

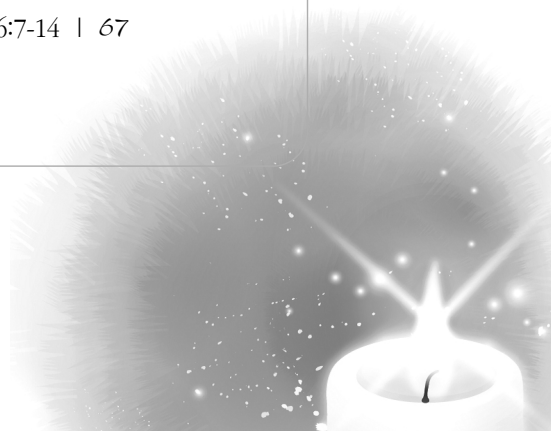
The Theological Shape of the Comfort Motif in the Book of Isaiah

최윤갑

고신대 신학과 조교수

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이사야서에 나타난 위로 모티브의 신학적 형성*

위로의 모티프는 이사야 전체 장에서 가장 중요한 주제중 하나로써, 이사야서에서 일관성 있는 발전(A Coherent Development)을 보여준다. 이사야 12장은 위로 모티프의 가장 중요한 두 가지 요소를 보여 준다: (1) 위로의 양태: 여호와와 회에서 구원으로의 반전, (2) 위로의 근원자: 여호와 하나님의 임재. 이사야 40:1-11은 죄 사함과 포로 생활이 끝나게 된 시온의 운명의 극적인 변화, 여호와 하나님의 임재, 그리고 시온과 하나님의 언약 관계를 보여 준다. 즉 이사야 40장은 이사야 12장에 나온 시온의 운명이 어떻게 극적으로 반전되는지 구체화 한다. 이사야 49장은 종의 사역과 여호와와의 사역을 더욱 구체적으로 보여 줌으로서, 이사야 40장의 시온의 완전한 변화와 회복이 어떻게 성취될 것인지 독자에게 알려 준다. 반면, 이사야 61장은 성령의 임재 하심과

* 이 논문은 제31차 한국복음주의 구약신학회에서 발표되었고, 이 논문의 한글 번역본은 『구약논집』 12호에 게재가 확정되었다

종의 선포를 통해 시온 백성들 가운데 공의와 정의가 회복되고, 영원한 언약이 성취됨으로, 시온이 영광스러운 운명과 위로를 경험할 것을 보여 주고 있다. 즉, 이사야 61장은 이전에 있었던 시온의 회복에 관한 말씀이 어떻게 구체적으로 성취 되는지 보여 준다. 끝으로, 이사야 66:7-14는 어머니가 자녀를 위로 하듯이, 여호와와 시온이 주의 종들을 풍성하게 위로할 것을 강조함으로 결론에 도달한다. 그러므로 우리는 위로 모티프는 이사야서 말씀 전체를 통해 아주 일관적인 모습으로 형성되었고, 또한 발전하고 있다고 말할 수 있다. 그리고 이사야서에서 이 위로의 모티프는 궁극적으로 시온 백성들이 누릴 종말론적인 회복과 구원의 양상을 극적인 모습으로 그려 내고 있다고 할 수 있다.

*The Theological Shape of the
Comfort Motif in the Book of Isaiah*

주요어

위로, 구원, 회복, 공의와 정의, 새 창조

Abstract

The Theological Shape of the Comfort Motif in the Book of Isaiah

Prof. Dr. YunGab Choi

In the Book of Isaiah, it might be true that the comfort motif plays a major role as a leitmotif and makes a coherent development in the whole book of Isaiah (Isa 12:1-6; 40:1-11; 49; 61:1-11; 66:7-14). First, it is the Holy One of Israel, Yahweh, who ultimately achieves the comfort of Zion in these five major comfort-texts. In Isa 12:1-6, the Holy One of Israel is emphatically described as “great one (לוֹרֵא).” In Isa 40: 9-11, he is portrayed as the king, warrior, and shepherd, demonstrating that he can achieve the great reversal of Zion’s fortune with his power, wisdom, and tender care. Furthermore, in Isa 49: 14-26, Yahweh is depicted as warrior, savior, redeemer, and the Mighty One of Jacob, who can bring about the return of Zion’s children and restore her glory and fame in the world. The image of Yahweh as comforter Isa 49:14-16 reaches its highpoint in Isa 66:7-14, which contains the image of the motherly, consoling Yahweh. Second, comfort is paradigmatically epitomized by the joyful reversal of Zion’s fortune in these five focal texts: the reversal from Yahweh’s wrath to Yahweh’s salvation in Isa 12:1-6, the

reversal by the forgiveness of sin and the end of exile in Isa 40:1-11, the reversal by the total restoration of Zion in Isa 49, the reversal of Zion with her growth as oaks of righteousness in Isa 61:1-11, and finally the reversal from the servants' mourning into joy and gladness in Isa 66:7-14. Within the deliberate development of Yahweh's image in the subsequent comfort-texts, the Book of Isaiah shows that the Holy One of Israel is the sole and ultimate protagonist who can achieve the comfort of his people within the redemptive history.

