

Yahweh's New Creation Servants: Explorations in Isaiah and Paul

Introduction

The main point in this paper and in all my writing is that the Bible is the unified and multi-faceted word of God, who is a unified and multi-faceted person. There is no fissure in God's word, for there is no fissure in God. As Carl F.H. Henry writes, "The very fact of disclosure by the one living God assures the comprehensive unity of divine revelation."¹ Based on this fundamental point, I have contended before² and still believe that the Bible portrays God's character and human character in a connected plot that spans the whole Bible. In brief, this plot is that the only living and sovereign God directs history from creation to new creation through the promise and work of the Christ and the Holy Spirit in and through his people. This plot includes vital encompassing themes. After a methodological statement, I will address three of these themes: creation, new creation, and God's servants, who are in fact themselves new creations, in Isaiah and Paul.

I will do so in the following way. First, I will note Paul's use of new creation language in Galatians and 2 Corinthians. Beginning with Paul

¹ Carl F.H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority: Volume Two* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1999) 69.

² See Paul R. House, "God's Character and the Wholeness of Scripture," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical theology* 23/1 (Spring 2005) 4-17; and "Examining the Narratives of Old Testament Narrative: An Exploration in Biblical Theology," *Westminster Theological Journal* 67 (2005) 229-245.

demonstrates new creation's ongoing biblical significance. Second, I will focus on Isaiah's multi-faceted creation, new creation, and servant theology. Isaiah 65-66 will receive particular attention due to the high concentration of key terms found there. Third, I will provide a synthesis of Isaiah and Paul's use of new creation servant theology. I will argue that Isaiah informs Paul's theology and that Paul connects Isaiah's concepts in a contextual manner suited to his readers' needs. Fourth, I will conclude with a brief reflection on Whole Bible Biblical Theology's value in academic ministry.

Methodology

My part in the program is merely round one of a bigger project. Scott Hafemann will give the second part and Andreas Kostenberger the third. Hafemann and I will deal with some common material to try to provide hearers with an example of Whole Bible Biblical Theology. Kostenberger will examine the discipline's current status and suggest how it may develop.

It seems natural to me to work with Scott on a related topic. We have enjoyed a long personal and professional friendship that includes co-editing a collection of Biblical Theology essays entitled *Central Themes in Biblical Theology*³ and serving on the leadership team in the Biblical Theology

³ Scott J. Hafemann and Paul R. House, eds., *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2007/Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007).

section of the Evangelical Theological Society. Our aim has been and remains the pursuit of Whole Bible Biblical Theology.

What do we mean by this, and how do we approach this task? Our methodology remains largely the same as in *Central Themes in Biblical Theology*.⁴ There we affirmed our friend and fellow contributor Elmer Martens' definition of Biblical Theology: "that approach to Scripture which attempts to see Biblical material holistically and to describe this wholeness or synthesis in Biblical categories. Biblical theology attempts to embrace the message of the Bible and to arrive at an intelligible coherence of the whole despite the great diversity of the parts. Or, put another way: Biblical theology investigates the themes presented in Scripture and defines their inner-relationships. Biblical theology is an attempt to get to the theological heart of the Bible."⁵ In other words, we strive to go beyond the important task of describing the theology of a single section or book of the Bible, or of discussing how the New Testament writers use the Old Testament in individual passages.

This definition does not force interpreters to use one particular methodology. There are many ways to arrive at an understanding of this

⁴ See Hafemann and House, 15-18.

⁵ See Elmer Martens, "Tackling Old Testament Theology," *JETS* 20 (1977) 123; quoted in Hafemann and House, 16.

unity. The writers in our co-edited volume took various methodological routes. But this definition rests on an essential governing commitment. We insist that one must discern *how* the Bible coheres, not *if* it does.

