

# MISSIONARIES FROM THE NATIONS: A LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF ISAIAH 66:18-21

---

Elisha Kwabena Marfo

*Abstract:* Through linguistic analysis, this article argues that Isa 66:18-19 proclaims YHWH's כְּבוֹד, which occurs thrice in the passage, emphasising God's divine plan to reveal Himself and His glory to the peoples of the nations and all humanity in general. YHWH's mission is a global mission based on personal salvation that the nations enjoy from God. The missionaries are both Israel and the Gentiles, and their mission field is the peoples of all nations and languages. As the nations see the כְּבוֹד of YHWH, God's plans for the nations and the entire world is realised. When YHWH's כְּבוֹד is grasped by the people and then proclaimed among the nations, the outcome of YHWH's mission for His servant, Israel, and the nations are achieved, and His sovereignty in the universe is established. YHWH's message of His glory and goodness to humanity reaches everywhere, even to the remotest places where His name has not been heard. As an outcome, all humanity comes to know the only true God and recognises what this only one true God has done.

**Key Words:** Gentiles; Humanity; Isaiah 66:1-18; Israel; Missionaries; Nations; Salvation.

## Introduction

The mission theology in the Old Testament (OT), particularly in the Isaianic literature, has been a subject of debate in scholarly circles. While several scholars have argued for OT mission theology,<sup>1</sup> others

---

<sup>1</sup> Bryant Hicks, "Old Testament Foundations for Mission," in *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions*, ed. John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith, and Justice Anderson (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 53-62; Walter C. Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000). See also Jiří Moskala, "The Message of God's People in the Old Testament," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 19, nos. 1-2 (2008): 18-39; Doug Matacio, "Centripetal and 'Centrifugal' Mission: Solomon and Jesus," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 4, no. 4 (2008): 31-42; Jiří Moskala, "The Mission of God's People in the Old Testament," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 19, nos. 1-2 (2008): 40-60; Yoon Tahk Sohn, "Biblical Missiology and a Wholistic Mission Perspective," *Mission and Theology* 7, no. 5 (2001): 235-244; Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003);

argue against the presence of the theme in the OT.<sup>2</sup> It is observed that the OT prophetic literature suggests “an indispensable aspect of a God whose character implies a missionary venture.”<sup>3</sup> He initiates, empowers, and assumes mission. Therefore, mission plays a crucial role in God’s revelation of His salvific plan for all humanity.<sup>4</sup>

Many scholars, however, have not considered the theme of mission in their research on Isa 66; examples are Chilton,<sup>5</sup> Polan,<sup>6</sup> Whybray,<sup>7</sup> Lindsey,<sup>8</sup> Clements,<sup>9</sup> McCullough,<sup>10</sup> Oswalt,<sup>11</sup> Dumbrell,<sup>12</sup> Seitz,<sup>13</sup> and Kath.

---

<sup>2</sup> For example, Eckhard J. Schnabel argues that there is no definite command in commissioning people to go out for mission in the OT, contrary to what is found in the NT (cf. Matt 28:19-20). To him, God did not outline a serious blueprint to propagate His message. See Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2 vols. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004). Furthermore, Ferdinand Hahn have pointed out that “there is an absence of a divine commission for the purpose and of any conscious outgoing to the Gentiles to win them for belief in Yahweh.” Ferdinand Hahn, *Mission in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1967), 20

<sup>3</sup> Robert Dobbie, “The Biblical Foundation of the Mission of the Church: The Old Testament,” *International Review of Mission* 51 (1962): 202.

<sup>4</sup> See, Elisha K. Marfo, “Who Said, No Mission in the Old Testament: A Theological Framework of Mission in the Isaianic Literature,” *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies* 6, no. 4 (2020): 223-235. Id., “Isaiah’s Authorship and Methodology: A Historical Review,” *Asia-Africa Journal of Mission & Ministry* 18 (2018): 109-137; Elisha K. Marfo, “Fulfillment and Application of Isaianic Prophecies,” *Valley View University Journal of Theology* 5 (2018): 1-15; Id., “Metaphors of Election in the Old Testament,” *Asia-Africa Journal of Mission & Ministry* 22 (2020): 3-25.

<sup>5</sup> Bruce D. Chilton, *The Glory of Israel: The Theology and Provenience of the Isaiah Targum*, ed. David J. A. Clines, Philip R. Davies, and David M. Gunn (Sheffield, UK: Department of Biblical Studies, The University of Sheffield, 1982).

<sup>6</sup> Gregory J. Polan, *In the Ways of Justice Toward Salvation: A Rhetorical Analysis of Isaiah 56-59* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1986), 5-139.

<sup>7</sup> Roger N. Whybray, *The Second Isaiah*, ed. Roger N. Whybray (Old Testament Guides; Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academics, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> F. Duane Lindsey, *The Servant Songs: A Study in Isaiah* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1985).

<sup>9</sup> R.E. Clements, “The Unity of the Book of Isaiah,” *Interpretation* 36 (1982): 117-129; Id., “Beyond Tradition History: Deutero-Isaianic Development of First Isaiah’s Themes,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 31 (1985): 95-113; Id., “Isaiah: A Book Without an Ending?” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 97 (2002): 109-126.

<sup>10</sup> W. S. McCullough, “A Re-Examination of Isaiah 56-66,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 67 (1948): 27-36.

<sup>11</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Holy One of Israel: Studies in the Book of Isaiah* (Cambridge, UK: Lutterworth, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> William J. Dumbrell, “The Purpose of the Book of Isaiah,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 36 (1985): 111-128.

<sup>13</sup> Christopher Seitz, “How Is the Prophet Isaiah Present in the Latter Half of the Book? The Logic of Chapters 40-66 Within the Book of Isaiah,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115 (1996): 219-240.