Keywords | comfort, salvation, restoration, justice & righteousness, new creation.

1. Introduction

The primary purpose of this article is to explore the theological shape of the comfort motif within the Book of Isaiah. In the Book of Isaiah, it might be true that the comfort motif plays a major role as a leitmotif in forming the profound message of the eschatological restoration of Yahweh's people (Isa 12:1-6; 40:1-11, 49; 51; 61-62, 66:7-14). Thus this motif has drawn the attention of the number of scholars—B. S. Childs, W. A. M. Beuken, Rolf Rendtorff, Willem A. VanGemeren, and Joseph Blenkinsopp—in the interpretative history of Isaiah.¹⁾ In spirit of their recognition on the importance of the comfort motif, however, scholars' interpretations of the major comfort-texts—Isa 12:1-6; 40:1-11, 49; 51; 61-62, 66:7-14—have been relatively biased by being achieved through one of the dominant viewpoints of Isaiah—salvation. As a result, this has brought about a considerable limitation or skewedness of scholarly exploration of the comfort motif's canonical, literary, and theological function in the Book of Isaiah. In this regard, we will attempt to investigate

1) Brevard S. Childs remarks that "The verb [—comfort—] in its piel form occurs frequently in Second and Third Isaiah (49:13; 51:3, 12, 19; 52:9; 61:2; 66:13), and sounds a note of divine restoration that is central to the second half of the book of Isaiah." See, *Isaiah* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 297; See also, W.A.M. Beuken, "Servant and Herald of Good Tidings: Isaiah 61 as An Interpretation of Isaiah 40-55," in *Book of Isaiah- Le Livre d'Isaie*, ed. Jacques Vermeulen (Louvain: Leuven University Press, 1989), 411 - 42; Rolf Rendtorff, "The Composition of the Book of Isaiah," in *Canon and Theology: Overtures to an Old Testament Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 150 - 51; Willem A. VanGemeren, "Isaiah," in *An Expository Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised Beforehand*, ed. Miles V. Van Pelt (Wheaton: Crossway, Forthcoming), 321 - 45; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, vol. 19B, 1st ed., *The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2003), 31.

the theological shape of the comfort motif in Isa 12:1-6, 40:1-11, 49, 61:1-11 and 66:7-14, all of which are the representative texts in the Book of Isaiah explicitly developing this theme, and finally demonstrate that the comfort motif makes a coherent development in the Book of Isaiah. To achieve this goal, we will utilize the canonical approach, the literary approach, and text-linguistic approach as the major methodology in this study.

2. Comfort in the Ancient World

Two studies by Gray A. Anderson and Saul M. Olyan have shed a promising light upon the comfort motif in the ancient near eastern world as well as in the Book of Isaiah. In particular, they investigated the comfort motif in its intrinsic relation to the “mourning” motif in the Old Testament. Anderson’s ground-breaking book *A Time to Mourn, A Time to Dance* has illuminated the ritual and behavioral expressions of grief and joy in Israel’s religion and then established the concept of mourning and rejoicing in terms of a theological model of type and antitype in the Old Testament.²⁾ In the process of his investigation into the behavioral expression of mourning and joy in the life of the individual in Israel (chapter 3), he has provided detailed aspects of the act of comforting in its relation to mourning:

2) Gary A. Anderson, *A Time to Mourn, A Time to Dance: The Expression of Grief and Joy in Israelite Religion* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991). Saul M. Olyan defines this frame in terms of a theological model of type and antitype. See *Biblical Mourning: Ritual and Social Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1.