In my opinion, everything hangs on this commitment. Otherwise a biblical theologian, much less an evangelical inerrantist biblical theologian like me, cannot adequately explain Mathew 5:17-20, Mark 12:28-32, Luke 24:44, John 10:35, Acts 7, Acts 13, 1 Corinthians 10:1-16, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Hebrews 11, 2 Peter 1:16-21, and other New Testament passages that explicitly assert biblical unity when discussing a variety of issues. No interpreter is infallible; we will fail to explicate biblical unity fully. Nonetheless, those of us who ask *how* the Bible coheres fail nobly in the right cause. In a plenary address at the Wheaton Theology Conference in 2000 I dared to hope that various types of Whole Bible Biblical Theology would appear in due course.⁶ Today I am happy to see a growing and diverse body of work dedicated to analyzing how the Bible coheres.⁷ There are now many workers in this particular harvest.

⁶ See Paul R House, "Biblical Theology and the Wholeness of Scripture: Steps towards a Program for the Future," in Scott J. Hafemann, ed., *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002) 267-279.

⁷ Much has happened since 2000. For example, the excellent New Studies in Biblical Theology series has made several thematic studies available. C.H.H. Scobie has published his magisterial *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003). James Hamilton, Jr. has written *God's Glory in Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, Crossway, 2010), and Greg Beale has

Our basic definition and fundamental commitment entail certain core convictions. First, as I noted a moment ago, we believe the Bible is a unity because it is the word of God, who is a unique, unified, coherent, good, and permanently complete being. The whole Bible reflects God's character, so Biblical Theology should span the entire range of the Scriptures. Of course this statement about God is hardly an uncontested assertion. Some writers have questioned the wholeness and goodness⁸ of God in recent years. Others think the Bible presents divergent positions on God's character,⁹ and still others argue that the Bible offers competing voices and theologies.¹⁰ While we respect these authors, we do not agree.

Second, based on point one, we do not pit the Old Testament against the New Testament, or Isaiah against Nahum, or Peter against Paul. As I noted above, the Bible's actual depiction of God's character in its pages and the Bible's statements on its unity lead us not to do so. To address a common objection to our position, this emphasis on unity does not ignore

published *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011). Broadman and Holman Press recently announced a commentary series anchored in Biblical Theology. The list could be extended, but the point is clear: there has been a solid stream of biblical theological works the past decade.

⁸ Note for example Carleen Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets: A Dialogic Theology of the Book of Lamentations* (Semeia Studies 58; Atlanta: SBL, 2007).

⁹ See for instance a moderate version of this viewpoint in Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1997).

¹⁰ See for instance Erhard Gerstenberger, *Theologies of the Old Testament*, trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002). Note C.H.H. Scobie's survey of biblical scholarship's turn from theology to theologies in *The Ways of Our God*, 25-28.

legitimate diversity. It affirms that effective literature utilizes tension to create its unity. After all, for example, tragedy must have some comic elements to work, and vice versa. Diversity in characters, plot, and themes aids the creation of the whole.

Once again, this is not a unanimous opinion among scholars. Indeed, I find this core commitment to the progressive, conceptual, and directional unity of the Bible grounded in God's character the most debated of our methodological points, even among evangelicals. As was just noted, some experts find competing voices and theologies in scripture. Others describe what they consider dichotomies or contradictions in the scriptures. Again, we respect these scholars greatly, but we do not agree with them.

Third, we do not think it sufficient simply to survey the Bible's subject matter. In pursuit of a proper grasp of God and his ways Whole Bible Biblical Theology certainly spans the entire canon as much as possible. It examines the Law, Prophets, Writings, Gospels and Acts, the Pauline letters, and the General Epistles and Revelation. I think it is best to do so in this canonical order. Yet the goal is not just to unpack the Bible's general characters, plot, and themes. It is to establish the Bible's unfolding conceptual unity.

Fourth, this type of Biblical Theology reflects synthetically *and* historically on God's relationship with people and the world. It does not settle for describing the biblical writers' separate theological emphases, historical sources, or favorite passages. It does not settle for reconstructions of religious experiences and historical events behind the text. It does not yearn for non-historical renderings of theology. Instead, it reads the Bible in its entirety, in its final historical and canonical form, and with its books and parts and historical settings in concert with one another. It affirms that God's self-revelation cannot be separated from its historical and canonical context.

