

WHEN “HOPE” IS A VERB: A STUDY OF THE COMMUNAL HOPE IN ISAIAH 59

ABSTRACT

Unlike the other Old Testament writings, the Book of the Prophet Isaiah does not use the noun “hope” (תקוה), but rather various verbal roots, such as חכה, יחל, קוה, to formulate the action “to hope.” Moreover, Isaiah’s vision of hope is expressed with a particular target in a concrete situation-in-life (*Sitz im Leben*). This study explores the centrality of communal hope amid the woundedness in Isaiah 59, arguing that the specific content of hoping action, “We hope for the justice” (נקוה למשפט, v. 11), in the Isaian community, emerges from the “postexilic exile” context, in which both the LORD and people felt the absence of justice (אין משפט). The desperate state of justice in the Isaian community is considered the reasonable background of the violent depiction of God and the preferential employment of verbs over nouns to express the communal hope in Isaiah 59.

ABBREVIATIONS

Most abbreviations in this paper follow the style in B. J. Collins et al. (ed.), *The SBL Handbook of Style*. For Biblical Studies and Related Disciplines (Atlanta, GA ²2014). A few other entries are drawn from S. M. SCHWERTNER, *IATG*³. Internationales Abkürzungsverzeichnis für Theologie und Grenzgebiete: Zeitschriften, Serien, Lexika, Quellenwerke mit bibliographischen (Berlin 1992).

BBR	Bulletin for Biblical Research
BCE	before the Common Era
ECC	Eerdmans Critical Commentary
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GKC	Gesenius, W., <i>Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar</i> (ed. Kautzsch, E. – tr. Cowley, A. E.) (Mineola, NY 2026)
HBM	Hebrew Bible monographs
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
ICC	International Critical Commentary

<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
LXX	Septuagint (the Greek OT)
NAB	New American Bible
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NRS	New Revised Standard Version Bible (1989)
NRSVCE	New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition
OTG	Old Testament Guides
OTL	Old Testament Library
ROT	Reading the Old Testament
SubBi	Subsidia Biblica
TNK	The new translation into contemporary English of the Holy Scriptures according to the traditional Hebrew text
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
Vulg.	Vulgate
WeBC	Westminster Bible Companion

INTRODUCTION:

Hope is one of the main profound theological themes of Isaiah's vision. It is expressed in different modes: explicit and implicit. It is presented intertwined with oracles of "doom" or judgment. It covers the long period (8th century BCE – 5th century BCE) in the history of the Israelites. Thus, Isaiah's vision of hope is expressed from the pre-Assyrian exile through the exilic periods in Assyria and Babylonia up to the post-Babylonian exile. This paper first presents the explicit expression of hope in the Isaian corpus, focusing on the usage of the Hebrew verbal root for the verb "to hope for, to wait for" (קוה, יחל, חכה) in a concrete situation in life (*Sitz im Leben*). Then, the particular theme of communal hope amid woundedness in Isaiah 59 is discussed. This study concerns the dominant use of the verbal form to express the communal hope in the Isaian community. It argues that the specific content of the hoping action, "We hope for the justice" (נקוה למשפט) in Isa 59:11, emerges from the "postexilic exile"¹ situation of the Isaian community, in which both the LORD (יהוה) and people felt the absence of justice (אין משפט). The desperate state of the Isaian community is considered the reasonable background of the violent depiction of the LORD and the preference for verbs over nouns to express communal hope. Such an insight is drawn from the "diachronically reflected synchrony"² approach to Isaiah 59.³

I. The Explicit Expression of Hope in Isaiah's Vision

In the Hebrew Bible, there are three roots of the verb "to hope for, to wait for": קוה, יחל, חכה. Among these, קוה is mostly used (41 times) in the *piel* verbal form to convey

¹ This term was coined by Bradley C. Gregory as a reference to the socio-historical context of the Third Isaiah (56–66), especially Isa 63:1-3. He describes, "A prophet in *postexilic* Palestine is preaching as though he were in exile. In other words, even though the situation he is addressing is after the end of the historical exile, the presupposition of his message is that the exile is in some way continuing." See B. C. GREGORY, "The Postexilic Exile in Third Isaiah. Isaiah 61:1-3 in Light of Second Temple Hermeneutics", *JBL* 126/3 (2007) 488. This hermeneutical lens is also shared by modern scholars. For example, Dempsey points out the struggles of the returnees in their homeland after their exilic period in Babylon (roughly 539-400 BCE, specifically around 520 BCE, just before the temple's rebuilding). See C. J. DEMPSEY, "Third Isaiah" in J. J. COLLINS *et al.*, eds., *The Jerome Biblical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century* (New York, NY 2022) 862.