Besides, Brevard S. Childs<sup>14</sup> and John A. Motyer<sup>15</sup> argue for other concepts as central to the Isaianic literature. Childs argues for the motif of YHWH's supremacy and sovereignty. Motyer, though advances that Isa 66:19 has mission nuances, indicates the concept of YHWH's dominion and Messianism as at the centre of the passage. In contrast to Motyer, Reed Lessing presents an in-depth insight into the historical and eschatological aspects of the text of Isa 66:19.<sup>16</sup>

However, Koole, exploring Isa 40—66 from a historical perspective, argues for a worldwide mission that is premised on individual salvation. Conversely, he notes that mission in Isa 66 is related to YHWH's sacred eschatological judgment concept. His work is not without complications. First, he premises his discourse of mission from a narrow view of Isaiah's portrayal; second, he positions mission in a judgment context. It is also important to note that Koole, like Brueggemann,<sup>17</sup> Stuhlmüller,<sup>18</sup> and Knight,<sup>19</sup> see the passage as post-exilic.

In agreement with Mora's discussion on YHWH's salvation theme in Isaiah's oracles against the nations,<sup>20</sup> Williamson notes a comparable study of the nations' activities in Zion by the Psalmist and in the Isaianic corpus.<sup>21</sup> For Williamson, however, the mission task of Israel to the nations that enter Judah is not mentioned. In contrast, Mora notes YHWH's judgment against the nations and equally postulates that "there are promises for the remnant of those people and for a remnant of Judah."<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> John A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993).

<sup>16</sup> R. Reed Lessing, *Isaiah 56-66*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2014), 493.

<sup>17</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1998), 246.

<sup>18</sup> Carroll Stuhlmüller, "Deutero-Isaiah and Trito-Isaiah," *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 1:348.

<sup>19</sup> George A. F. Knight, *The New Israel: A Commentary on the Book of Isaiah 56-66*, International Theological Commentary 23B (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 96, 117-118.

<sup>20</sup> Carlos Mora, "The Oracles Against the Nations in the Old Testament: Salvation for All the People," *Scholarship and Christian Worldview* 6 (2012): 123-147.

<sup>21</sup> H. G. M. Williamson, *Isaiah 1-5*, International Critical Commentary (London, UK: T. & T. Clark, 2006), 173-177.

<sup>22</sup> Mora, "The Oracles Against the Nations," 133.

The survey of Isaianic literature reveals that the motif of mission, its scope and nature, needs more investigation even though several works have been dedicated to it. This article enters in the debate offering a contribution through a linguistic analysis of a key pericope, Isa 66:18-21.

The methodology employed is the linguistic analysis, which examines the morpho-grammatical-syntactic concerns of the passage, the semantic elements, and a synthesis of key issues in the study.<sup>23</sup> A brief investigation of the literary issues which centre on theme and structure are carried out to provide a better understanding of the context concerning the motif or theme espoused in the text. The theological implications gathered from the pericope's linguistic analysis are formulated based on the passage's textual-proven meaning in the Isaianic literature.

### **Context Analysis of Isaiah 66:18-21**

Isaiah 56—66 is considered the broader context, and 66:15-24 the immediate context of 66:18-21. The prophet predicts the future experience of Israel in chaps. 56—66, especially in chaps. 60—62, where YHWH's restoration of Jerusalem is emphasised. In chaps. 65—66, YHWH answers the imploration of His people for intervention; chapter 66 begins with the prophet's address to the faithful, where YHWH judges His enemies (vv. 1-6). Amidst the dislike by their brother and sister (v. 5), God's people have a glorious future. While YHWH brings judgment over sin, He also shows compassion (v. 10). Zion is miraculously delivered by YHWH (vv. 7-14), and worldwide judgment and missional

---

<sup>23</sup> See Susan A. Groom, *Linguistic Analysis of Biblical Hebrew* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2003); Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (London, UK: SPCK, 1989); Michael P. O'Connor, "Discourse Linguistics and the Study of Biblical Hebrew," in *Congress Volume, Basel 2001*, ed. André Lemaire (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2002), 17-42. Also for a discussion on the history of linguistic analysis in the OT, see Robert Rezetko and Ian Young, *Historical Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew: Steps Towards an Integrated Approach* (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2014); Ian Young, Robert Rezetko, and Martin Ehrensverd, *The Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts* (London, UK: Equinox, 2008); Robert H. Robins, *A Short History of Linguistics*, 4th ed. (London, UK: Longman, 1997); Jacobus A. Naudé and Cynthia L. Miller-Naudé, "The Evolution of Biblical Hebrew Linguistics in South Africa: The Last 60 Years," *Old Testament Essays* 31, no. 1 (2018): 12-41; Cynthia L. Miller, "Methodological Issues in Reconstructing a Language System From Epigraphic Fragments," in *The Future of Biblical Archaeology: Reassessing Methods and Assumptions*, ed. James K. Hoffmeier and Alan Millard (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 281-305; Diane Larsen-Freeman and Lynne Cameron, *Complex Systems and Applied Linguistics* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008); Cynthia L. Miller, *The Representation of Speech in Biblical Hebrew Narrative: A Linguistic Analysis*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 55 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1996); David A. Dawson, *Text-Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1994); Robert B. Bergen, ed., *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994).

outreach are advanced (vv. 15-21) to bring salvation to all humanity. In YHWH's quest to bring salvation to all, He separates the righteous from the unrighteous.