Fifth, this type of Biblical Theology often traces themes the biblical text introduces and develops. Using themes to unite textual data, theological concepts, and historical settings is as old as Christian Theology. Sparked by Walther Eichrodt and others, this approach was especially helpful in the renewal of Biblical Theology during the last century.¹¹ Scholars still contribute thematic studies, as was noted above. We rarely argue these days that one single theme accounts for every aspect of Biblical Theology. Perhaps we do not need to do so. But it remains helpful to utilize centering organizing themes found repeatedly in scripture.

¹¹ For a basic survey of this era see Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998) 28-36.

Sixth, we find it helpful for Old and New Testament scholars¹² to work in concert with one another and with systematic, historical, and practice-oriented theologians. It is hard for one person to do everything these days given the burgeoning academic production in our disciplines. Collaboration of the type we are trying to model during this ETS regional meeting is one way to learn and teach more together than is possible alone.

Let me be clear about my own use of this methodology. I believe that Old Testament Theology is the irreplaceable, fully essential, authoritative and self-connected first part of unified Whole Bible Biblical Theology.¹³ Indeed, based on length it is the first three-fourths of it. To me, canonical Biblical Theology is like a waterfall that graces the heights rimming a Norwegian fjord. The water plunges swiftly and inevitably down the mountains to the fjord, each inch of water participating in the flow. Each inch is needed for the whole; and each inch is incapable of going back from where it came. In unpolluted settings these pure waterfalls help produce large bodies of water so clear the waterfall's reflection is mirrored in them. All is reflected in clarity and purity.

¹² For a recent example of this type of collaboration see Reinhard Feldmeier and Hermann Spieckermann, *God of the Living: A Biblical Theology*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011).

¹³ On these points see House, *Old Testament Theology*, 53-57.

Or perhaps some of you will prefer a more muddied, American image. If so, Biblical Theology is like the Mississippi River, which flows north to south and empties into the Gulf of Mexico. Each portion is one with the whole and heads in the same direction. Each portion reaches its goal, and each portion has its place and reason for being. These waters cut through the land, the place where we live. I believe Whole Bible Biblical Theology teaches that believers in Christ are heading from creation to new creation. These truths converge in human life on earth, and a mighty biblical river runs through it.¹⁴ My goal in this paper is simply to trace a small portion of the water's flow.

Paul's New Creations

As Hafemann will discuss more fully in his presentation, the apostle Paul specifically describes believers in Christ as new creations at least twice, in Galatians 6:15 and 2 Corinthians 5:16-18. In these two passages Paul does not only look for believers to become new creations in the coming kingdom where believers will be with God forever. He also considers believers new creations now.

¹⁴ I adapted this image from Norman Maclean, *A River Runs through it and Other Stories* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1976) 104.

In Galatians 6:15, Paul writes, “For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.”¹⁵ As you know, this verse appears at the end of a book that argues, among many other things, that Jews and Gentiles can come to God in Christ on equal footing. Thus, one may be circumcised or not. What matters supremely is being a new creation. Similarly, Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:16-18, “From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.”

Paul almost certainly utilizes Isaiah in some way when he writes these verses.¹⁶ As will be discussed below, Paul’s statements in these two passages fit conceptually with Isaiah 65-66, the prophet’s grand conclusion to his book. They also correspond to Isaiah 41-48, where Isaiah reflects on creation and the creating of new things in a concentrated way.¹⁷ Several scholars have noted that Isaiah 43:18-19 and 2 Corinthians 5:17 have very

¹⁵ Unless otherwise noted, English translations are from the ESV.

¹⁶ Peter Balla notes several New Testament scholars that agree in his “2 Corinthians,” in D.A. Carson and G.K. Beale, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) 765-766.

¹⁷ See the discussion of *hadash* and *bara* below.

specific linguistic links.¹⁸ Furthermore, when Paul tells the Corinthians that God reconciles people in Christ through Jesus' death on the cross in 5:21, he may refer to Isaiah 52:13-53:12. Paul also quotes Isaiah 49:8 in 6:2 and cites Isaiah 52:11 in 6:16-18. It seems Paul often has Isaiah on his mind.