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

³ Chapter 59 should also be read in the literary context of the whole book, as recently proposed by scholars. See B. ROSSI – D. S. IRUDAYARAJ – G. HENS-PIAZZA, ed., *Unity in the Book of Isaiah* (Library of Biblical Studies/Old Testament Studies; London 2024).

hope explicitly. Its majority usage is in wisdom writings, such as Psalms (16 times), Job (5 times), Proverbs (1 time), and Lamentations (2 times). Unlike other prophetic books, Isaiah does not use the noun תְּקוּהָה for “hope⁴; it, instead, uses the verbal form (15 times). The most frequent occurrence of the verb “to hope” testifies to the significance of the hope motif, among other theological themes, in Isaiah’s vision.

1. The LORD’s Hope (Isa 5:1-7)⁵

It is interesting to note that the first explicit expression of hope in Isaiah’s vision is used for the LORD (יְהוָה). The root for the verb “to hope for, to wait for”, קוּה, is used 3 times in the parable of the LORD’s Vineyard (vv. 2, 4, 7). This parable is extended to cover the whole social life of the LORD’s people (the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah). Being the owner of the “vineyard,” the LORD hopes for the good grapes (עֲנָבִים); however, it yielded the rotten grapes (בְּאִשִּׁים). The implied meaning of “good grapes” is revealed at the end as “justice” (צִדְקָה) and “righteousness” (מִשְׁפָּט).

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

2. Declaration of One’s Hope for/in the LORD

Isa 8:17 – I will wait for the LORD (וַחֲכִיתִי לַיהוָה), who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him (וְקִיֵּיתִי־לוֹ)

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

Isa 26:8 – In the path of your judgments,
O LORD, we wait for you (קִיֵּינוֹךְ)

Isa 33:2 – O LORD, be gracious to us; we wait for you⁶ (לֵךְ קִיֵּינוּ).

Be our arm every morning,
our salvation in the time of trouble.

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

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

⁶ “We hope in you” (New Jerusalem Bible).

3. The LORD's Assurance of Benefit for Those who Hope in him

Isa 49:23 - Kings shall be your foster fathers,

and their queens your nursing mothers.

With their faces to the ground

they shall bow down to you,

and lick the dust of your feet.

Then you will know that I am the LORD;

those who wait for me shall not be put to shame. (אשר לא־יבשו קוי)

Isa 51:5 – I will bring near my deliverance swiftly,

my salvation has gone out

and my arms will rule the peoples;

the coastlands wait for me, (אלי אים יקוו)⁷

and for my arm they hope. (ואל־זרעי ייחלון)⁸

Isa 60:9 – For the coastlands shall wait for me, (לי אים יקוו)⁹

the ships of Tarshish first,

to bring your children from far away,

their silver and gold with them,

for the name of the LORD your God,

and for the Holy One of Israel,

because he has glorified you.

4. Unexpected Theophany

Isa 64:1-3

¹O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,

so that the mountains would quake at your presence—

²as when fire kindles brushwood

and the fire causes water to boil—

to make your name known to your adversaries,

so that the nations might tremble at your presence!

³When you did awesome deeds

⁷ "The coasts and islands will put their hope in me" (New Jerusalem Bible).

⁸ "They shall look to My arm" (TNK).

⁹ "The coasts and islands put their hope in me: (New Jerusalem Bible)

that we did not expect, (לא נקוה)
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.

Having briefly surveyed how Isaiah uses the Hebrew root for the verb “to hope for, to wait for,” קוה, this presentation examines how the Isaian community’s hope is expressed in Chapter 59.

II. The Communal Act of Hoping in Isaiah 59

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

1. Socio-Historical and Literary Context

1.1. Socio-Historical Context

The sequential arrangement of the book of Isaiah in the Masoretic Text probably presupposes that the socio-historical context of Isaiah 59 can be considered according to the historical pointers of the preceding chapters.¹⁰ The studies of Deutero-Isaiah have established that Isaiah 49 contains a scenario where the prophet presents the vision of “the awaited return of the exiled and a spectacular reversal of fortunes.”¹¹ The exile in view most probably refers to the Israelites’ captivity in Babylon, and the prophecy of hope for deliverance, as Whybray perceives it, could have been in conjunction with Cyrus’ permission given to the exiles to return to their homeland after the year 539 BCE.¹² Such a scenario in

¹⁰ However, it is important to note a wide range of theories about the formation of the last 27 chapters of the book of Isaiah. For relevant studies on this issue, see L.-S. TIEMEYER – H. M. BARSTAD (ed.), *Continuity and Discontinuity. Chronological and Thematic Development in Isaiah 40-66* (FRLANT 255; Göttingen 2014)

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

¹² R. N. WHYBRAY, *Isaiah 40-66* (NCBC; Grand Rapids, MI 1984) 10. Here, Whybray lists the passages that present Isaiah’s prophetic texts concerning Cyrus’ release of the Israelites’ exiles, such as in 41:2-4.25; 44:28; 45:1-6.13; 46:11; 48:14-15.

some passages of Deutero-Isaiah¹³ prompts scholars, such as Duhm and Emerson, to confidently assert the “Palestinian background of 56–66.”¹⁴ Moreover, Gregory argues for the “postexilic exile” in Trito-Isaiah.¹⁵ This claim is significant for interpreting the polemical tone and violent image of YHWH in Isaiah 59.

