him. Instead of producing fruit to His glory, they are giving all that they possess to the enemy. Therefore God will have to deal with them accordingly.

The story is so framed that unwittingly they have passed judgement before realizing that they themselves are being condemned. When the secret is actually revealed, a change in rhythm and the use of assonance gives tremendous force to it. The whole poem from a literary and artistic point of view is admirable.

Imagery

The wealth and grandeur of poetic descriptions with imagery is explicit in the book of Isaiah. The figure of God's action as one of fire is a favourite one with Isaiah as seen in the following verse,

And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the
diet thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall
become burning pitch¹²

The following is the verse quoted as an example for the figurative style of Isaiah:

For thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will extend peace to her
like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like stream; then
shall ye suck, ye shall be borne upon her side, and be
dandled upon her knees¹³

Metaphors

The Book of Isaiah is rich with metaphors. In the very first chapter of the book, the twenty first verse exhibits his grievance over the city's sinful attitude and he exclaims, How is the faithful city become a harlot! It was full of judgement; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers.

Isaiah calls Israel as the city of righteousness metaphorically in the twenty sixth verse of the first chapter which is as follows: “And I will restore thy judge as at the first, and they counselors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, righteousness, the faithful city”.¹⁴

Isaiah further calls Israel a vineyard in the chapter five and a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty as seen in chapter twenty eight verse five. To quote:

In that day shall the Lord of Hosts be for crown of Glory,
and for the diadem of beauty, unto the residue of this
people.¹⁵

The following is another significant metaphorical illustration which pronounces God’s blessings upon Israel in chapter sixty, verses nineteen through twenty one. Here in these verses he proclaims that the Lord shall be an everlasting light unto Israel and that the days of her mourning will be ended. The people will be all righteous and will inherit the land for ever, the branch of the Lord’s planting, the work of His hands, that the Lord may be glorified.

Isaiah uses a metaphorical illustration in chapter twenty eight verse twenty three through twenty eight that impresses the truth that he has been giving. The metaphor is that of the farmer who first of all prepares the ground by ploughing and then still further breaks it up and pulverizes it by harrowing. After that, he plants or sows the seed. When the harvest time arrives, he deals with each one according to its own nature. He is simply saying that God knows how to deal with every person and every nation. He knows how to break up the hard soil of man’s opposition. By careful instruction God speaks to lead men in the ways of righteousness. If men will respond, the seed of God will bring forth abundantly. The child of God may experience temptations, trials, and tribulations that which is likened to the threshing of the grain.

Similes

The succeeding chapter elaborately attempts a study of various similes found in **The Book of Isaiah**.

Chapter 3 Similes: An Effective Literary Medium

Focus of This Chapter

Prophet Isaiah has employed numerous similes in **The Book of Isaiah**. There are quite a large number of similes seen throughout the book which enhance the literary value of the book.

The first part of this chapter deals with the similes portraying the various attributes of God namely, God's mercy, love and forgiveness, His protection and His care and concern for man. This is followed by similes which speak about the ungrateful Israel and Judah and their sins such as drunkenness, intemperance, idolatry, licentiousness, hypocrisy, pride obstinacy and back sliding. The next section of this chapter focuses on similes describing God's wrath, His chastisement, judgement, deliverance, restoration, regeneration and renewal of Israel. Similes referring to Christ's nature and His kingdom are being dealt with in the last section of this chapter.

Prophet Isaiah has proclaimed divine universality of God's character and administration. This proves that God's dealing with man's justice is unchanging.

Love of God

It is a fundamental religious truth within Christianity that there is no gospel quite apart from the love of God. The supreme dimension of divine love is very well underlined in **The Book of Isaiah**. The following similes depict God's mercy and forgiveness.