Since this is the case, it is appropriate to ask some questions. What is the range of material (not just individual verses cited) Isaiah offers Paul? What specific elements of Isaiah might stand behind Paul's concept of "new creation"? How do these elements link Paul to other portions of biblical theology? The answers to these questions require interpreters to seek answers in the deep waters of Isaiah's theology.

Isaiah's Canonical Theological Vision

When Paul reflects on Isaiah he chooses a writer who incorporates much that has already appeared in the Law and Former Prophets and much that will appear in the Latter Prophets and in the Writings. Given Isaiah's theological range and the length of this presentation, I must let his book represent the Old Testament. A longer paper or a monograph should ideally explore each canonical theme in each canonical segment in some detail. Still, Isaiah utilizes more biblical themes than almost any other Old

¹⁸ G.K. Beale notes that 43:18-19 includes the terms "behold," "old," and "new" appear in the LXX and in 2 Corinthians 5:17. See his "The Old Testament Background of Reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5-7 and its Bearing on the Literary Problem of 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1," *New Testament Studies* 35 (1989) 553.

Testament book, so this decision is not simply pragmatic. The survey that follows in this section will show that Isaiah uses themes found throughout the Old Testament to forge his statements on creation, new creation, and Yahweh's servants. It will then analyze Isaiah 65-66 specifically to show how Isaiah unites these diverse and connected themes in a fitting climax that features Yahweh's new creation servants.

Isaiah's Canonical Theology

Isaiah is clearly a canonical theologian. He references creation theology throughout his book (see below). He mentions Abraham (41:8), the exodus (63:7-14), Israel's consistent rebellion against Yahweh during its history (1:2-31; 5:8-30), the Davidic covenant (7:14; 9:6-7; 11:1-16), Israel's division (7:1-25), and the woes of the late eighth-century B.C. and early seventh-century B.C. (1:1; 46:1-47:13; etc). He includes psalms-like material in his work (e.g. 12:1-6; 26:1-21), and he incorporates wisdom motifs (11:1-9). Significantly for later prophets and supremely for New Testament writers, he also describes the future Davidic messiah, who will rule Israel (9:1-7), unite Israel and bring light to the Gentiles (42:1-9; 49:1-13), die for his people (52:13-53:12), teach his people how to live (32:1-8), and rule the whole earth forever (11:1-16). Finally, he envisions Zion as an ultimate home for God's remnant, a multi-national ministering team of

servants transformed into his changed people prepared for a new heavens and new earth (65:1-66:24).

Isaiah's Creation and New Creation Theology: Selected Key Concepts

Beginning with 4:5, Isaiah unites creation theology and the concept of new things in the future. Most tellingly for Paul, I think, he also eventually links the concept of Yahweh's servant and Yahweh's servants to this theology. Isaiah composed several cycles of messages that shape his book.¹⁹ These cycles consistently begin with transgressions done by Israel, Judah, or one or more of the nations. These sins harm people, nations, government, families, and the land itself. All facets of creation are affected negatively by sin. The cycles then warn about or portray judgment, often by describing the day of Yahweh (e.g. 2:5-22), a great shaking of creation. The cycles always end, however, with Yahweh's international people living permanently in a secure home on Mount Zion (e.g. 4:2-6; 12:1-6; etc). The messianic promise is often a key component of this renewal. Clearly, Yahweh must remake negative situations for Yahweh's followers to experience this positive result. Throughout the book, then, Isaiah uses terminology calculated to produce new people, new actions, and new homes.

¹⁹ I consider these cycles to include 1:1-4:6; 5:1-12:6; 13:1-27:13; 28:1-35:10; 36:1-56:8; 56:9-62:12; and 63:1-66:24. I believe these cycles are the key to the book's structure. Thus, old ideas of dividing Isaiah ought to be reconsidered.