Isaiah’s scholarship affirms that no clear indicators in Isaiah 59 lead to its dating. However, the prophetic vision of the coming of the LORD in the third section (vv. 15b-21) makes Koole see the implication of a question of Israel’s national restoration. Moreover, he also claims that “the previous chapters suggest that the pre-exilic have mostly continued to exist.”¹⁶ Furthermore, the “disputatious condition of the postexilic community”¹⁷ can be seen in the opening verse of this text. Thus, v. 1a: הֵן לֹא־קִצְרָה יְדִי־הוּהוּ מִהֲשִׁיעַ (Behold! The hand of the LORD is not too short from saving) appears to be an answer to the question raised earlier by the LORD: הֲקִצְרָה יְדִי מִפְדּוֹת וְאִם־אֵין־בִּי כֹחַ לְהַצִּיל (“Is my hand shortened, that it cannot redeem?” Or have I no power to deliver?”) in 50:2.¹⁸ If Isa 50:2 can be understood as an indirect “deep-seated questions of postexilic community as regards the relevance of God”.¹⁹ It can be interpreted as an apologetic vis-à-vis “the charge brought against God,” and those words “were spoken after the return had taken place.”²⁰

1.2. Literary Context

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

¹³ Tiemeyer considers the following passages to convey the notion of the return of the exiles: Isa 43:16-21; 48:20-21; 51:9-11; 52:10-12, and possibly in Isa 43:2. She suggests a metaphorical interpretation in the cases of Isa 43:2.16-21. For the three other remaining passages (48:20-21; 51:9-11; 52:10-12), she is convinced that they do not constitute an argument for their Babylonian origin, “these passages sought to convince the people of Judah that a return of the exiles from all corners of the world would be advantageous to Judahites since the returning exiles would help restore Jerusalem to her former splendour and rejuvenate her population.” See L.-S. TIEMEYER, *For the Comfort of Zion*. The Geographical and Theological Location of Isaiah 40–55 (VTSup 139; Leiden – Boston 2011) 202-203.

¹⁴ See B. DUHM, *Das Buch Jesaja* (Göttingen 1968) and G. I. EMMERSON, *Isaiah 56 – 66* (OTG; Sheffield 1992) 81-97.

¹⁵ GREGORY, “The Postexilic Exile in Third Isaiah”, 488. On the historical context of Trito-Isaiah, see P. D. HANSON, *Isaiah 40–66* (IBC; Louisville, KY 185-186; WHYBRAY, *Isaiah 40–66*, 38-43; C. WESTERMANN, *Isaiah 40–66* (tr. D. M. G. STALKER) (OTL; London 1969) 295-296.

¹⁶ J. L. KOOLE, *Isaiah III* (tr. A. P. RUNA) (HCOT; Leuven 2001) 168.

¹⁷ W. BRUEGGEMANN, *Isaiah 40 – 66* (WeBC; Louisville, KY 1998) 202.

¹⁸ GREGORY, “The Postexilic Exile in Third Isaiah”, 488. On the historical context of Trito-Isaiah, see HANSON, *Isaiah 40–66*, 185-186; WHYBRAY, *Isaiah 40–66*, 38-43; WESTERMANN, *Isaiah 40–66*, 295-296.

¹⁹ IRUDAYARAJ, *Violence, Otherness and Identity in Isaiah 63:1-6*, 2, n. 6.

²⁰ WESTERMANN, *Isaiah 40–66*, 345.

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

The function of Isaiah 59 is recognizable in its immediate and broader literary contexts. It shares considerable thematic similarities with Isaiah 58. Thus, the pair of *נשע* ("transgression, rebellion") and *חטאת* ("sin"), previously occurring in 58:1 as part of the prophetic accusation against the house of Jacob, is now presented again in 59:12 with a greater degree of emphasis on confession.²² The same observation can be made with the pair of *צדקה* ("righteousness") and *משפט* ("justice") in 58:2 and 59:14. Berges further confirms the parallel theme in 58:1b and 59:20 concerning the redemption for the returners from the transgression in the house of Jacob.²³

In the larger literary context, the opening lines (vv. 1-3) of Isaiah 59 closely parallel the theme of people's sinfulness in Isa 1:15.²⁴ Moreover, according to Emerson's chiasmic structure of the Trito-Isaiah, centralizing the "promises of salvation" (60–62), chapter 56 is recognized as parallel to chapter 63 (59:1-15a || 63:7–64:12; 59:15b-20 || 63:1-6).²⁵ In this context, chapter 59 (esp. vv. 15b-20) can be read as a parallel passage with chapter 63 (esp. vv. 1-6).²⁶ As Irudayaraj reasonably points out, "within the five chapters (Isaiah 59–63) thematic focus shifts from 'doom' to 'salvation' to 'doom.'"²⁷ In the same vein, Koole interestingly surmises that "the composer of 59:15b–63:6 has deliberately flanked the announcement of Zion's salvation by two words of judgement in which Zion is delivered from enemies who threaten from within and from without."²⁸ However, why does the message of "doom" recur after the promises of salvation? This question leads to the