Within the immediate context of vv. 15-24, v. 15 advances the indignation of YHWH against His people (v. 14). A display of YHWH's almighty power is shown (vv. 15-16); with fire, chariots, and sword, YHWH comes to execute judgment upon all flesh (v. 17). From v. 18, the mission outreach assumes a different modality. "The universal judgment of 66:15-17 is followed by a massive missionary movement. Yahweh's advent in 66:15 accents wrath, while His coming in 66:18-21 is to save."<sup>24</sup> The nations gather to behold YHWH's glory (v. 18), and the survivors of the nations (missionaries) are sent among the nations to evangelise (v. 19). The converts among the nations would become priests (v. 21) as they bring their offerings to YHWH's holy mountain (v. 20). Thus, YHWH moves from universal judgment to a worldwide mission that brings salvation to all.

### Theme and Structure

Thematically, Isa 66:18-21 contains YHWH's missional strategy of sending the peoples of Israel and the nations into the nations. YHWH's act of sending is focused on the salvation of the nations bringing them into His worship; in an evocative way, YHWH engages in a universal outreach aimed at drawing peoples' attention to the glory of YHWH. As Lessing has pointed out, the survivors or missionaries are "to declare Yahweh's glory. Just like the Servant nation (42:6) and the suffering Servant, they are a light for the world (49:6). Their goal is to bring the Servant's free gift of righteousness to many more people (53:11; 54:17)."<sup>25</sup>

Against the backdrop of the missionary motif, the following chiasmic structure of Isa 66:18-21 may be suggested:

---

<sup>24</sup> Lessing, *Isaiah 56-66*, 492.

<sup>25</sup> Lessing, *Isaiah 56-66*, 493.

- A** The coming (בוא) of YHWH to gather all the nations (גוֹיִם; v. 18)
- B** YHWH to send out from the survivors of the nations to the nations (גוֹיִם; v. 19)
- A<sup>I</sup>** The survivors to bring (בוא) their brethren from all the nations (גוֹיִם; vv. 20-21)

In A and A<sup>I</sup> (vv. 18 and 20-21) through the semantic repetition (בוא and גוֹיִם) the author creates a parallelism between YHWH's coming to gather all the nations and peoples of every tongue, and the survivors from the nations bringing in their brothers and sisters from all the peoples some of whom would later serve as priests and Levites. B (v. 19) discloses the sending of 'survivors' to the people of the nations. They are to serve as missionaries who will declare YHWH's glory among the nations. The central point also captures the meaning of mission as "the sending of individuals to distant people to proclaim God's glory among them."<sup>26</sup>

### **Delimitation of Isaiah 66:18-21**

Although the BHS does not demarcate Isa 66:18-21 with the textual markers and the *petûhā*, the text can be considered a literary unit. Verse 18 introduced by וְאֶנְכִי (and as for me) points to the commencement of a new prose unit.<sup>27</sup> The unit closes with the communicative formula הִנֵּה אָמַר יְהוָה (says YHWH). Similarly, there are repeated expressions that show the uniqueness of the pericope as a unit; גוֹיִם (nations) occurs four times in the pericope, twice in v. 18 and one each in v. 19 and v. 20. Again, the verb בוא (to come) appears four times in the unit: twice in v. 18 and twice in v. 20.

---

<sup>26</sup> Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary*, trans. David M. G. Stalker (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1969), 425.

<sup>27</sup> The issue addressed in the pericope centralizes on YHWH's mission for the nation which differs from the preceding discourse (i.e., vv. 15-17, which has to do with the coming of YHWH's judgment on a worldwide scale) and the following passage (i.e., vv. 22-24, which centers on the creation of new heavens and new earth). See Lessing, *Isaiah 56-66*, 492.

## Clausal Hierarchy of Isaiah 66:18-21

The clausal hierarchy given below takes into consideration the MT's division of the verses by the Hebrew accents *'atnāḥ* and *sillūq*. They help in the division of the verses into sentences, clauses, and phrases.

The textual variances of the Book of Isaiah are the Masoretic text, DSS,<sup>28</sup> and the Old Greek witnesses, insofar as the *Vorlage* may possibly be remodelled.<sup>29</sup> It is as well conceivable that the Syriac Peshitta is a translation of a Semitic original, which is independently of the Greek witnesses. Again, the Vulgate is translated unswervingly from the Septuagint; however, the Vulgate is fairly dependent on previous variances.<sup>30</sup>

In this section, the witnesses in each passage in the textual variances as indicated in the critical apparatus of the BHS are highlighted and evaluated. Wonnerberger<sup>31</sup> and Scott's<sup>32</sup> guidelines are followed and used in interpreting the textual apparatus of the BHS.

---

<sup>28</sup>Eugene Ulrich, ed., *The Biblical Qumran Scrolls: Transcriptions and Textual Variants*, Volume 2: Isaiah-Twelve Minor Prophets (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2013).

<sup>29</sup>See, Arie van der Kooij, "The Text of Isaiah and Its Early Witnesses in Hebrew," in *Sôfer Mahîr: Essays in Honour of Adrian Schenker Offered by Editors of Biblia Hebraica Quinta*, ed. Yohanan Goldman, A. Kooij, and Richard Weis (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2006), 143-152.

<sup>30</sup>Robert Weber and Roger Tryson, eds. *Biblia Sacra: Iuxta Vulgatam Veersionem* (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983).

<sup>31</sup>Reinhard Wonnerberger, *Understanding BHS: A Manual for the Users of Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, 2nd ed., trans. Dwight R. Daniels, Subsidia Biblica 8 (Rome, Italy: Pontifical Biblical Institute Press, 1990).

<sup>32</sup>William A. Scott, *A Simplified Guide to BHS: Critical Apparatus, Masora, Accents, Unusual Letters & Other Markings* (Berkeley, CA: BIBAL, 1987).