Isaiah uses several important keywords also found throughout the Old Testament canon to forge these themes: *bara* (“create”),²⁰ *asah* (“make”),²¹ *yotser* (“form,” or “act as a potter”),²² and *nagad* (“declare,” or “announce”).²³ These terms appear together and with other important concepts, including *hadash* (“new [thing or things]”),²⁴ *tsemach* (“branch” or “branch out”),²⁵ and *atseh* (“plan,” or “counsel”).²⁶ In short, various aspects of Yahweh as maker, creator, shaper, planner, and declarer of the future permeate the book. Yahweh plans, announces, makes, and creates new things that will happen soon and in “the latter days” to counteract “the former days.”

Isaiah’s Servant and Servants Theology

²⁰ Instances of the verb occur in 4:5; 40:26, 28; 41:20; 42:5; 43:1, 7, 15, 19; 45:7 (2x), 8, 12, 18 (2x); 48:6-7; 54:16 (2x); 57:19; and 65:17, 18 (2x).

²¹ Instances of the verbal and nominal forms of *asah* in the sense of Yahweh making or being the maker of things or in the sense of human beings trying to act as creator when they are not, especially in the matter of idolatry, occur in 2:8, 20; 17:7-8; 22:11; 25:1, 6; 29:16; 31:7; 37:16; 37:26; 41:4, 20; 43:7; 43:19; 44:13-19; 44:24; 45:7, 9, 12, 18; 46:6, 10-11; 48:3, 5, 11, 14; 55:11; 57:16; 66:2; and 66:22.

²² Instances of the verbal and nominal forms of *yotser* in the context of making or creating include 22:11; 27:11; 29:16; 37:26; 43:1, 7, 21; 44:2, 9, 10, 12, 21, 24; 45:7, 9 (2x), 11, 18; 46:11; 49:5; and 64:7 [ET 64:8]. This word can also have the sense of “planning” (see 22:11 and 37:26).

²³ Relevant instances of *nagad* include 19:12; 21:6; 21:10; 41:22 (x); 41:23; 41:26; 42:9-10; 43:9, 12; 44:7; 44:8; 45:19, 21; 46:10; 48:3, 5, 6, 14, 20; and 66:19.

²⁴ Relevant instances of *hadash* occur in 41:15; 42:9, 10; 43:19; 47:13; 48:6; 62:2; 65:17; 66:22, 23.

²⁵ Relevant instances of *tsemach* occur in 4:2-6; 42:9-10; 43:18-19.

²⁶ Relevant instances of *atseh* occur in 14:26; 19:11, 17; 19:3; 25:1; 28:29; 42:9-10; 44:26; 46:11; 47:13; 48:6-8; and 65:16.

Isaiah also frequently mentions God's "servant" and "servants," concepts also found often in the Old Testament.²⁷ There are at least four relevant servant categories in Isaiah. First, some texts mention Yahweh's past servants, in particular David (37:35) and Jacob/Israel (41:8; 44:1; 44:21; 45:4; 48:20; 49:3). Second, the book identifies present servants of God, namely Isaiah (20:3) and Eliakim (22:20). Third, Isaiah discusses a special servant of Yahweh who will minister to Israel and Judah. He will redeem them and persons from other lands (42:1-17; 49:1-13; 50:1-11; 52:13-53:12). Fourth, this special servant will produce a group of servants that will follow him and serve Yahweh (54:1-56:8).

This group clearly includes Israelites (54:1-17; 55:3-5; 63:15-19) and Gentiles (55:3-5; 56:1-8). The multi-national nature of the group is in keeping with earlier parts of the book. For instance, in 2:1-4 Isaiah envisions peoples of many nations coming to seek Yahweh's word in Zion, and in 19:16-25 he looks forward to Yahweh counting Israel, Egypt, and Assyria as his people. As will be discussed below, the end of the book intertwines the concept of Yahweh's "servants" with new creation theology.

²⁷ For an outstanding study of "servant" in Biblical Theology, see Stephen G. Dempster, "The Servant of the Lord," in Hafemann and House, 128-178.