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord:
though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as
snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be wool.
¹⁶

Commenting on this verse Mathew Henry and Thomas Scott remark: "though our sins have been as scarlet and crimson, a deep dye, a double dye, first in the wool of original corruption, and afterwards in the many threads of actual transgression; though we have often dipped into sin, by many back sliding; yet pardoning mercy will take out the stain".¹⁷

I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, their transgressions and
as a cloud, thy sins; return unto me; for I have redeemed
thee.¹⁸

The above similes most effectively bring out God's mercy and His forgiving nature when it says that "when God pardons sin, he blots out, he dispels this thick cloud so that the way to heaven is open again. The cloud is scattered by the Sun of righteousness; it is quite gone".¹⁹

On God's Care and Concern

Chapter twenty five, verse four is a simile which speaks of God's care and concern, which portrays God as strength to man, a divine refuge and overshadowing care. To quote:

For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall.²⁰

The similes further prove that God's love is super human that it ever gives and forgives. It is written in the tablet of human experience that the Divine love is poured out with prodigality without the least reference to man's merit or worthiness. God's love does not withhold its best to man. It has got the special prerogative which is to give.

On God's Protection

Verse four and five of chapter thirty one are similes which depict God's protection.

For thus hath the Lord spoken unto me, like as the lion and the young lion roaring on his prey, when multitude of shepherds is called forth against him, he will not be afraid of their voice, not abase himself for the noise of them: so shall the Lord of hosts come down to fight for mount Zion, and for the hill thereof.

As birds flying, so will the Lord of hosts defend Jerusalem; defending also he will deliver it; and passing over he will preserve it.²¹

God will protect Jerusalem as birds hovering over their nests and to protect their young ones. This is a tremendous statement and promise. This simile is an illustration which is clear and impressive. The beautiful city of Jerusalem, the land of Judah is threatened by Assyrians from the north. God says He will be as a thousand birds circling, curling, watching and protecting.

On Sins

Isaiah cries against the sins of Israel and Judah. Numerous are the sins and similes listed below effectively voice forth the prophet's views. The first Chapter provides a fitting introduction to the teaching of Isaiah. Its theme elaborates and develops throughout his career and is the story of the prodigal son - Judah, God's people rebelling against their heavenly father, and suffering the prodigal's fate. There is hope that they will come to themselves, recognize their sins and be restored.

The twenty first verse of the first chapter is packed with colourful imagery, more effective than plain catalogue of imagery, more effective than a plain catalogue of the offences to which they refer apostasy, violence, debased standard, fraud, racketeering, bribery, corruption and neglect of social obligation.

The cry of Isaiah is the revelation of the sinfulness of Israel and Judah. They are described as being overcome with drunkenness. It seems the more God bestows His gifts upon them, the more utterly they forget Him and turn to idolatry and selfish, sinful wickedness. They are now at the bottom rung of the ladder wallowing in drunkenness and licentiousness.

The glorious beauty of this northern kingdom, Israel is likened to a beautiful flower and fruitless tree. Isaiah declares to them that their sinfulness, their drunkenness, their idolatry are just like the worm that eats the roots of the tree and the flower. To quote:

And the glorious beauty, which is one the head of the fat valley, shall be fading flower, and as the hasty fruit before the summer; which when he that looketh upon it seeth, while it is yet in his hand he eateth it up.²²

The sinful heart of a person or a nation may be covered over with the beauties of vineyards, orchards, flowers; cultured and civilized manners, but as long as the fires of sin burn deep in thoughts and imagination of the heart, there is likely to be an eruption at any time that will lay waste that which is fair and beautiful. The best thing for a man to possess is good heart. That is the one thing that the people of God needed in Isaiah's day which they did not have.

Judah turned away from the fear of the Lord. Formality took the place of true spiritual worship until God Himself could no longer tolerate the unfaithfulness and hypocrisy which characterized the people with whom He has entered into Covenant relationship. Therefore Israel and Judah experienced the judgment of God, administered through Godless nations of that day. Israel has become very mulish and God tries to change their current of thoughts and direct them back to himself.

Isaiah says in Chapter thirty verse thirteen that these people of Judah are like individuals standing beside high wall whose foundations have been undermined and which is already bulging and about to fall on them and bring them to destruction. To quote:

Therefore this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fail, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly at an instant²³

Or, he says they are like a potter's vessel which is soon to be broken into many pieces and that not one piece can be found large enough to take up water to quench their thirst or to be of any use.

And he shall break it as the breaking of the potter's vessel that is broken in pieces; he shall not spare: so that there shall not be found in the bursting of it a shred to take fire from the hearth, or to take water withal out of the pit.²⁴

Commenting on this simile, the New Commentary Bible says that the disobedient will suddenly crash down like a cracking wall, and so great will be their ruin that it can be likened to the shivering of a piece of crockery as revealed in the preceding simile.