Sentence		Type
וְאֶנֶכִי מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם וּמַחֲשַׁבְתֵיהֶם בְּאֵהָ <sup>33</sup> לְקַבֵּץ אֶת-כָּל-הַגּוֹיִם וְהַלְשִׁיגוֹת	18a	nominal/participle/infinitive construct
וּבָאוּ וְרָאוּ אֶת-כְּבוֹדִי	18b	we-qatal
וּשְׁמַתִי בָהֶם אוֹת <sup>34</sup> וְשַׁלַּחְתִּי מֵהֶם פְּלִיטִים אֶל-הַגּוֹיִם תַּרְשִׁישִׁי פּוֹל <sup>35</sup> וְלוֹד מִשְׁכֵי קִשְׁת תִּבְּל וַיִּגּוּ	19a	we-qatal/we-qatal
הָאֵיִם הִרְחִיקִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא-שָׁמְעוּ אֶת-שְׁמִיעִי <sup>36</sup> וְלֹא-רָאוּ אֶת-כְּבוֹדִי וְהִגִּידוּ אֶת-כְּבוֹדִי בְּגוֹיִם	19b	x-qatal/x-qatal
וְהִבִּיאוּ אֶת-כָּל-אֲחֵיהֶם מִכָּל- הַגּוֹיִם מִנְּחָה לַיהוָה בְּסוּסִים וְבָרֶכֶב וּבַצְּבָאִים וּבַכְּרָדִים וּבַכְּרָדוֹת עַל הַר קָדְשִׁי <sup>37</sup> יְרוּשָׁלַם אָמַר יְהוָה	20a	we-qatal/qatal-x
כִּפְאֶשֶׁר יְבִיאוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת- הַמִּנְחָה בְּכֵלֵי טְהוֹרָ <sup>38</sup> בַּיִת יְהוָה	20b	x-yiqtol
וְגַם-מֵהֶם אֶקַּח <sup>39</sup> לְכַהֲנָיִם לְלוֹזִים אָמַר יְהוָה	21	x-yiqtol/qatal-x

<sup>33</sup> For the MT בְּאֵהָ, the 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> has באו which could be seen as probably assimilating to the preceding plural noun מַחֲשַׁבְתֵיהֶם. However, the Syriac, Vulgate and LXX have first person verbs which is the Hebrew equivalent of בא and is seen to be assimilating with the first term of the verse יְאֶנְכִי.

<sup>34</sup> The 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> has אותם instead of the MT אוֹת as a way of assimilating the plural nouns with the context.

<sup>35</sup> The LXX has Φουδ which implies פוט instead of the MT פּוֹל. The Vulgate has *aprica* (Africa).

<sup>36</sup> The LXX has τὸ ὄνομα instead of the MT שְׁמִיעִי.

<sup>37</sup> Instead of the MT עַל הַר קָדְשִׁי (to the holy mountain), the LXX has εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν (to the holy city).

<sup>38</sup> The LXX has μετὰ ψαλμῶν (with Psalms) instead of the MT בְּכֵלֵי טְהוֹרָ (in a clean vessel).

<sup>39</sup> The 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> adds ליא (for me) after אֶקַּח. The LXX in similitude with 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> adds ἐμοὶ (for me) but the other manuscripts follows the MT.



## Linguistic Analysis of Isaiah 66:18-21

In v. 18a, וְאֲנִי מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם וּמַחְשְׁבֹתֵיהֶם בְּאֵהָ לְקַבֵּץ אֶת-כָּל-הַגּוֹיִם וְהַלְשׁוֹנוֹת, (“For I know their works and their thoughts; the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues”), the opening clause of the sentence (וְאֲנִי מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם וּמַחְשְׁבֹתֵיהֶם בְּאֵהָ) presents syntactical challenges. The clause is considered a “web of exegetical conundrums,”<sup>40</sup> “anacoluthon,”<sup>41</sup> or “casus pendens.”<sup>42</sup> The relationship of the four Hebrew expressions among themselves and the rest of the expressions of the sentence and verse is obscure.

Literally, the MT clause can be translated as “and I, their deeds and their thoughts, she is coming” but the LXX and Peshitta offer different translations. They supply a verb of cognition, which makes the first three expressions a complete clause.<sup>43</sup> The two nominal expressions מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם from מַעֲשָׂה (work, labor, deeds, human achievement, or accomplishment) and מַחְשְׁבֹתֵיהֶם from מַחְשָׁבָה (plan, thought, or intent) are used in Isa 59:6 to express the iniquities and sins of the wicked. Similarly, their use in 66:18 seems to describe man’s sinful deeds and the thoughts that are full of monstrosities. This sinfulness provokes YHWH’s zeal to gather all nations and tongues for judgment.

בְּאֵהָ is from the root בוא (come, enter, return home, bring in, or lead in). The feminine gender raises an issue as it does not correspond with any other expression within the context. It could, therefore, be taken as ellipses perhaps supplied in the form of a feminine noun עַתָּה (the time). The root בוא is seen as a thematic term employed five times throughout the pericope until v. 23. While in v. 18, the time is coming (בְּאֵהָ) to gather the nations, in v. 18b the people of the nation will come (וּבֹאֵי) to see YHWH’s glory. In v. 20, as the people will bring (וּבְרִיאֵי) their brethren from all the nations as a grain offering to YHWH, the people of Israel will bring (וּבְרִיאֵי) their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of YHWH.

<sup>40</sup> Lessing, *Isaiah 56-66*, 475.

<sup>41</sup> Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, ed. and enlarged Emil Kautzsch, trans. Arthur Ernest Cowley (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1910), 167b.

<sup>42</sup> Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965-1972), 3:531.

<sup>43</sup> The LXX reads, *καὶ γὰρ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν καὶ τὸν λογισμὸν αὐτῶν ἐπίσταμαι* (and I, their works and their thoughts I know). The Peshitta, on the other hand, is translated as “and as for me, I know their deeds and their minds.”