Isaiah's New Creation Servant Theology in Isaiah 65-66

Isaiah now pulls several themes together in a striking theological synthesis. In Isaiah 65-66, he portrays Yahweh's servants as living for Yahweh when others do not (65:1-16), living in Yahweh's new heavens and earth (65:17-25), and ministering for Yahweh among the nations (66:1-24). Both the Israelite and Gentile representatives of this group have access to Yahweh. Both groups minister on Yahweh's behalf to the ends of the earth (66:19-21). This group of ministering servants begins with Yahweh's "survivors" (66:18-21), a company introduced as early as 2:1-22 and 6:1-13. In short, Isaiah produces these connected, patterned details to assert that Yahweh's servants will come from all nations, participate in ministry, reflect the new creation now, and are thus already new creations poised to become complete in Zion. Clearly, these ideas interested Paul.

Yahweh's Servants Living for Yahweh (65:1-16)

Isaiah 65:1-7 proves the old adage that the more things change the more they stay the same. Isaiah's ministry spans six decades (c. 745-680 B.C.). He opens his book with scorching condemnations of Jerusalem and Judah's faults (1:2-26). These sins include cultic (1:10-14) and societal (1:21-26) transgressions. Sadly, the book's periodic updates (5:1-30; 28:1-31:9; 56:9-57:21; etc.) do not report an improved situation. It is not surprising, then,

that 65:1-7 condemns the people for walking in their own ways (65:2), which includes cultic rebellion (65:3-7). The general populace does not seek Yahweh any more than when Isaiah began. Indeed, sinful cultic practices increased when Hezekiah died and Manasseh reigned after him (2 Kings 21:1-18).

Yet not all the people fail, according to 65:8-12. Within the nation there is “new wine” (65:8), Yahweh’s servants. They stand out in the midst of a generally rotten cluster of grapes. Yahweh’s servants seek Yahweh (65:10). They do not do evil in Yahweh’s eyes or delight in things he despises (65:12). These people have appeared in earlier cycles. They are the ones 4:2-6 describes as having their names written in Yahweh’s book. They are the ones 12:1-6 states rejoice because they drink salvation from Yahweh’s well of salvation. They are the ones 35:1-10 portrays as singing as they travel to Zion. They are the gentiles joined to God’s people in 56:1-8. Yahweh himself will rejoice over them, according to 65:19a. They may be lonely in their service, but God has not forgotten them.

Because these servants obey him, in 65:8-16 Yahweh distinguishes between them and the disobedient people in the land. Using images that echo the covenant blessings in Leviticus 26:1-13 and Deuteronomy 28:1-14, Yahweh promises his servants food, drink, joy, gladness, and a special

name. In images that echo the covenant consequences in Leviticus 26:14-45 and Deuteronomy 28:15-68, Yahweh promises the rebels the opposite. Due to their relationship with Yahweh, his servants are covenant keepers, and Yahweh extends to them the covenant blessings of an obedient people.

Once the wicked are put to death, all “former troubles” cease (65:15-16).

New things unfold.

Yahweh’s Servants Living with Yahweh (65:17-25)

These new things are stunning. In 65:17-25, Isaiah’s considerable vision for the future, shaped and seasoned through decades of ministry, takes full flight. He announces nothing less than Yahweh creating new heavens and a new earth (65:17). This new creation includes a New Jerusalem, where Yahweh’s people dwell (65:18; see 4:2-6; 12:1-6; etc). In this home there will be no more weeping or distress (65:19-20). According to 65:21-22, this city will not endure another invasion like the ones depicted in Isaiah 10:5-34 and 36:1-37:34. Children will be safe (65:23). Yahweh will answer his people when they call (65:24). Indeed, 65:25 reveals an ideal setting: “The wolf and the lamb will graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent’s food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain.” This verse connects readers to the nearly identical promises of the messianic kingdom in 11:1-9. It also reminds readers of Genesis 3,

the spoiling of creation and the violence of Noah's era (cf. Gen. 6:5). All these problems will be overcome. Yahweh's servants clearly have much for which to hope as they obey him.