“Comfort can imply either the symbolic action of assuming the state of mourning by the mourner, or it can have the nuance of bringing about the cessation of mourning. In grammatical terms, the former usage reflects a processual usage of the verb, while the latter usage would be resultative ... [T]he resultative usage of comforting entailed the replacement of mourning behavior by joyous ones.”³⁾

In the same vein, Olyan establishes a theoretical paradigm for the ritual dimensions of mourning in the Bible in his book *Biblical Mourning*, in which he explains the role of comforter as bringing “consolation and intervention to put an end to the mourning state.”⁴⁾ These studies make a tremendous contribution to the interpretation of the comfort motif within its social, spiritual, and historical context, most of which is vividly embodied in the mourning community of Zion in the Book of Isaiah. More significantly, the attempt to interpret the comfort motif against the mourning motif will lead us to consider the comfort motif within its literary and social context in the Old Testament.⁵⁾ Thus, it is imperative for an interpreter to interpret the comfort motif within the framework of mourning and its implied situations—either God’s wrath, judgment, doom upon his people, or people’s failure to achieve the life of

3) Anderson, *A Time to Mourn, a Time to Dance*, 84 – 5. Cf. Xuan Huong Thi Pham, *Mourning in the Ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999).

4) Olyan, *Biblical Mourning*, 61. He has categorized the mourning rites in the Bible into mourning the dead, petitionary mourning, non-petitionary mourning at the time of a calamity, and the mourning of the individual afflicted with skin disease.

5) We can find several texts in which comfort appears against the backdrop of the mourning situation in the Old Testament. In Gen 37:35, Jacob refused to be comforted in his mourning when he heard his son Joseph was dead. In Jer 31:13, in addition, YHWH promise to comfort his people in sorrow when the new covenant is established. In Lam 1:21, Jeremiah mourns because there was no comforter in the groaning and destruction of Jerusalem.

righteousness and holiness—that sets up its theological and literary background in the Book of Isaiah. Finally, it is feasible that the comfort motif is intrinsically related with the reversal of Zion’s fortune from her mourning to joy as well as from her judgment to salvation in the Book of Isaiah.

3. The Comfort Motif in Isa 12:1-6

Isaiah 12:1-6 is generally understood as the “eschatological hymn of praise,” which prompts the people of Zion to give thanks to Yahweh for his salvation and comfort. Many linguistic and thematic connections between Isa 12:1-6 and the preceding chapters readily suggest that this chapter functions as a deliberate conclusion to Isa 1-11.⁶⁾

How does Isa 12:1-6 characterize the comfort motif along with other themes? An outstanding mark of the comfort motif in Isa 12:1-6 are the dominant presence of “joy” and “praise”—**וְרִיָּא** (v. 1), **וְשִׁשׁ** (v. 3), **וְרִיָּה** (v. 4), and **וְרִיָּה** (v. 5)—in the midst of Zion. In particular, the dramatic change in the mood of Yahweh’s people from “fear” due to Yahweh’s wrath into “trust”

6) The theme of Yahweh’s anger in v.1 is thematically and linguistically linked to 5:25; 9:11[12], 16 [17], 20 [21]; 10:4, 5, and 25. The theme of exaltation of Yahweh’s name in verse 4 has connections with 2:11 and 17. Finally, the Holy One of Israel appears in Isa 1:4; 5:19, 24; 10:20. For the linguistic and thematic connection between Isa 12 and the previous chapters, see further B. S. Childs, *Isaiah* (Louisville: Westminster John Know, 2001), 108; Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1991), 499 - 508; H.G. M. Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah: Deutero-Isaiah’s Role in Composition and Redaction* (New York: Clarendon Press/Oxford University Press, 1994), 118 - 19.

and “joy” definitely supports the demonstration of the reversal of Zion’s fortune. Furthermore, Yahweh’s powerful presence in Zion makes such a radical transformation possible. Therefore, there emerge two main agendas of the comfort motif in Isa 12:1-6: (1) the reversal of Zion’s fortune from wrath into salvation, and (2) the presence of the Holy One of Israel in Zion.

If we delve into the semantic flow of verses 1-2, first, it is evident that the comfort motif is placed at the thematic turning point in verse 1c, from Yahweh’s wrath (v. 1b) into Yahweh’s dwelling in Zion and its resultant salvation (v. 2a, 2d). Within the semantic development of verses 1-3, Yahweh’s wrath gives way to Yahweh’s salvation at the pivotal point of Yahweh’s comfort in verse 1c. These three repetitions of the key-term יְהוֹשִׁיעִי (vv. 2-3) not only forcefully inculcate the idea of Yahweh’s salvation as Zion’s final destiny, but also emphasize the radical reversal of Zion’s fortune from Yahweh’s wrath into salvation. Furthermore, the paronomasia created by the repetition of two similar-sounding terms—תִּבְבֵּא and תִּבְבֵּא אֵל—underscores the point that Zion’s status changes from fear into trust through the comfort of Yahweh. The semantic flow of verses 1-2 can be portrayed as follows,