תְּהִלָּתוֹת אֶת־כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם לְקַבֵּץ seems to highlight the purpose of YHWH's coming—He is coming to gather all people and nations. The use of the prefix לְ with קַבֵּץ, a piel infinitive construct, emphasises the purpose of YHWH. The combination of גּוֹיִם (nations) and לְשׁוֹנוֹת (tongues) together with כָּל (all) indicate the entirety of humanity, which is the focus/aim of YHWH's advent. The hendiadys אֶת־כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם וְהַלְשׁוֹנוֹת (“nations of every tongue”) serves as the direct object of the sentence.<sup>44</sup> The purpose of the nations and tongues coming to YHWH is missional. As anticipated in Isa 2:1-5, the nations come to YHWH's holy mountain for missional instruction concerning the Torah and righteousness. Therefore, the motif which commences in chap. 2 reaches its completion in chap. 66 of the book of Isaiah.

Verse 18b, וַיָּבֹאוּ וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת־כְּבוֹדִי (“and they shall come and see My glory”), throws more light on the intention of the nations coming to YHWH. The nations come (בָּאוּ) to see (רָאוּ) the glory (כְּבוֹד) of YHWH. The idea of seeing the glory of YHWH is espoused in 60:2, where YHWH's glory comes to illuminate the dark world and bring relief for the people in deep darkness. Similarly, the nations beholding the glory of YHWH are indicated in Ps 97:6: הַגִּידוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם צְדָקוֹ וַיִּרְאוּ כָּל־הָעַמִּים כְּבוֹדוֹ (the heavens declare His righteousness, and all the peoples have seen His glory). In Isa 66, the concept of YHWH's glory occurs thrice in vv. 18-19, thereby emphasising God's divine plan to reveal Himself and His glory to the world.

Verse 19a, וְשָׂמַתִּי בָהֶם אֹת וְשַׁלַּחְתִּי מֵהֶם פְּלִיטִים אֶל־הַגּוֹיִם פְּרוֹל וְלוֹד, וְיַגְגּוּ מִשְׁכֵּי קִשְׁתׁי תִּבְל וְיַגְגּוּ (and I will set a sign among them and will send survivors from them to the nations: Tarshish, Put, Lud, Meshech, that draw the bow, Tubal, and Javan), highlights God's intention of leaving survivors among the nations with the purpose of declaring His glory to the nations and distant coastlands. The predicate of the sentence וְשָׂמַתִּי is from שָׁם which means “to lay down, set down, arrange, fix, to set, put, [or] stand.”<sup>45</sup> In other instances, its use with the object אֹת (sign) express negative connotation,<sup>46</sup> however, the syntagm seems to assume a

<sup>44</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2000-2003), 309-310.

<sup>45</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (HALOT)*, vols. 1-5 combined, trans. and ed. under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson, rev. Walter Baumgartner and Johann Jakob Stamm (1994-2000), s.v. “שָׁם.”

<sup>46</sup> For example, read Exod 10:2; Jer 32:20; Ps 78:43.

different function in this verse. אֹת (sign) appears several times in the Book of Isaiah,<sup>47</sup> with different connotations. It is used to express the covenant established between God and man with redemptive motives<sup>48</sup> but it can also be used as a mark of deliverance from death (cf. Gen 4:15; Ezek 9:4, 6). The preposition כִּי with third person masculine plural suffix in כִּי־הֵם is the natural antecedent of כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם וְהַלְשׁוֹנוֹת (all the nations and tongues). Thus, the sign could be seen as the display of God's glory and power among the nations (v. 18).

שְׁלָח form שְׁלַח is employed in v. 19 to denote the *sending* of YHWH. שְׁלַח is a principal mission term in the Book of Isaiah and the whole OT. Before the appearance of the verb in 66:19, שְׁלַח is used in 58:6 to denote YHWH's deliverance of the oppressed. However, in v. 19 the verb indicates 'missionary sending' "a worldwide task based on personal salvation."<sup>49</sup>

YHWH's missional sending involves פְּלִיטִים who are directed to the nations.

פְּלִיטִים is the plural form of פְּלִיט. The term פְּלִיט designates "fugitive" or "survivors, those who have been spared."<sup>50</sup> By extension, פְּלִיט denotes one who has escaped or survived danger, catastrophe, or battle.<sup>51</sup> The term is used both for Israelites or non-Israelites. In Ezra 9:8, 13 and Neh 1:2, פְּלִיטָה is used for survivors of disaster after the exile. In Ezek 6:8-9, פְּלִיטִים is used for survivors of the fall of Jerusalem who are then scattered among the nations. In Isa 45:20, פְּלִיט designate survivors of Babylon from the heathen nations (פְּלִיטֵי הַגּוֹיִם). The use of פְּלִיט with the מְהֵם shows that they are survivors of the nations sent among the peoples of the nations. The usage of פְּלִיט and מְהֵם

...refer back to the nations mentioned in v. 18; they are designated in 3<sup>rd</sup> person forms, unlike God's servants in vv. 20 and 22. Though they are sent 'to the nations' (אֶל־הַגּוֹיִם), of which they, therefore, cannot

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Isa 7:11, 14; 8:18; 19:20; 20:3; 37:30; 38:7, 22; 44:25; 55:13.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Gen 9:12-13; 17:11; Exod 12:13; 31:13; Isa 7:14; 19:20.

<sup>49</sup> Koole, *Isaiah 56-66*, 520.

<sup>50</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*, s.v. "פְּלִיט."

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Gen 14:13; Ezek 24:26-27; 33:21.

be part, this objection is removed if the nations are only the remote peoples, as designated by the name in what follows.<sup>52</sup>

Therefore, the term ‘survivors’ in the context refers both Israel and the Gentiles. Their task is to proclaim YHWH’s glory and goodness among the nations.