Another simile which pronounces judgment on the people's iniquity is as follows:

Behold, the name of the Lord cometh from far, burning with his anger, and the burden thereof is heavy; his lips are full of indignation and his tongue as a devouring fire.²⁵

The next verse is another simile which reiterates the point that God's breath is an overflowing stream, which will reach to the midst of the neck, to sift the nations with the sieve of variety: and there shall be a bridle in the jaws of the people, causing them to err.

Other examples of similes which focus our attention on God's wrath are found in Chapter forty, verse twenty four, and Chapter forty one verse two. To quote:

Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown: yea their stock shall not take root in the earth: and he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble.²⁶

And again:

Who raised up the righteous man from the east, called him to his foot, gave the nations before him, and made him rule over kings? He gave them as the dust to his sword and as driven stumble to his bow.²⁷

On Worldly Wisdom

The simile in chapter twenty four verse twenty is noteworthy in this context which exclaims that worldly men think to dwell in the earth as in a palace, as in a castle; but it shall be removed like a cottage, like a lodge put up for the night. To quote:

The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it; and it shall fall and not rise again.²⁸

Therefore as the fire devoureth the stubble and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust: because they have cast away the law of the Lord of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.²⁹

On the State of Nation and God's Wrath

This indeed is another simile which explains the state of the Jewish nation. Sin lays open the wrath and curse of God. Sin weakens the strength, the root of people; it defaces the beauty, the blossoms of a nation. When God's word is despised and His laws cast away men cannot expect anything else but God's utter abandonment of them.

Similes seen in Chapter sixty six, verse fifteen are an exquisite exposition of God's wrath. To quote:

For, behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire.³⁰

Commenting on this simile Matthew Henry remarks that, "the day of the Lord will, indeed, be terrible with wrath and fierce anger, far beyond all here stated. Nor will there be any place for the sinner to flee to or obtain an escape".³¹ The New Commentary Bible interprets the faces of flames as burning with excitement or with shame.

Many are the similes which wonderfully portray Israel's state of desolation, restoration, regeneration and renewal. The desolate state of Israel without God is graphically portrayed in many a simile. Chapter one, verse eight pictures the back slid Israel which is desolate as seen in the following similes.

And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a Vineyard,
as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city.³²

Garland effectively voices forth his views on the above quoted verse as, because of the nation's rejection of Yahweh, Jerusalem is left as insecure as a frail watchman's hut perched on four poles in the midst of a cultivated area.

For Ye shall be as an oak whose leaf fadeth and as a garden that hath no water. And the strong shall be as tow, and the maker of it as a spark, and they shall both burn together, and none shall quench them.³³

Isaiah declares that the Jews should become as a tree when blasted by heat; as a garden without water, which in these hot countries would soon be burned up. Even the strong man shall be as the tow; not only soon broken and pulled to pieces, but easily catching fire. When the sinner has made himself as tow and stubble, and God makes Himself as a consuming fire, what can prevent the utter ruin of the sinner?

God's Disappointment

Israel's state of desolation is beautifully pictured in chapter twenty four verse thirteen,

When thus it shall be in the midst of the land among the people, there shall be as the shaking of an olive tree; and as the gleaning grapes when the vintage is done.³⁴

This simile portrays that it is "a world of disappointment, a valley of tears; the children of men in it are but a few days, and full of trouble. There shall be a remnant preserved from the general ruin, and it shall be a devout and pious remnant. These few are like the gleanings of the olive tree hid under the leaves."³⁵

God continues to pronounce woe upon these disobedient people after He declares that He has to reject them because of their sins, and then reminds them that He has made provisions for their renewal. He talks of their redemption. The desolate state will turn to the future reign of righteousness. He declares that the desolations will be until the spirit be poured upon men from a high place and the wilderness will be a fruitful field with His power.

Source of All Power

A characteristic of God is that He is the source of all power in the Universe. His power is unlimited. The following simile in chapter twenty eight, verse two reveals Isaiah's great awareness of God's power.