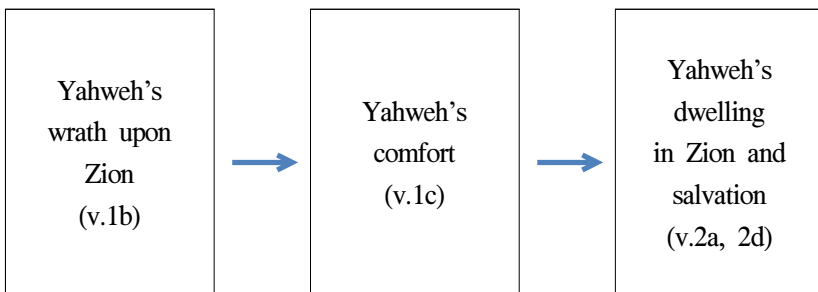


Figure 1. The Comfort Motif in Isa 12:1–2.

According to the above diagram, it is obvious that the comfort motif in Isa 12:1-6 takes place against a thematic backdrop of Yahweh's wrath, and is also depicted in parallel with Yahweh's salvation toward Zion, which results in her elated joy and praise (vv. 1, 3).

Second, the presence of the Holy One of Israel in Zion will enable the people of Zion to be comforted by joy and praise (v.6). It is widely accepted that the Holy One of Israel (לְאֱרֻשֵׁי שׁוֹרֵק) is a major theme in the Book of Isaiah, which reveals its core message—the Holy One's judgment and salvation. In particular, in Isa 1:4, according to Wildberger, “the Holy One of Israel is the God of the covenant who is viewed as the kind father who has raised his people” and therefore expects a life of justice and righteousness from them.⁷⁾ It is significant that the Holy One of Israel occurs in close thematic conjunction with his mighty deeds—וַיִּתְּלֵי־עַם (v. 4) and תּוֹאֵג (v. 5)—as a way to underscore “the royal sovereignty of Yahweh” that saves his people from the Egyptian slavery and oppression.⁸⁾ In Isa 12:1-6, therefore, the Holy One of Israel (שׁוֹרֵק לְאֱרֻשֵׁי) appears as the mighty warrior and the sovereign Lord who can fight with his enemy and then bring about victory and salvation (Cf. Isa 10:20; 29:19, 23). In this regard, it is the dwelling of the Holy One of Israel in Zion that guarantees the comfort of Zion in Isa 12:1-6, akin to Israel's salvation and joy. The movement of the theological argument in Isa 12:1-6 seems to highlight the fact that the presence of the Holy One of Israel is the solid and fundamental foundation on which his people will experience their comfort. Thus, as Wildberger rightly remarks, “the Holy One of Israel

7) Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, 25.

8) *Ibid.*, 507. It also has the thematic and linguistic allusion to YHWH's mighty hand and power that have saved the Israel from the Egyptian oppression in Exod 15.

is the comfort for the remnant which has survived (10:20), the God in whom the redeemed rejoice [(12:1-6)], the one upon whom humans can rely on the day of judgment (17:7).⁹⁾ In conclusion, Isa 12:1-6 has two dominant agendas for the comfort motif: (1) the reversal of Zion's fortune from wrath into salvation, and (2) the presence of the Holy One of Israel in Zion. The comfort motif in Isa 12:1-6 is programmatic, in that it anticipates Zion's salvation and restoration in light of her comfort in the whole Book of Isaiah. But the passage we have just examined does not precisely indicate who will achieve it and how it will be achieved, specifically in the eschaton. These ideas will be developed in the following comfort-texts—Isa 40:1-11, 49, 61:1-11, and 66:7-14.

4. The Comfort Motif in Isa 40:1-11

Isa 40:1-11 is widely accepted as the introduction to the message of Isa 40-55. The occurrence of Zion's comfort in Isa 40:1-2 implies that the comfort is a major theme that forms the central message of Isa 40-55. In other words, the comfort of Zion in Isa 40:1-11 signifies the “new things” that Yahweh finally achieves with his agents—servant(s), Spirit, and word—in Isa 40-66. Even though we cannot find explicit joy and praise terms in Isa 40:1-11, as the term *תְּרַשְׁבֵּן* (herald of goodtiding s) suggests, these three agendas are good tidings for Zion, thereby implying her joy and gladness, which is akin to the manifestation of her comfort.