²¹ *Inclusio* is a Latin word for "inclusion" in English. It is "a literary device where words or clauses are repeated to bracket off or envelope the marked-off material." See D. B. SANDY – R. L. GIESE, Jr., *Cracking Old Testament Codes. A Guide to Interpreting the Literary Genres of the Old Testament* (Nashville, TN 1995) 301; also J.-N. ALLETTI et al., *Vocabulaire Raisonné de L'exégèse Biblique*. Les Mots, les Approches, les Auteurs (Paris 2013) 95.

²² J. GOLDINGAY, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 56 – 66* (ed. G. I. DAVIES – C. M. TUCKETT) (ICC; London – New Delhi – New York – Sydney 2014) 214.

²³ BERGES, *Book of Isaiah*, 444. Also, P. A. SMITH, *Rhetoric and Redaction in Trito-Isaiah*. The Structure, Growth, and Authorship of Isaiah 56 – 66 (VTSup 62; Leiden 1995) 126-127.

²⁴ CHILDS, *Isaiah*, 487.

²⁵ G. I. EMMERSON, *Isaiah 56 – 66* (OTG; Sheffield 1992) 20. However, Emerson does not include v. 21 in the structure, nor does she discuss or explain it.

²⁶ BERGES, *Book of Isaiah*, 453.

²⁷ IRUDAYARAJ, *Violence, Otherness and Identity in Isaiah 63:1-6*, 67.

²⁸ KOOLE, *Isaiah III*, 329.

necessary discussion on the genre, structure, and poetic features in Isaiah 59, to which the paper now proceeds.

2. Genre, Structure, and Rhetoric Features

2.1. *Genre.* The shifts in literary style and the alterations of the speaker and addressee in Isaiah 59 have invited much scholarly effort to identify the genre of this textual unit. Suggestions such as liturgical form, sermon, or apocalyptic genre have been made. Muilenburg and others²⁹ classified Isaiah 59 as a “prophetic liturgy.”³⁰ However, “liturgy” is “imprecise and speculative”³¹ in this case. Kessler³² ascribes the genre of sermon as cited in Westermann. Nevertheless, Westermann is not convinced of either liturgy or sermon genre.³³ In this regard, Hanson argues for the apocalyptic genre. Notably, he attributes vv. 15b-20 to the theme of God’s judgment through the genre of “a Divine Warrior Hymn.”³⁴ However, the suggestion that it is a “prophetic speech” suggested by Petersen³⁵ probably grants a suitable form that utilizes rhetorical devices, such as מִשְׁפָּט shown in its critical positions of the textual unit (vv. 8, 9, 15b), to persuade the audience³⁶ about the reality of people’s immoral act and how the LORD’s response would be.

2.2. *Structure.* Generally, most scholars agree on the three-part structure of this pericope: vv. 1-8; 9-15a; 15b-21.³⁷ Based on the change of person, speaker, and addressee, Kim names the opening part (vv. 1-8) as an “accusation” against Israel, the middle section (vv. 9-15a) as the community’s “confessional lament”, and the closing subunit (vv. 15b-21) as

²⁹ M. HALLER, *Das Judentum*. Mit Namen und Sachregister (Göttingen 1914) 131-132; O. PROCKSCH, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Gütersloh 1949) 294.

³⁰ J. MUILENBURG, “Isaiah. Chapters 40–66”, *The Interpreter’s Bible*. Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Isaiah, Jeremiah (ed. G. A. Buttrick) (Nashville 1956) V, 686.

³¹ CHILDS, *Isaiah*, 484. Unfortunately, Childs does not suggest any specific genre for this pericope.

³² W. KESSLER, “Studie zur religiösen Situation im ersten nachexilischen Jahrhundert und zur Auslegung von Jesaja 56–66”, *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Martin Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg* 57/1 (1956) 41-47.

³³ C. WESTERMANN, *Isaiah 40–66* (tr. D. M. G. Stalker) (OTL; London 1969) 344.

³⁴ P. D. HANSON, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic*. The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology (Philadelphia, PA 1979) 120.

³⁵ D. L. PETERSEN, *The Prophetic Literature*. An Introduction (Louisville, KY 2002) 28.

³⁶ This paper defines “rhetorical device” as “the art of persuasion” (French: *l’art de persuader*), following the suggestion of ALLETTI *et al.*, *Vocabulaire Raisonné de L’exégèse Biblique*, 82.