Behold the Lord hath a mighty and strong one, which as a tempest of hail and a destroying storm, as a flood of mighty

waters overflowing, shall cast down to the earth with the hand.³⁶

In the latter part of the thirty-first chapter, Isaiah speaks of the supreme authority of God giving deliverance. The people of Jerusalem could not imagine how God would be able to deliver the city from the armies of Sennacherib. The simile emphasizes this message which states that the enemies of Israel are like crowd of shepherds vainly trying to scare a lion by their mere shouting. The lion stands undaunted, not one shepherd dares to challenge this mighty beast. So God as the Almighty will use His strength in defending Israel. God will be as a mighty lion against these pretended shepherds of Assyria.

The sixth verse of the fifty first chapter further highlights on God's power being eternal. To quote:

Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein... shall be forever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.³⁷

This simile is a prayer for the display of God's powers and an answer with the consolations of His grace. God calls upon His people to mind the things that belong to their everlasting peace. In that day the present heavens and the earth will give way to new ones in which His salvation and righteousness will never cease. This is echoed in the following simile.

So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and His glory from the rising of the Sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall rise up a standard against him.³⁸

The views of Matthew Henry and Thomas Scott are noteworthy in this context. They say that "God engaged His own strength and righteousness for His people. When the enemy threatens to bear down all without control, then the Spirit of the Lord shall stop him, put him to flight."³⁹

God as the Lord of Battles

God as the Lord of Battles fighting for His own is graphically portrayed in The Book of Isaiah. To quote:

For thus hath the Lord spoken to one, like as the lion and the young lion roaring on his prey, when a multitude of

shepherds is called forth against him, he will not be afraid of their voice, nor abase himself for the noise of them: so shall the Lord of Hosts come down to fight for mount Zion, and for the hill thereof. ⁴⁰

And again:

And your spoil shall be gathered like the gathering of the caterpillar, as the running to and fro of locusts shall he run upon them. ⁴¹

God's Deliverance

There are similes that speak of God's deliverance, the first glimpse of Jehovah's triumphant return. He will come like a conqueror who won the victory by His own right arm bringing as His booty the returning exiles and leading home the young and feeble among them with infinite tenderness.

Every deliverance by God in history is part of the supreme act of deliverance in Christ, a ray in the light of the one light. He is caught up in a vision of that greater deliverance to which all God's act in the history of his people, are leading, the supreme victory of God in Christ. The prophecy remains in terms of national deliverance and prosperity, but faith translates it into terms of the reign of Christ and a Spiritual Kingdom of peace, justice and righteousness.

D. David Garland commenting on the simile in the eighth verse of the fifty first chapter speaks of how "Israel is admonished to endure patiently the reproach of Israel its men and their reviling because the day of God is salvation and will more than compensate for such abuse. It will be salvation which is eternal." ⁴² To quote:

For the moth shall eat them up like a garment and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation. ⁴³

In chapter sixty two, verse one, God's deliverance is seen as Jehovah has purposed the redemption of Zion, and she is encouraged by His assurance of restoration as seen in the following simile:

For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth. ⁴⁴

Picture of Warrior

Isaiah uses the picture of a warrior to show God putting on the zeal for right as a coat of mail, the helmet of salvation a mantle of fury in vengeance in the following simile:

For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon His head: and He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing and was clad with zeal as a cloak. ⁴⁵

Yahweh will bring her subjugation to an end and restore her to Zion. The twenty ninth verse of the thirtieth chapter speaks of the restoration of joy to the people of Israel. In the meantime there is going to be great rejoicing among the Israelites, rejoicing like that of the Passover. Isaiah is saying that they are to have as a consequence of the destruction of the Assyrians an occasion like the Passover to celebrate.

On Rejoicing

The tenth and the eleventh verse of the sixty first chapter depict the view that when the nation, or perhaps Zion, responds to the promises of the covenant, there will be great rejoicing and joy in the goodness of Jehovah. There will also be unbounded assurance, for as certain as a seed sprouts from the soil, so will the Lord accomplish His word, which is reflected in the following verses.

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, as a bridegroom adorneth herself with her jewels. For the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are in it to spring forth; so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations. ⁴⁶

According to chapter fifty one verse three, God plans the same for those left in Zion since they are the inheritors of God's promise to Abraham. In addition, the barren earth will again be made productive and the land will once more ring the joy of thanksgiving as a result of Jehovah's faithfulness. The verse goes thus:

For the Lord shall comfort Zion: He will comfort all her waste places: and He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness

shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.⁴⁷

Similes in verses nineteen through twenty one of the sixtieth chapter says that there will be no need for light either by day or by night, because the light of His presence would supersede all other illumination. This light will be an everlasting radiance which dispels darkness and drives away all mourning and unrighteousness.