This form of mission is rare in the OT as YHWH’s concern for the nations is undertaken by the nations themselves. Unlike 2:1-5 where the nations come for instruction, here the nations do not come but they are sent by YHWH to the nations.

The names of the nations for the mission task of the survivors are תַּרְשִׁישׁ פּוּל וְלֹד מִשְׁכֵי קָשֶׁת תְּבַל וְיָוֶן. Some of these nations are mentioned in Gen 10:2, 4, 13, 12, and Ezek 27:10, 12-13. While the appearance in Genesis is in reference to the table of nation, that of Ezekiel refers to the prophet’s oracle to Tyre. These nations could be termed as representative of all nations due to the *inclusio* formed by the use of גּוֹיִם (nations) at the beginning and end of v. 19. The Masoretic accents and the use of two-particle conjunctions וְ (and) in the names of the nations show the names fall under two groupings: (a) Tarshish,<sup>53</sup> Pul,<sup>54</sup> and Lud<sup>55</sup>; and (b) those who draw the bow,<sup>56</sup> Tubal,<sup>57</sup> and Javan.<sup>58</sup> Among these and the rest of the nations to the end of the earth, YHWH is going to send survivors to declare His glory

The second sentence of v. 19 is הָאֲרָצִים הַרְחֹקִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא־שָׁמְעוּ אֶת־שִׁמְעִי וְלֹא־רָאוּ אֶת־כְּבוֹדִי וְהִגִּידוּ אֶת־כְּבוֹדִי בְּגוֹיִם (to the distant coastlands that

---

<sup>52</sup> Koole, *Isaiah 56-66*, 520.

<sup>53</sup> Tarshish could probably be identified with Tartesus on the Iberian Peninsula at the west of Gibraltar or Tarsus on the west coast side of Asia Minor. Jonah 1:3 shows that Jonah, the prophet, tried running away from God’s mission to Nineveh by taking a ship to Tarshish. See John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 429.

<sup>54</sup> There is no identified nation known by the name Pul. However, since the Assyrian king, Tiglath-Pileser III, is referred to in Hebrew as פּוּל (2 Kgs 15:19; 1 Chr 5:26), some scholars seem to suggest the nation of Assyria. Some also identify it, along with the LXX rendition, with Libya, west of Egypt. See Horace D. Hummel, *Ezekiel 21-48*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2007), 825.

<sup>55</sup> Lud is identified with Lydia in Asia Minor. Lud sometimes appears together with Pul as in Jer 46:9; Ezek 27:10; 30:5; 38:5.

<sup>56</sup> קָשֶׁת מִשְׁכֵי literally means “one who draws a bow.” It could also be rendered as archers. The LXX translates the phrase with Μοσσεχ (Meshech). See Gen 10:2.

<sup>57</sup> Tubal is identified with the Caucasus area of the northeast. It also refers to the fifth son of Japheth (cf. Gen 10:2; see also Ezek 27:13; 32:26; 38:2-3; 39:1).

<sup>58</sup> Javan is identified with the Ionian coast of Asia Minor. Cf. Gen 10:2; Dan 8:21; Zech 9:13.

have neither heard My fame nor seen My glory. And they will declare My glory among the nations). In the sentence, the nations are rounded up with an adjectival phrase that describes the ends of the world: הָאֲיִים הַרְחֵקִים (to the distant coastlands). In the discussion in 42:4, it is noted that the expression הָאֲיִים (coastlands) is used in Isaiah to designate the nations seemingly far away from Israel and by extension, the ends of the world. A connection can be drawn between 66:19 and 42:2. While in 42:4 the nations wait for the instruction of YHWH concerning His Torah and righteousness; in 66:19 the survivors from the nations are sent as missionaries to the nations.

The reason for YHWH's sending of missionaries to the nations and the distant coastland is because the nations have not heard the report of YHWH's glory. Due to this, messengers/missionaries need to be sent out. By the nations seeing the glory of YHWH, God's plans for the nations and the world as a whole will be realised. When YHWH's glory is realised and then proclaimed among the nations, the outcome of the missional task of the YHWH's Servant, Israel, and the nations will be achieved and YHWH sovereignty in the universe will be established.

The proclamation of the YHWH's glory (וְהִגִּידוּ אֶת־כְּבוֹדִי בְּגוֹיִם) could be seen differently as the preaching of God's goodness and deeds among the nations. "The primary aim in missionary and all the preaching is not the betterment of the hearer but the glory of God."<sup>59</sup> In this case, YHWH's message of His glory and goodness to humanity will reach everywhere, even to the remotest places where YHWH's name has not been heard. By this, all the nations will come to know the one God and recognise what this supernatural God has done.

Verse 20 begins with וְהִבְיִאוּ אֶת־כָּל־אֲחֵיכֶם מִכָּל־הַגּוֹיִם מִן־הַהָרְחֵק לְיְהוָה בְּסוּסִים (Then they shall bring all your brethren from all the nations as a grain offering to YHWH, on horses, in chariots, in litters, on mules, and on camels, to My holy mountain Jerusalem, says YHWH). The sentence is seen as a continuation of v. 19. Therefore, the subject of the sentence is inferred from 19a, פְּלִיטִים (survivors). As their missional tasks entail, they are to make YHWH's glory known among the nations and bring כָּל־אֲחֵיכֶם (all your brethren) as a grain offering to YHWH. The presentation of the

<sup>59</sup> Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3:533.

offering to YHWH is similar to the way Israel offers the sacrifice to God in their worship context.