Here, the comfort of Zion is thematically and theologically substantiated

9) Ibid., 26.

by three major agendas: (1) the reversal of Zion's fortune (vv. 1-2), (2) the restoration of the covenantal relationship (vv. 1-2), and (3) the advent of Yahweh (vv. 3-5, 9-11). Let us explore these three agendas in turn now. First, the reversal of Zion's fortune in verses 1-2 signifies her comfort in Isa 40:1-11. The reversal of her fortune primarily occurs in Isa 40:1-2 as follows,

נחמו נחמו עמי יאמר אלהיכם:
 דברו על לב ירושלים וקראו אליה
 כי מלאה צבאה כי נרצה עונה
 כי לקחה מיד יהוה כפלים בכל־חטאתיה

(Isa 40:1-2)

If we scrutinize verses 1-2, it is true that while verses 1-2b describe the proclamation of comfort by Yahweh, verse 2c-f expound on two dramatic changes in Zion that are the primary causes of her comfort.¹⁰⁾

Semantically, it is noteworthy that the two fundamental transformations of Zion in Isa 40:1-2—the “forgiveness of her sin” and the “end of exile”—delineate the dramatic reversal of her fate. To be more specific, the forgiveness of sin indicates the crucial change of Yahweh's wrath into his salvation in the midst of Zion (cf. Isa 12:1-6). In Isa 1:4-5, Israel's iniquity and transgression lead her under Yahweh's judgment. In Isa 24:5, people have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, and broken the everlasting covenant, providing a reason for Yahweh's wrath. In the course of the Book of Isaiah, Israel's sin causes Yahweh's judgment upon Zion, and this has been fulfilled by Israel's

10) Goldingay and Payne comment that in regard to the relationship between vv. 1-2b and v. 2c-f, three *kî* clauses not only indicate the content of this proclamation of comfort, but also elaborate on the reason of Zion's comfort. See further, *Isaiah 40-55 Vol 1: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 69.

exile into Babylonia in Isa 39. In this regard, Yahweh's forgiveness of Israel's sin implies his new action and restoration for his people in Isa 40:1-11. In other words, in Isa 40:1-11, the fact that "God turns once again to his chosen people in forgiveness puts everything right. This, and this alone, is the cause of the change in their fortune."¹¹⁾

Closely related to the forgiveness of sin, in addition, it is the end of exile that signifies the reversal of Zion's fortune. The word **צבא** in verse 2c implies "army or warfare, thus military service," and then denotes "the period as a period of hard, fruitless toil ... for Judeans in Babylon."¹²⁾ Therefore, for those who are in the harsh period of the Babylonian exile, the proclamation of the end of exile must be the good news, indicating the dramatic reversal of their fortune. Therefore, as Debra Moody Bass cogently explains, "The word 'comfort' is used here [Isa 40:1ff] to denote relief from the suffering and oppression Israel experienced at the hands of the Babylonians,"¹³⁾ adumbrating the glorious future of Zion with the forgiveness of her sin.

Second, the restoration of the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and his people anticipates the comfort of Zion in Isa 40:1-11. Isa 40:1-2 obviously clarifies that the object of Yahweh's comfort is "my people" (**עַמִּי** v. 1) in parallel with "Jerusalem" (**יְרוּשָׁלַיִם**: v.2). In turn, Yahweh—who proclaims comfort toward them from the heavenly court—calls himself "your God" (**אֱלֹהֵיכֶם**). According to J. L. Koole, "This underlines the reality of the covenant [relationship]," which is reflected in the covenant formula between Yahweh

11) Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1969), 36.

12) Goldingay and Payne, *Isaiah 40-55 Vol 1*, 70.

13) Debra Moody Bass, *God Comforts Israel: The Audience and Message of Isaiah 40-55* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2006), 95.

and his people in other texts of the Old Testament (Ex 6:6; Lev 26:12; Jer 7:23; 11:4; 31:33).¹⁴⁾ Also, the fact that Yahweh restores his covenantal relationship with his people in Isa 40:1 reveals his plan to act for his people (Isa 40:9-11). In Isa 40:10, then, the strong arm and might of Yahweh indicate that he will not only defeat his enemy, but also save his people from the Babylonian exile with his sovereign power, thereby resulting in the comfort of Israel in Zion.