³⁷ H. C. P. KIM, *Reading Isaiah*. A Literary and Theological Commentary (ROT; Sheffield 2016); CHILDS, *Isaiah*. However, some scholars are also concerned about the placement of v. 21. For the most recent review on this issue, see G. GOSWELL, “Isaiah’s New Covenant (Isaiah 59:21)”, *BBR* 32/4 (2022) 384-385. Among scholarly views, the reading of v. 21 in connection with 56:4 – both texts mention בְּרִיתִי (my covenant) – is the most appealing to the canonical function of v. 21 in the larger context (Chapters 56–66) as well as its immediate context (Chapter 59). As Childs observes that the role of v. 21, in relation to the coming of גּוֹאֵל (redeemer) to Zion (v. 20), is to articulate “God’s purpose in terms of his covenant” (CHILDS, *Isaiah*, 490).

the LORD's response regarding the redemption for those who have returned from the transgression (שְׁבִי פֶשַׁע). Moreover, the literary function of v. 21 is given due significance in the concentric structure (ABCB'A') of this textual unit, presented by Kim, as follows:³⁸

A – vv. 1-3: Y_{HWH}, “you” (pl.)

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

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

B' – vv. 15b-20: “they,” “he” (Y_{HWH}) [v. 15, “There is no justice.”]

A' – v. 21: Y_{HWH}, “you” (sg.) plus “your offspring”

Kim's proposed structure of Isaiah 59 highlights the desperate situation of justice, which frustrates the LORD's command given earlier in 56:1 (keep justice and do righteousness). Since justice is also the LORD's hope expressed in the vineyard parable 5:1-7, Isaiah's vision of the Lord's violent response to the corrupt people (vv. 15b-20) deems it necessary. This literary structure also reflects the prophet's confidence in the LORD, who will finally judge all things, including wicked thoughts (מַחֲשַׁבוֹת אֹן), lying words (דְּבַר־יִשְׁקָר), and violent deeds (פַּעַל חֲמָס).

2.3. *Rhetoric Features.* Repetition is one of many definitive techniques of rhetoric. Alonso Schökel observes that people “repeat sounds, words, phrases, verses, and strophes in different positions and with various functions.”³⁹ It is evident in Isaiah 59. The repetition of the name of God, יְהוָה, is evident in vv. 1, 13, 15, 19[2x], 20, 21[2x]. The same rhetorical technique is applied to some verbal roots such as יָשַׁע (vv. 1, 11, 16, 17), צָדִיק (vv. 4, 9, 14, 16, 17), and שָׁפַט (vv. 4, 8, 9, 14, 15). As regards the repetition of phrase or clause, the nominal clause, which consists of a particle of negation and a noun – “there is no justice”

³⁸ KIM, *Reading Isaiah*, 272 (with slight modification regarding the content of the chiastic structure).

³⁹ ALONSO SCHÖKEL, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics*, 76.

(אין משפט) – occurs first in v. 8 after the accusation against the people and recurs in v. 15b as the beginning of the final subunit describing the LORD's response.

Isaiah 59 is also overloaded with numerous metaphors.⁴⁰ The Chapter includes metaphorical images such as conceiving trouble and begetting wickedness (הרו עמל והוליד) in v. 4, spider (עכביש) and viper (אפעה) in v. 5, paths (מעגלות) in v. 8, darkness (חשך) and gloom (אפלות) in v. 9, blindness (עורים) in v. 10, growling bears (נהמה דבים) and moaning doves (הגה יונים) in v. 11, a warrior's costume ("breastplate", כובע, "helmet", שריון) in v. 11, "garments of vengeance", מעיל, "robe", in v. 17, and a constricted river (נהר צר) in v. 19.

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

3. The Rhetorical Function of משפט (Justice)

A justice-sensitive reading of Isaiah 59 considers משפט (justice) as the keyword of the text.⁴¹ Before analyzing its rhetorical function, it is important to note the three distinctive rhetorical purposes of משפט in its literary context. First, by using משפט with the negative existent particle, אין ("there is not"), in v. 8, the prophet recapitulates the immoral acts of the pleading people. Second, by placing משפט in the confessional statement, על-כן ממנו רחק משפט ממו (therefore, justice is far from us) at the opening verse (v. 9) of the communal confession (vv. 9-15a), the prophet associates the immoral conduct of the people (the cause of social injustice) with the rebellion against the LORD. Third, with the repetition of אין משפט (there is no justice) in the description of LORD's perception of the desperate of justice (v. 15b), the prophet thus links the first two parts (vv. 1-8; 9-15a) with the prophetic vision of the LORD's apparent violent, yet just, response (vv. 15b-21). The following presentation will thus highlight the desperate situation of justice in this Isaian community.

3.1. Prophet's Accusation: "There is no justice in their path" (v. 8)

In the first section (vv. 1-8) of Isaiah 59, the most impressive statements are the use of אין with נשפט (v. 4) and משפט (v. 8). Of these two statements, the first occurrence, אין

⁴⁰ Metaphor is understood in this paper as a literary device that invites the reader to perceive the more complex reality, which is implicitly conveyed by the images in Isaiah 59. For the full presentation of the cognitive metaphor theory, see G. LAKOFF – M. JOHNSON, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago – London 1980).