Yahweh's Humble and Contrite Servants (66:1-14)

But Yahweh's servants are not yet in this new place enjoying these new conditions. They must live on and serve on, displaying the characteristics of the people of the new heavens and earth now. So once again Isaiah returns to old themes. This time he echoes language found in 2 Samuel 7:1-17 and 1 Kings 8:12-27. In 66:1-2a Yahweh reminds readers that the heavens and earth belong to him; no house of worship can contain him. He does not need sacrifices to exist, so he looks for worshippers who fit the following profile: "He who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word." His servants are this type of worshippers.

But such worshippers always have enemies. Their opponents make sacrifices, but not worthy ones (66:3-4). They hate Yahweh's servants, and believe they are serving Yahweh by persecuting them (66:5). Soon, though, Yahweh will come and defeat these foes (66:4, 6). Then Jerusalem will be at peace (66:7-13). Then Yahweh's servants will see his "indignation against his enemies" (66:14). Meanwhile the servants keep doing Yahweh's will, and they keep suffering and rejoicing.

Yahweh's Survivors' Ministry to the Nations (66:15-24)

Isaiah concludes his book by sandwiching statements about Yahweh's servants' ministry to the world (66:18-23) between two promises of judgment (66:15-17; 66:24). As before, Isaiah stresses the international nature of Yahweh's followers and the safety they find in Zion. This security is permanent, and so is their opponents' punishment.

Isaiah 66:15-24 begins and ends with fire. Yahweh will come in burning fury to purge the wicked from his people (66:15-17). He will especially seek out those who practice idolatry (66:17). When Yahweh gathers the wicked he will burn their bodies forever (66:24), an image Jesus uses in Mark 9:48. The servants will no longer endure persecution for their obedience to Yahweh. Their enemies will face complete and final defeat.

International ministry by the servants/survivors provides the heart of the section. In 66:18a Yahweh states that he will gather the nations, which seems ominous at first, given previous passages like Joel 3:1-2. But 66:18b-19 shows the positive plans behind the gathering. Yahweh will send his survivors to the nations that have not heard of him, and they shall declare his glory to those who have not heard of Yahweh (66:20). They will bring people from these nations to Jerusalem, who will be Israel's "brothers," and

Yahweh will make some of these gentile people priests (66:20-21).²⁸ Once again Isaiah stresses the international glory of God through the international people of God who believe in and serve Yahweh. Never again will Yahweh suffer poor worship or lack of followers. Those who trust and worship him properly will endure as long as the new heavens and earth remain (66:22-23). Isaiah closes, then, with themes that punctuate his book repeatedly.²⁹

Isaiah, Paul, and New Creation Servants Theology

Though Isaiah's prophecy ends, his theological waters have not reached their final destination. They flow on to later prophets, to psalmists, and to apostles. I do not have time to describe, for example, how Ezekiel develops concepts of God's Spirit reviving Israel, or how Psalm 51:10 [MT 51:12] speaks of Yahweh creating a new heart in the psalmist. I cannot discuss how John cites Isaiah 65:17-25 directly in Revelation 21:1-8, having already stated in 19:4-10 that Yahweh's servants, who are brothers, are Christ's people. It must suffice to suggest some ways Isaiah's ideas may provide material from which Paul shapes his thinking about who is a new

²⁸ Though they differ over details, a wide variety of experts agree with this general overview. See for example Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66* (AB19B; New York: Doubleday, 2003) 312-315; Brevard Childs, *Isaiah* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001) 542; J.A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 1993) 541-543; and G.V. Smith, *Isaiah 40-66* (NAC 15B; Nashville: Broadman and Holman Press, 2009) 749-751.

²⁹ Childs, 542.

creation and who is a servant of Yahweh in 2 Corinthians 4-5 and Galatians 6:15.

First, Paul explains his ministry in terms of being God's servant. Three of Paul's letters begin with him identifying himself as a "servant" (*doulos*) of Jesus (Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:1). In Acts 13:46 he relates his ministry to an Isaianic servant passage (see Isaiah 49:1-13). In 2 Corinthians 4:5 he states that he preaches "Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants (*doulous*) for Jesus' sake." If Isaiah provides some of the background for this statement, then Paul may offer a very high Christology and theology of apostolic ministry: Jesus is Yahweh, and Paul and the apostles are the servants of Yahweh. Paul seems to believe the elements of Isaiah 65-66 have come to life in his ministry and in those of other apostles and gospel workers.