Finally, the advent of Yahweh in Isa 40:9-11 provides the foundation of Zion's comfort in Isa 40:1-11. This advent is already anticipated in Isa 40:3-5, where not only the way of the Lord is prepared for his coming (v. 3), but Yahweh also appears in his glory (v. 3). And this theme is more fully elaborated upon in In Isa 40:9-11, in which Yahweh appears as king, warrior, and shepherd.¹⁵⁾ To be more specific, Yahweh is depicted as the Sovereign LORD who comes with power and then will decisively attack his enemies as a warrior-king (Isa 40:10; cf. Isa 33:2; 59:15; 62:8). In other words, just as Yahweh used his almighty power for the salvation of his people from Egyptian slavery in the Exodus, so too he will save his people from the Babylonian exile in the New Exodus. Then, the scene of the warrior-king in verse 10 smoothly moves to that of shepherd-king in verse 11. There, Yahweh gathers and tenderly leads his people back home as a shepherd-king cares for his flock. In connection

14) J. L. Koole, *Isaiah III. Volume I/Isaiah 40-48. Historical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Kampen: Peeters, 1997), 50.

15) Linguistically, Isa 40:3-5 and 9-11 share many terms – רה (v. 4/ v.9), לוק (v. 3/ v.9), מיהלץ (v.3/ v.9). Also, the two terms – רעב (v.5) and תרעב (v.9) – form a Hebrew sound technique called paronomasia. Semantically, Yahweh's coming and his glory in vv. 3-5 are fully developed in vv. 9-11, which speaks of his advent in Zion and his diverse ministries as king, warrior, and shepherd.

with Isa 40:1-2, the forgiveness of Israel's sin and her liberation from Babylonian exile are only made possible by the compelling power of Yahweh as a king-warrior-shepherd. As Childs rightly remarks, in Isa 40:1-11, "The stress is fully on the coming of God for salvation and on the inbreaking of the new era of joy," which provides the fundamental resource for the dawning of new era of comfort in the midst of Zion.¹⁶⁾

In conclusion, while Isa 12:1-6 raises the expectation of comfort by underscoring the reversal of Yahweh's wrath into salvation, Isa 40:1-11 meets this expectation by expounding on how this fundamental change is made possible through the rhematic-development. Namely, the development of two important themes—the forgiveness of Zion's sin and the end of Zion's exile—in Isa 40:1-11 explains how the comfort of Zion is to be fulfilled. Along with this, the powerful presence of the Holy One of Israel in Isa 12:1-6 is elaborated on in Isa 40:1-11, in which Yahweh appears as king, warrior, and shepherd. Because of the presence of such a great king, warrior, and shepherd in the midst of Zion, it is possible for Yahweh's people to expect and experience the divine comfort and restoration in the eschaton.

5. The Comfort Motif in Isa 49

It is widely known that Isa 49 is the chapter that introduces the message of Isa 49-55.¹⁷⁾ Here we can detect three main agendas of the comfort motif

16) Childs, *Isaiah*, 302.

17) Structurally, Isa 49 can be divided into three major sections: (1) the second servant song (vv.

in Isa 49: (1) the ministry of the individual servant, (2) the reversal of Zion's fortune, and (3) the ministry of the Holy One of Israel. First, it is the ministry of the individual servant that will facilitate the comfort of Zion in Isa 49. Isa 49 serves to introduce a new and integral personage—this individual servant—on the stage of the redemptive drama of Isaiah. Then, it is Isa 49 as a whole that expounds upon the “new strategy of God for his servant,” which is integral for the grand restoration of Zion in the eschaton.¹⁸⁾ While the servant's ministry was fruitless in former times (v. 4), he is now capable of achieving Yahweh's divine purpose for his people. In Isa 49: 6, the ministry of the servant is depicted in three rubrics: (1) to raise up the tribes of Jacob, (2) to bring back the preserved of Israel, and (3) to be a light for the nations. Furthermore, these ministries of the servant are elaborated on via three points in Isa 49: 9-12: (1) to establish the land, (2) to apportion the desolate heritages, and (3) to accomplish the New Exodus. Within the literary and theological context of Isa 49, it is certainly accurate that the election and ministry of the servant is the major foundation for Zion's comfort.

Second, the reversal of Zion's fortune demonstrates her comfort in Isa 49. While Isa 49:1-12 describes the restoration of Yahweh's people with special reference to the servant's ministry, Isa 49:14-26 depicts it in terms of the repopulation and glorification of Zion by Yahweh's ministry. Significantly, the total restoration of Zion is characterized by the reversal of her fortune in Isa 49:14-23 and it is compelling. In the past, Zion as a woman was bereaved and barren (v. 21). In the future, however, children will come back to Zion

1-6), (2) the comfort of Zion by the servant's ministry (vv. 7-13), and (3) the comfort of Zion by Yahweh's ministry (vv. 14-26). Westermann, 206 - 23.