מִנְחָה means offering, sacrifice, or tribute.<sup>60</sup> It is used twice in the verse and both instances מִנְחָה reference the sacrificial practice of Israel. A similar use is found in 19:21 where the nations (particularly Egypt) come to offer sacrifice to YHWH. A variety of means of transport are indicated as the medium to bring the offerings. They are “not literalistic, but impressionistic.”<sup>61</sup> The offerings or tributes are brought on horses (בַּסּוּסִים), in chariots (וּבַכְרֶכֶב), and wagons (וּבַצְבָּיִם), on mules (וּבַכַּרְדִּים) and dromedaries (וּבַכְּרוֹת).<sup>62</sup> By YHWH’s words, the tributes are sent to the centre of all human offering and the destination of the nation’s pilgrimage: to Jerusalem, YHWH’s holy mountain (עַל הַר קְדְשִׁי). The phrase הַר קְדְשִׁי (My holy mountain) is also employed in 56:7; 57:13; 65:11, 25. In an appositional use, יְרוּשָׁלַם (Jerusalem) is indicated in relation to YHWH’s holy mountain. Therefore, here יְרוּשָׁלַם is referenced as YHWH’s holy mountain.

There seems to be a progression of the missional activities on the pericope (66:18-21) which is highlighted in this verse. The nations are invited to make the missional pilgrimage to Jerusalem in v. 18. Verse 19 shows the preparation of the nation for the mission ahead. Verse 20 further shows the commencement of the procession of the nations.

Verse 20b, כְּאֲשֶׁר יָבִיאוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַמִּנְחָה בְּכֵלֵי טָהוֹר בֵּית יְהוָה, (just as the sons of Israel bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of YHWH), shows the future oblation that the survivors will bring to YHWH. The offering brought by the nations equally follows the sacrificial offering pattern when the Israelites bring their offering to YHWH in the Temple.<sup>63</sup> Young notes that

...as the Israelites of Isaiah’s day were accustomed to bring to the Temple a *minhah* in ceremonially pure vessels, and hence an offering legitimate and acceptable, so in the future, the survivors will, through

<sup>60</sup> William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament: Based Upon the Lexical Work of Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 202.

<sup>61</sup> Lessing, *Isaiah 56-66*, 478.

<sup>62</sup> וּבַכְּרוֹת (dromedaries) is a *hapax legomenon* and is a semantic equivalent of camels in the Ugaritic. See Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*, s.v. “כְּרֶה.”

<sup>63</sup> Shalom M. Paul, *Isaiah 40-66*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 629.

the making known of God's glory, bring a legitimate offering, namely the Gentiles.<sup>64</sup>

The sentence begins with כַּאֲשֶׁר (just as) to show the connection between the bringing of tribute or offering from the nations and the offering the Israelites brought to YHWH's temple in the past. יָבִיא is from בא (to enter, come, bring, lead in, or return). Its use signifies a past event or activity that persisted for a significant period of time. Also, an accusative of a place is employed by the use of בֵּית יְהוָה (to the house of YHWH) to designate the destination of the offering.

Verse 21, וְגַם־מֵהֶם אֶקַּח לַכֹּהֲנִים לְלוֹיִם אֲמַר יְהוָה, (And also from them I will take for priests and for Levites, says YHWH), presents a difficulty in the antecedent of the third person masculine plural suffix in מֵהֶם (from them). Is it a reference to the nations, particularly the survivors, or to the Israelites? Or even is it a reference to them both? From the context, the antecedent of מֵהֶם could be כָּל־אֶחָיְכֶם (all your brothers) which is linked to the nations or survivors in v. 20.<sup>65</sup> The nations are the subject of v. 20 and the climax of the verse shows that authority will be given to the nations as they share in the salvation of YHWH. Also, גַּם (also) is used emphatically and is cumulatively linked up with בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (sons of Israel) in v. 20, showing the contrast between the two entities: not only בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל but also among the nations YHWH chooses His people for special purposes and mission.

אֶקַּח is employed to show YHWH's wish to give liturgical role/task to the nations. אֶקַּח from לקח may denote the appointment or selection of person(s) to an office. In Ps 78:70, לקח parallel בחר (to choose): "He [YHWH] also chose [בחר] David His servant, and took [לקח] him from the sheepfolds." Thus, the appearance of לקח here indicates YHWH's decision of taking or choosing His people (here from the nations).

לְלוֹיִם לַכֹּהֲנִים לְלוֹיִם shows an asyndeton relationship of two successive terms with the repetition of the preposition לְ. לַכֹּהֲנִים לְלוֹיִם can be literary translated as "for the priest for the Levites," but such a translation is confusing. One could assume that it is a reference to two distinct groupings and would be translated as "for the priest and for the Levites." The

<sup>64</sup> Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3:533.

<sup>65</sup> See also Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 542.

prefix of the preposition ל in both nouns (לְוִיִּים and כֹּהֲנֵי־לְוִי) is presented in a repeated way because לְוִיִּים (Levites) is a proper noun. Also, the phrase can be said as the collocation of genus and species where כֹּהֲנֵן is the genus and לְוִי is the species.<sup>66</sup> The males of the tribe of לְוִי (Levi) were לְוִיִּים (Levites) and within the לְוִיִּים those of direct lineage of Aaron function as the כֹּהֲנֵי־לְוִי (priests; cf. Num 1:47-53; Exod 28:1; 30:30). Therefore, YHWH will appoint from among the nations Levitical priests to serve Him and the non-Israelites will also participate in the cult and worship of Israel.<sup>67</sup> YHWH through Israel will

bring into the household of faith their brethren from among the Gentiles, but also these Gentile converts themselves will be chosen by God, taken especially by Him, for the purpose of serving as priest and Levites, i.e., as ministers to serve Him in preaching of the Gospel.<sup>68</sup>

As God's mission-oriented people, the nations are made into a special people group who proclaim His glory among the nations. Verse 21 elucidates that the nations as YHWH's witnesses and messengers are just as much a part of YHWH's elect as the sons of Israel. As such, the nations are qualified for the cultic services and worship activities in YHWH's Temple. They are servants in the holy place of God.