⁴¹ It occurs six times throughout the literary unit (vv. 4,8,9,11,14,15), with one exceptional use of the participle form of *nif'al*, נשפט (one who is judged), in v. 4.

נשפט (there is no one calling with justice) in v. 4, concerns the perpetrator⁴² of the judicial system without אמונה (reliability). In contrast, the second one, אין משפט (there is no justice) in v. 8, concludes the accusatory section of the prophetic message.

The prophetic accusation against the pleading people begins with two causative particles כי (because/for) in the following verses. The first כי, connected to the preceding negative statement, has a connective function in the verses. Thus, it conveys a contrasting sense, “but rather.”⁴³ Logically, as a contrasting statement *vis-à-vis* the preceding verse, v. 2 forcefully asserts the sinful reality of the pleading people. It is evident in the word order of v. 2. Following כי־אם (rather), the emphatic position of the subject עונותיכם (your iniquities) and הטאותיכם (your sins) highlights the moral responsibility of the corrupt people. Moreover, the parallel pattern (aba'b', in v. 2aα; 2bα) and the chiasmic arrangement cd (2aβ) x d'c' (2bβ) correspond to the description of the LORD in the preceding verse and thus highlight the people's culpability. Here, the prophet pronounces that it is not because of “the hand of the LORD” and “his ear” but due to their iniquities and sins.

Following the general assertion of the sinful reality of God's people, the prophet specifies their sins. Thus, the כי in v. 3 points out concrete sinful acts that have become the causes for the absence of the LORD's deliverance. People's sinful acts involve their body's parts, such as the palm (כף), finger (אצבע), lip (שפה), and tongue (לשון). Strikingly, these body parts neatly correlate⁴⁴ to the hand of the LORD (יד־יהוה) and his ear (אזנו) in v. 1. However, they are presented in a contrasting characteristic to those of the LORD. Here, the prophet accuses people of sinfulness being the primary concern. Because of the people's blood-defiled hands and iniquities-filled fingers (כפיכם נגאלו בדם ואצבעותיכם בעון), the LORD's hand withdraws from saving them; likewise, since “their lips spoke deception and their tongues uttered wickedness” (שפתויכם דבר־שקר לשונכם עולה תהגה), the LORD's ears become dull to their pleading.

Human immorality is further elaborated and brought to a deeper level. The prophet, thus, in v. 4a uses the non-existential particle (אין) two times consecutively to signify the

⁴² S. M. PAUL, *Isaiah 40–66*. Translation and Commentary (ECC; Grand Rapids, MI 2012) 500, renders “to contend, plead” for the *nif'al* form of the verb שפט and reads it in the light of other examples: Isa 43:26; 66:16; Jer 2:35.

⁴³ See GKC, 500 §163b; MUILENBURG, “The Linguistic and Rhetorical Usages”, 140. LXX renders ἀλλά, also Vulg. has *sed*; likewise, modern English translations, esp. NAB and NRS, maintain such adversative sense.

⁴⁴ However, it is also important to note the difference between the language used for the body parts of human beings and the LORD. While such a language can be applied literally for human beings, its anthropomorphic use for the LORD should be interpreted metaphorically.

seriousness of human sinfulness. In this context, the two statements, “there is no one calling with righteousness” (אין־קרא בצדק) and “there is no one being judged in truth” (אין נשפט), probably function to summarize the preceding descriptions of the people’s sinfulness and introduces the severe problem, which is presented in the following lines. It is also important to note that the absence of righteousness (צדקה) and justice (משפט) here is the violation of the LORD’s command given earlier (56:1), the first verse of the Trito-Isaiah. This correlation in the accusatory message is substantiated by the series of infinitives whose direct objects have negative qualities. The text of v. 4b contains four specific immoral acts: trusting upon emptiness (בטוח על־תהו), speaking of nothingness (דבר־שוא), conceiving trouble (הוליד עמל), and begetting wickedness (הוליד און).

The prophet elaborates on the sinful acts with metaphorical language in v. 5. Two elements deserve our attention. The first element is the shift from direct addressee (second person) to the indirect addressee (third person). The second element is the unusual word order. Firstly, why shift the personal pronouns? Is it significant in the accusatory argument? Goldingay may be reasonable in recognizing the ‘rhetorical effect’ of the use of the third person as “to make the audience (who in reality are still addressed) look at themselves as a third party, as if they are someone else, even though they know that they are not.”⁴⁵ In other words, the audience, in this case, is persuaded to admit their wrongdoings from an objective viewpoint. The following section on the communal confession (vv. 9-15a) is evidence of the success of this strategy.