18) Childs, *Isaiah*, 382.

and as a result the city of Zion will be repopulated and adorned by them like a bride (vv. 17-21). In other words, as Koole comments, “The City of God was in ruins, but will become resplendent because Zion’s children are no longer blemishes (Deut 32:5) but ornaments.”¹⁹⁾ Furthermore, their enemy, who left the city devastated, will leave them (v. 17). Finally, kings and their princesses from nations will not only return and nurse the children of Zion (v. 23), but will also prostrate themselves before her, licking the dust of her feet. This is paradigmatic portrayal of her glorification. As Christle M. Maier comments, “In this situation, 49:22-23 aims at comforting Zion by the promise that her children will return to her [Zion].”²⁰⁾

Finally, the presence of the Holy One of Israel guarantees the embodiment of the comfort of Zion in Isa 49. In Isa 49:1-12, the primary reason that the servant succeeds in his ministry of comfort is that the Holy One of Israel has chosen and helped him (v. 7). That is, in Isa 49:13, Yahweh is the compassionate God who comforts his people in affliction. Against Zion’s lament that the Lord has forsaken her, he confirms his steadfast love toward his people with the analogy of the loving relationship between a mother and her son (vv. 14-15). He will raise up his hand to the nations, and they will bring Israel’s son and daughter to Zion. Furthermore, Yahweh is depicted as the mighty One of Jacob, savior, and mighty warrior who can rescue his captivated people from the tyrant Babylon.

In conclusion, Isa 49 develops the comfort motif with special reference

19) J. L. Koole, *Isaiah III. Volume II/Isaiah 49-55. Historical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Kampen: Peeters, 1998), 49.

20) Christle M. Maier, “Zion’s Body as a Site of God’s Motherhood in Isaiah 66:7-14,” in *Daughter Zion: Her Portrait, Her Response*, ed. Mark J. Boda, Carol J. Dempsey, and LeAnn Snow Flesher (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 232.

to the total restoration of Zion through the ministry of both the servant and Yahweh. The most conspicuous development in the comfort motif in Isa 49 is the appearance of this servant, who will facilitate the grand restoration of Zion. Isa 12 delineates comfort as the reversal of this people's fortune from experiencing Yahweh's wrath to experiencing his salvation, and Isa 40 describes comfort as the forgiveness of Israel's sin and the end of their exile. However, these two chapters do not specifically state how Israel will be transformed and restored after the return to the mother city, Zion. In this regard, the comfort motif in Isa 49 makes a significant contribution by providing a vivid description of their total restoration after their return to Zion.

6. The Comfort Motif in Isa 61:1-11

From the form critical viewpoint, as Claus Westermann states, Isa 60-62 contains a pure "message of salvation," forming "the nucleus of the message" of Isa 56-66,²¹⁾ which is why Westermann designates Isa 61 as the "proclamation of salvation" in his commentary.²²⁾ In Isa 61, we can detect that a Spirit-anointed servant proclaims the message of comfort to his people.

How then does Isa 61:1-11 characterize the comfort of Zion? If we scrutinize the thematic configuration of Isa 61 in relationship to its literary and theological context, as well as examining the social and cultural settings of the Ancient Israel behind it, we can investigate how Isa 61 characterizes the comfort of

21) Westermann, 296.

22) Ibid., 297; J. L. Koole, *Isaiah III. Volume III / Isaiah 56-66* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 267.

Zion. There is no doubt that Isa 61 represents the restored status of Zion. Furthermore, the social and cultural settings of Ancient Israel reinforce the reference to the comfort of Zion in Isa 61.

One dominant occurrence that features into Isa 61's declaration of comfort is the reversal of Zion's fortune from mourning into joy and praise. As is well-known, לָבָא (mourning) is a characteristic term of Isa 56-66, and one that appears only in the final section of Isaiah (57:14-18; 60:20; 61:2-3; 66:10). From a rhetorical viewpoint, the word, recurring three times in the first strophe (vv. 2-3) of Isa 61, לָבָא effectively epitomizes the spiritual and social condition of Yahweh's people in Zion. Semantically, it is probable that many terms – מִיוֹטָא (poor), בְּלִי-יִרְבָּשָׁנָא (broken-hearted), מִיִּבְשָׁא (captives), and מִיִּרְסָא (prisoners) – in verse 1 can be subsumed under this focal term – לָבָא. Therefore, לָבָא functions as a dominant term rhetorically and semantically in the first strophe, emphasizing the despondent and gloomy situation of Yahweh's people in Zion. However, in verse 3a and onward in Isa 61, the fact that a mourner in Zion transitions dramatically from mourning into joy and praise powerfully demonstrate the status of comfort within the despondent Israel. The repeated usage of תַּחֲתָא forms a unique auditory effect, mimicking the reversal of the mourner's fortune: רַפָּא (ashes) → רֵאפָא (a beautiful headdress), לָבָא (mourning) → הַטַּעַמָא הַלְהִיתָא (the oil of gladness), and חַוְיָא הַקָּבִיא (a faint spirit) → הַטַּעַמָא הַלְהִיתָא (the garment of praise). As is typical of root-play in Hebrew poetry, the alteration of רַפָּא (ashes) into רֵאפָא (a beautiful headdress) mirrors the imagery of Zion's change of fate.²³ In ancient Israel, a mourner would often tear apart his mantle, take off his hairband, and place ash upon his head without putting oil on