On Restoration

The tenth and eleventh verses of the fifty-fifth chapter are an apt simile that reveals God's restoration.

For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth and not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater.

So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I send it.⁴⁸

These verses when explained reveal the fact that just as the rain accomplishes its purpose as it falls upon the earth, so will the word of Jehovah accomplish His purpose. The word is the expression of His purpose and that which He purposed will be realized. Since His immediate plan for Israel is restoration, she can rest assuredly that she will return with Yahweh as her guide. The whole of the natural order will be transformed and that miracle will be performed and will be a blessed restored state.

The following similes picturesquely reveal God's restoration in an emphatic manner. To quote:

And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses.⁴⁹

The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.⁵⁰

And the Lord shall guide them continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shall be

like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.⁵¹

Thou shall also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God.⁵²

The following is an oft quoted simile which speaks of the renewal of Israel. To quote:

But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength: they shall mount up with wings as eagles: they shall run, and not be weary, and they shall walk, and not faint.⁵³

Garland commenting on this simile remarks that when men wait for the Lord, they are borne along and sustained by faith and hope, in the same way in which the eagle is borne aloft by his wings or the walker or runner is sustained by a second wind. However weak men may seem to be in comparison with the might of Babylon, God can give new life to them. Man's unaided strength, be it ever so great, like that of a young man, in the full vigour of life, it shall utterly fall; but whose faith is in the Lord will acquire supernatural strength and be up borne as eagles soaring to the heights.

The simile in the twelfth verse of the sixty-sixth chapter is noteworthy in this context.

For thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream: then shall ye suck, ye shall be borne upon her sides, and be dandled upon her knees.⁵⁴

The Signs of Widowhood

The signs of widowhood will give way to the ornaments of a bride and the desolate places will be repopulated by numbers too great for the area to accommodate.

For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.⁵⁵

Figuratively speaking Israel shall be the bride of Jehovah and He shall rejoice over her in their new relationship. These thoughts on the renewal of Israel are reflected in the above simile.

Yet another grand simile where Zion is bidden to put on festive array, to rise and sit enthroned as a queen; for the days of her sorrow are ended is seen in the chapter fifty two verses one to twelve.

Foretelling the Christ's Coming

Isaiah has prophesied that the Christ will come out of Judah and accomplish the work of Redemption and Restoration, whose forgiveness and deliverance in mercy is matchless. God has stooped forth into this world in the person of His Son to straighten out the crooked, to smooth the rough places, to lay low the mountains, and to exalt the valleys.

In chapter forty verse eleven, Isaiah says:

He shall feed His flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.⁵⁶

The above simile depicts Christ as the good shepherd who shows tender care for the believers and those of a sorrowful spirit. All created beings shrink to nothing in comparison with the Creator. This magnifies God's love to the world, that it is of such small account and value compared with God Himself.

The consolation and graces of Christ's spirit are as rivers of water in the dry land; and as the overhanging rock affords refreshing shade and shelter to the weary traveller in the desert, so his power, his truth and love yield the believer the only real protection and refreshment in the weary land through which he journeys to heaven as revealed in the following verse:

And a man shall be a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.⁵⁷

The peaceful character of Christ's kingdom is brought out in the following simile:

They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.⁵⁸

The simile in verse twenty-six of chapter thirty comments on the spiritual dawn that will come upon the people, when Christ is their light. To quote:

Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of His people and healeth the stroke of the wound.⁵⁹

These similes emphasize that the drama of redemption is perpetually been re-enacted and it is this tenet that gives such poignancy to his poetic treatment of man's self- will and God's sufferings. The idea of God's sustaining love pervades throughout the book of Isaiah. Even though man goes astray and breaks down the intimate relationship that ought to exist between him and the Creator, God sustains man. Thus the similes become an effective medium to convey such profound truths in the most simple and precise manner.