To further explain the meaning of “begetting wickedness” (הוליד און) in v. 4, the prophet presents the immoral actions in an unusual word order in v. 5. By placing the objects, “eggs of a viper” (ביצי צפעוני) and “webs of a spider” (קורי עכביש), before the actions, “they hatched” (בקעו) and “they wove” (יארגו), the prophet probably wants to emphasize the danger and uselessness of the wicked people’s works. Its danger is spelt out in the second colon (v. 5bα): the death of the one who eats their eggs (האכל מביציהם ימות) and the emergence of a more dangerous kind of viper (אפעה).⁴⁶ The uselessness of the wicked people’s works is presented in v. 6a: “their webs are not for them as a garment” (קוריהם לא־יהיו לבגד) and “they will not cover themselves with their works” (לא יתכסו).

⁴⁵ GOLDINGAY, *Isaiah 56–66*, 193.

⁴⁶ The other occurrence of אפעה in Isaiah is 30:6, where the viper is listed among the beasts of the Negeb. In Job 20:16, the viper’s tongue (לשון אפעה) kills the wicked one. Both literary contexts, thus, suggest the viper to be a dangerous animal.

במעשיהם). The following colon (v. 6b) presents the reason for such uselessness in two clauses arranged in a concentric structure (ABB'A), which highlights their works of wickedness and deeds of violence.

A – their works (מעשיהם)

B – works of wickedness (מעשי-און)

B' – and deed of violence (ופעל חמס)

A' – in their hands (בכפיהם)

Human wickedness and violence are seen at their highest point in the shedding of innocent blood. The prophet keenly depicts the movement of the wicked people, which involves the whole body, from their feet (רגליהם) to the head, which generates their thoughts (מחשבותיהם). In addition, the shedding of innocent blood is depicted as a “hastening” (מהירו, *pi'el* of מהר) action.⁴⁷ At this point of criticism, the prophet seemingly tries to convince the addressed audience that all the immoral acts described above begin with their “thought of wickedness” (מהשבות און), which eventually links to “devastation and destruction” (שד ושבר)⁴⁸ in their course (במסלותם).

The scenario of immoral acts (v. 2-7) leads to the logical conclusion in v. 8. Here, the poetic lines appear to be arranged with a concentric structure. This structure consists of an *inclusio*, which is formed by the lamentation about the ignorance (לא ידע) of “peace” (שלום) and a chiasmic structure at the center, which highlights the paths/roads of injustice/crookedness. The prophet at this moment seems to tell the audience about not only the interconnectedness between peace (שלום) and justice (משפט) but also, and more importantly, the central place of justice in the establishment of peace. The beautiful literary structures of v. 8 can be sketched as follows:

A – the way of peace they do not know (דרך שלום לא ידעו)

B – and there is no justice in their paths (ואין משפט במעגלותם)

B' – their roads are crooked for them (נתיבותיהם עקשו להם)

A' – everyone walking in it does not know peace (כל דרך בה לא ידע שלום)

⁴⁷ Noting the similarity of this phrase in Isa 59:7 and Prov 1:16, Abernethy, following GOLDINGAY, *Isaiah* 56–66, 195, argues for the utility of wisdom traditions in Trito-Isaiah. See ABERNETHY, “Wisdom in Isaiah”, 346.

⁴⁸ The repetitive sound of ש in the two words of “thought” (מחשבה) and in the expression “devastation and destruction” (שד ושבר) can be considered, from the viewpoint of the “linking sound pattern,” as a device that joins together the wicked thought of the wrongdoers and the “devastation and destruction.” See T. P. McCREESH, *Biblical Sound and Sense*. Poetic Sound Patterns in Proverbs 10 – 29 (JSOTSup 128; Sheffield 1991) 64-65.

The illustration above shows that the central section of v. 8 highlights the injustice or crooked paths of the sinful community. In this presentation, the absence of justice (משפט) becomes the primary concern, which, by reechoing the theme of justice in the Lord's commandment (56:1), rhetorically recapitulates all the immoral acts and attacks a group of wicked people.⁴⁹ So, it is now the opportunity for the addressed audience to respond to the accusation.

3.2. Communal Confession: "Justice is far from us" (v. 9)

The communal confession is introduced by על־כן ("therefore"). Grammatically, the combination of the preposition for causality, על ("because"), and the deictic particle, כן ("this"/"that"), can function to link the preceding part (vv. 1-8) with the content that follows.⁵⁰ It correlates the people's confession (vv. 9-15a) to the prophet's accusation (vv. 2-8). Semantically, however, על־כן can be a conjunction that indicates the consequence of the preceding acts.⁵¹ From this perspective, the communal confession (vv. 9-15b) can be read as a consequence of the prophetic accusation in vv. 2-8.