Second, Paul describes conversion in terms of God's creating power. He comments in 2 Corinthians 4:6 that the same God who called light out of darkness in Genesis 1:3 called believers out of the darkness of sin into the light of Christ's glory. Paul includes himself in this enlightening in Acts 26:12-18, where he claims that at his conversion God struck him blind, then gave him his sight back. This taught him his ministry would bring light to

the Gentiles. Paul therefore considers himself and others who have been taken from darkness to light examples of new instances of creation.

Third, Paul notes that though he is a new creation he still lives on earth and deals with struggles of the spirit and body (2 Cor 4:7-12). He endures afflictions and persecutions. He clearly thinks his servant ministry unfolds amidst God's enemies. He suffers now, yet is confident he will soon enough experience a new home and a new body due to Christ's resurrecting power (2 Cor 4:13-5:10; see Isa. 25:1-12). Like Yahweh's servants in Isaiah 65:1-16 and 66:1-14, then, Paul ministers obediently until he reaches the new heavens and earth.

Fourth, in Galatians 6:15 and 2 Corinthians 5:16-18 Paul considers every person transformed by God's creating power in Jesus a new creation regardless of ethnic heritage. This belief coincides with Isaiah 66:18-21, which asserts that God's servants will bring believers from the nations to Yahweh. These believers may become God's priests. There is no distinction between Israelites and Gentiles at this point. All may serve Yahweh in all capacities. No one, Paul included, may consider people "according to the flesh" any longer (5:16).

Fifth, since the persons the servants bring to Yahweh become servants themselves, they share their predecessors' obedient nature. The earlier

servants serve Yahweh and receive his covenant blessings (65:1-6; 66:1-14), and so will these new servants (66:19-23). In short, they have an ethical excellence God's enemies simply cannot display. Paul's own endurance in service (*diakonia*) described in 2 Corinthians 6:3-13 embodies this persevering faithfulness. His statement that believers are "created in Christ Jesus for good works" in Ephesians 2:10 and assertion that believers are "created in righteousness and holiness of truth" in Ephesians 4:24 also support this conclusion.³⁰

Isaiah provides Paul with many of the elements he needs for his "new creation" theology. From Isaiah Paul inherits teachings about the servant messiah, the servants of the messiah as an international group, and the reality of new creation in current and future life. But Paul deserves credit for uniting these elements to apply his readers' lives and his ministry to the Bible. He tells his readers that they are Yahweh's servants because they are Jesus' servants. He asserts that their existence indicates new creation has begun now. Paul believes his ministry produces persons that demonstrate the fulfillment of Isaiah's promises. Though he awaits an even greater

³⁰ See P.E. Hughes, *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962) 202; and Scott J. Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel* (WUNT 81; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1995) 430-431.

fulfillment, the evidence of its reality walks before him in the cities of the Roman Empire.

Conclusion

Whole Bible Biblical Theology strives to present the character of God in history, creation, and new creation. It exists to honor God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—through servant scholarship. It exists to honor God’s written word the way biblical writers did. Yet it also exists to bring wholeness to biblical thinking, biblical preaching, biblical scholarship, and biblical ethics. Whole Bible Biblical Theology offers unitary ways of reading and thinking. Paul’s writings on new creation represent an example of how crucial such thinking can be. His uniting of text and ministry in the grand tradition of Isaiah the prophet led to a sacrificial ministry that insisted that God’s servants are new creations that cannot be separated by race. In a very real way, then, Paul’s Biblical Theology shaped the church for the better, hopefully forever. Though not persons receiving God-breathed scriptures, today’s biblical theologians may take heart that thinking and writing and ministering through Whole Bible Biblical Theology will have positive consequences beyond our current meeting. We may not reach the level of

Isaiah and Paul, but we can provide pure water for thirsty hearts, souls, and minds.