Chapter 4 Conclusion

This project aimed at the exposition of the literary value of the Book of Isaiah with special reference to the form and function of similes in the Book. Chapter one delineated the Bible as literature and presented the salient features of the book along with its authorship, construction and the message of the book. Chapter two dealt with the rhythmic prose, puns and alliterations, poetic grandeur, lyrical element, pictorial descriptions, symbolic element, parable, imagery, figurative style and metaphors, which are some of the significant literary forms of the Book of Isaiah.

The next chapter progressively and vividly unfolded to the reader the numerous similes in the Book of Isaiah which graphically portray the various attributes of God's nature such as God's love, mercy and forgiveness, care and concern, His protection, the sins of Israel and God's wrath. Many are the similes that proclaim Israel's state of desolation, God's deliverance, Israel's restoration, regeneration and renewal. The similes which depict the nature and the kingdom of Christ are noteworthy.

A deep and purposeful study of the literary aspects specify the metaphors and similes, drive home that the **Book of Isaiah** is mostly a philosophical enquiry into the meaning of life. The book indeed is concerned with the problem which has assailed man from the earliest times to the present study. The eternal question was and is that why man has been created? And what is his final destiny.

It is an interesting and inspiring theme of the Bible, identifying love with the Divine Being and also one of the essential virtues of human soul. There are a good number of poems and similes which convey such mystic and immutable aspect of God's love.

A grand and touching picture of human life is painted in the **Book of Isaiah**. What makes the book so telling is the dynamic awareness it creates in the readers about the supernatural power and the different dimensions of God's love.

Isaiah very effectively contrasts the love of man with the divine love. He affirms that man repays God's kindness with ingratitude, disbelief and murmuring. It is touching to note that though God pursues man deliberately and with all urgency, and proves to be a relentless lover, man rebels against Him. There is nothing in man that obligates, God to be gracious to him and more so when man does not deserve such loving attitude. God's great love can never be questioned for it is as unchangeable as His Holiness.

Divine love is deeper in intensity and richer in quality than human love at its higher level. Spurgeon, the world famous scholar and evangelist, reiterates the views of Isaiah when he says that: "When man's love has reached its climax, it can only be a solitary dew drop on a leaf

compared with the copious showers of love that pour continually from the heart of our dear Lord and Master”.⁶⁰ And again he says, “if all our loves are put together they will not fill a tiny cup; there before us flows the fathomless, limitless and shore less ocean of the love of Jesus”.⁶¹

Isaiah goes on to say emphatically that out in the wilderness of life man needs God. He is set apart for God’s glory and his race is directed towards full grown spiritual life. He cannot live without God for then he would become a fish without water and a bird without wings. A man without God is a pitiful thing. As Montaigne puts it, “...can anything be imagined so ridiculous, that this wretched creature, who is not so much master of himself, but subject to the injuries of all things, should call him master of the worlds”.⁶² Only companionship with God can complete life.

Isaiah, with the examples of Israel and Judah, proves that man has always the temptation of separating himself from the loving hand of God and moving about independently with the result that he is exposed to all sorts of difficulties. He is able to see the misfortune of frustration and incompleteness they undergo because they have not yet opened their hearts to the inflow of higher wisdom and dynamism of divine love.

The nature of man is graphically portrayed in the book of Isaiah which makes it universal in its appeal. He proves that the commonest tendency of man is to fulfill his own native desires and ambitions even though they are diametrically opposite to God’s will. Though the human heart is basically the same in every individual, man’s finite mind is not capable of dealing anything as great as the love of God. Man has got a faint glimpse into the plan of God through the sacred scriptures and yet he is hesitating to follow His will.

“The startling thing is that the lives and motivations of these people who lived so long ago have such a modern flavour. As we read, the pages seem like mirrors held up before our own minds and hearts, reflecting our pride and prejudices, our own failures and humiliations, our own sins and sorrows.”⁶³ The book is certainly a work of original and uncommon genius. In a word the similes and other literary forms contain an excellent epitome and illustration of the Christian doctrines and principles.

Thus the Book of Isaiah can be regarded as the story of man and his relationship with God which accounts for the universality of the book. In this book prophet Isaiah gives a unique insight into the divine purpose for the creation of man and the Universe. A man’s life and his belief and what he believes concerning time, truth, destiny, eternity, life and God are subjects of great value and importance. A correct and idealistic conception of such topics counts not only for the present but for eternity also. Such a spiritual tenor serves as one of the most important principles guiding Prophet Isaiah in his prophetic vision.

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