The communal character of this confession is marked by the suffix נו (us/our) and verbal forms in the first-person plural (we). The most striking feature in this section is the repetitive occurrence of משפט (vv. 9, 11, 14) in a balanced distribution in the poem, just as it is a refrain of a musical arrangement. This extensive use of משפט undoubtedly shows its central place in this part and conveys the deeper level of transgression than the social injustice. The text indicates that the wicked people do not mention immoral acts against their fellow human beings. In v. 13, the corrupt people confess their acts of "transgressing and deceiving against the LORD" (פשע וכחש ביהוה) and turning back from behind their God (נסוג מאחר אלהינו). Goldingay points out that the root כחש, used in *pi'el* form to describe the deception, connotes the hidden rebellion in contrast to the professed commitment to the LORD. Such a covert act is made explicit by the fact of "turning away" (נסוג, *nif'al*) "from following our God" (מאחר אלהינו).⁵² From a grammatical viewpoint, it can be said that the

⁴⁹ See WHYBRAY, *Isaiah 40–66*, 221; GOLDINGAY, *Isaiah 56–66*, 197.

⁵⁰ Just as it is also used in Isa 57:10. In other contexts, it can also be used as a consequential connection, such as in Job 42:6. See J. B. CURTIS, "On Job's Response to Yahweh", *JBL* 98/4 (1979) 497-511.

⁵¹ In Job 42:6, על־כן indicates Job's change of perspective concerning the "dust and ashes" reality of human life as the consequence of the divine speech (40:6–41:34).

⁵² GOLDINGAY, *Isaiah 56–66*, 215. Here, Goldingay sensibly points out that the expression "our God" (אלהינו) is meant to heighten the enormity of these acts.

pi'el form of כחש may imply a greater moral responsibility being charged against the active agent than the *nif'al* of נסוג because the latter can be the passive of the former.⁵³ Hence, v. 13a probably suggests that the hidden deception against the LORD bears more severe moral responsibility than the explicit act of turning away from him.

The rhetorical function of משפט in vv. 9-15a seems to be presented in a gradually intensive manner. At the beginning of the communal confession (v. 9), the sinful group admits that justice is far from them (רחק משפט ממנו), and this situation is made parallel with their incapability of reaching righteousness (לא תשיגנו צדקה). Then, at the center of their confession (v. 11b), the people lament that they intensively hope for justice (נקוה למשפט). However, there is none (ואין), an affirmation of the accusation against them in v. 8a. Finally, the confession ends with the worst scenario in which justice is turned backward (הסג אחור משפט, v. 14a). The recurrence of the root סוג here is probably a wordplay to present the fact that “justice is turned backward” as a consequence of the people’s turning away (נסוג) from their God (v. 13a).⁵⁴ These situations of משפט indicate that the pleading people are not following the Lord’s commandment, in 56:1, that his people should “keep justice” (שמרו משפט) and “do righteousness” (עשו צדקה). This desperate context of social and religious injustice can be a justifiable reason for the preference for the verbal form (*pi'el*), rather than the noun, of the root קוה to express the intensive communal act of hoping for justice at the central place of the pericope.

CONCLUSION

This paper has presented the primary usage of the Hebrew verbal root for the verb “to hope for, to wait for” (קוה, יחל, חכה) in the Isaian prophetic writings. It proposed that the “postexilic exile” experience of the returnees from the Babylonian exile would have been the reason for the intensive action of hope for “justice.” This study has established that the absence of justice (אין משפט) in the postexilic community is the reasonable background of the preferential usage of verbal form (*pi'el*) to express the communal hope for justice, which occupies the central place in the pericope (v. 11). In other words, the preferential usage of the verb, נקוה, implies the desperate situation-in-life of the Isaian community.

⁵³ P. JOÜON – P. MURAOKA, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Roma 2006) 40.

⁵⁴ PAUL, *Isaiah 40–66*, 507. In the same vein, Goldingay asserts that the usage of סוג in this place “already points in another way to the link between the two actions.” See GOLDINGAY, *Isaiah 56–66*, 217.

Isaiah's way of expressing the communal hope for justice is relevant in communities and societies where justice is absent due to the wickedness of the tyrannical government. This prophetic oracle is an appealing voice in the tragic situation of the victims of the "Extrajudicial Killings" (EJKs) or "Extralegal Killings" (ELKs),⁵⁵ which are happening around the world today.⁵⁶ These victims experience the total absence of justice in their community, just as the innocent people in Isaiah 59. In such a context, the victims and their families need to hear a prophetic voice, such as in Isaiah 59, protesting against the tyrannical government and, more importantly, assuring hope for justice at the intervention of the LORD.

⁵⁵ The United Nations considers these terms synonymous and defines them as "killing committed, e.g., by vigilante groups or secret government agents – outside judicial or legal process – that is, in contravention of, or simply without, due process of law" (https://conferences.unite.un.org/unterm/Display/record/UNHQ/extra-legal_execution/6E3E8435A06FEDE9852569FD00029B39) (accessed 29 June 2025).

⁵⁶ For a list of the countries and an update on EJKs/ELKs, access <https://www.omct.org/en/what-we-do/extrajudicial-killings> (accessed 29 June 2025).

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