From the literary context, Isa 65—66 demonstrates “concern the future restoration of Judah after the Babylonian exile.”<sup>69</sup> The context of Isa 66 is essentially post-exilic—a stretched period following Israel's return from the Babylonian captivity. However, an eschatological locus of the passage needs to be pointed out, in that the Isaianic literature seems to have a significant bearing on the events that culminate in the world's history. In other words, as YHWH seeks to send messengers from the nations among themselves following Israel's return from captivity, as world history gets to a close, God is going to send gentiles or non-Israelites to bring His salvific message to the universe.

---

<sup>66</sup> Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 423.

<sup>67</sup> For the nations serving or participating in the cultic service and worship of Israel in the Book of Isaiah, see Isa 45:14-15, 23-24; 56:6-7; 60:7, 10.

<sup>68</sup> Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3:535.

<sup>69</sup> Daniel K. Bediako, “Isaiah's ‘New Heavens and New Earth’ (Isa 65:17; 66:22),” *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 11, no. 1 (2008): 20.



## Theological Implications on Mission

Isaiah proclaims to the Gentiles (and the universe as a whole) that YHWH had designated them for the purpose of leading its fellow nationals to YHWH's glory and knowledge. From Isaiah's perspective, YHWH Himself is the missionary who brings together peoples from all nations so that they may behold His glory. It underscores the goal of mission that seeks the glory of YHWH; He is to be known and acknowledged for who He is throughout the universe.

The pericope is directed by the idea of YHWH mission to the nations and the world outside Israel. It is a missionary task that is designed to reach Israel, the peoples of the nations, and all humanity around the globe. YHWH notifies that His coming is directed towards the nations and all humanity so they could behold His glory. YHWH's mission becomes a global phenomenon. YHWH's light shines not only on Israel but among the nations. Far from bringing His salvation to the Gentile nations, YHWH's name and glory are manifested in a global and cross-cultural setting. The nations acknowledge the supremacy and redemptive power of Israel's true God—the God of all nations.

The passage highlights that (1) the survivors will function as missionaries to the world. They would preach YHWH's glory to people who have not heard about God together with the unrighteous Israelites; (2) as a result of their mission to the world, the nations will bring their offering or homage just as the people of Israel bring offerings to the Temple of YHWH; (3) amid Israel and the nations YHWH will select some as priests of the Levitical order who would serve Him in the services and worship in His Temple.

These survivors are sent to all nations, including their own people. They become YHWH's people who share His love and grace. They are witnesses to His unfailing grace and mercies among the peoples of the nations. In YHWH's mission through the survivors, the nations are blessed, and they experience His glory. An integral aspect of the survivors' missionary activities is the proclamation of YHWH's deeds among the peoples and the nations. For others to hear about YHWH's salvation and glory, the survivors of the nations will have to proclaim YHWH's glory to the people about His salvific plan for humanity.

“The ‘survivors of the nations,’ there invited to be participants in the salvation and to realise that Yahweh, the God of Israel, is the only true God, are here made into his ambassadors, missionaries sent to the far islands in order to proclaim God’s glory among them.”<sup>70</sup> Motyer has equated the pericope to the ministry of Christ. He notes that Isa 66:18-20 highlights Christ’s “purpose for the world (18), his means of carrying it out (19-21), the *sign* set among the nations, the remnant sent to evangelise them (19) and the gathering of his people to ‘Jerusalem’ (20) with Gentiles in full membership (21).”<sup>71</sup>

## Conclusion

The linguistic analysis was carried out to examine the morpho-syntactic features of Isaiah 66:18-21. The investigation yielded some significant themes that underpinned the mission intent of YHWH in the Book of Isaiah. Furthermore, the structure and theme were investigated to help a better understanding of the context in relation to the mission theology in the selected passage. Isaiah 66:18-21 noted that YHWH’s idea of mission is outside Israel. YHWH’s missionary move to the nations is destined to inform all humanity (Israel and the nations) that He is coming to gather them in order to manifest His glory and to bring salvation. From the linguistic analyses, it has been established that Isaiah 66:18-21 speaks of a real mission movement and motif that characterises the Isaianic literature.

It can be concluded that in Isa 66:18-19, the proclamation of YHWH’s *קְבוֹד*, which occurs thrice in the passage, emphasises God’s divine plan to reveal Himself and His glory (His divine sign) to the peoples of Israel and the nations, and all humanity in general. YHWH’s mission in Isa 66:18-21 is a global mission based on personal salvation that the nations enjoy from God.

The missionaries are both Israel and the Gentiles, and their mission field is the peoples of all nations and languages. They proclaim YHWH’s *קְבוֹד* and goodness to the end of the earth due to the fact that the nations do not hear the report of YHWH’s *קְבוֹד*. They are ignorant of what YHWH is doing. As the nations see the *קְבוֹד* of YHWH, God’s plan for the nations and the world is realised. When YHWH’s *קְבוֹד* is grasped

---

<sup>70</sup> Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 425.

<sup>71</sup> Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 540. Emphasis in original.

by the people and then proclaimed among the nations, the outcome of YHWH's mission for His servant, Israel, and the nations are achieved, and His sovereignty in the universe is established. YHWH's message of His glory and goodness to humanity reaches everywhere, even to the remotest places where His name has not been heard. As an outcome, all humanity comes to know the only true God and recognises what this only one true God has done.

*Elisha Kwabena Marfo*

elisha.marfo@vvu.edu.gh  
Department of Theological Studies  
Valley View University, Oyibi