23) Jeffrey Shaochang Lu, "Called to Proclaim Covenantal Transformation : A Text-Linguistic Analysis of Isaiah 59:21-63:6" (Ph.D diss., Trinity International University, 1999), 180.

his face.²⁴⁾ In sharp contrast, the Spirit-anointed servant proclaims that he will give the mourners in Zion a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit (v.3). We can also detect that joy and gladness motifs along with a praise theme are spread throughout the entire chapter: the ‘oil of gladness’ (וַיִּשֶׁשׂ וַיִּמָּשֵׁחַ) and the ‘garment of praise’ (הַבְּטָעֵם הַלְהָהָרָה) in vv. 1-3, the rejoice (וַיִּגְדָּל) and everlasting joy (בְּלֹא תִכָּחַשׁ) in vv. 4-7, and rejoicing (וַיִּשְׂשֹׁן) and praise (הַלְהָהָרָה) toward Yahweh in vv. 10-11. In other words, the joy and gladness motif not only signifies the dramatic reversal of Zion’s fortune, but also the full manifestation of comfort.

What then will bring such a tremendous transformation in Zion’s fortune? The fundamental rationale for such a significant transformation is that people in Zion will grow as oaks of righteousness (v. 3) and then reenact the covenantal relationship with God (vv. 7-8). In the immediate context of Isa 59:9-15, on the one hand, the absence of righteousness makes the righteous people mourn in Zion. Furthermore, the pollution of righteousness leads to Yahweh’s punishment of the people of Zion, so that they make a penitential prayer in their mourning (64:1-12). In such a literary and theological context, therefore, the restoration and manifestation of righteousness essentially causes the righteous

24) Regarding the mourning rite, Roland De Vaux explains that “at the news of the death, the first action was to tear one’s garment (Gen 37:34; 2 Sam 1:11; 3:31; 13:31; Job 1:20). Then ‘sackcloth’ was put on... The mourners took off their shoes (2 Sam 15:30; Ez 24:17, 23; Mic 1:8) and headdress (Ez 24:17, 23)...The mourner would put earth on his head (Josh 7:6; 1 Sam 4:12; Neh 9:1; Job 2:12; Ezek 27:30)...and lie or sit among a heap of ashes (Esth 4:3; Isa 58:5; Jer 6:26; Ezek 27:30)... Lastly, mourners refrained from washing and using perfumes (2 Sam 12:20; 14:2).” See further, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Instructions* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 59.

in Zion to burst out in elated joy and praise (vv. 10-11). On the other hand, Yahweh's enactment of the everlasting covenant with his people in Zion implies their future glorification, which forms an essential part of Zion's restoration in Isa 61. Based on his covenant, Yahweh will achieve his plan to glorify Zion as a crown of splendor and a royal diadem in his hand (Isa 62:3).

In relation to Isa 49, it is evident that Isa 61 makes a significant thematic development by emphasizing the point that the servant of Yahweh now proclaims the content of comfort to his people. When the Spirit-anointed servant proclaims Yahweh's plan of comfort and restoration to Israel, his people in Zion will grow as oaks of righteousness and experience the benefit of the everlasting covenant, both of which indicates the status of comfort in Zion.

7. The Comfort Motif in Isa 66:7-14

Along with Isa 65, Isa 66 is generally considered to be the end of the Book of Isaiah as a whole, and thus Childs argues that "the literary effect of chapter 66 along with chapter 65 is to bring the book of Isaiah as a whole to a conclusion."²⁵ This last chapter conveys "a hopeful vision of the future of Zion/Jerusalem."²⁶ By and large, Isa 66 can be divided into three major units : (1) the condemnation of false worship (vv.1-6), (2) the vindication

25) Childs, *Isaiah*, 539.

26) Chris Franke, "'Like a Mother I Have Comforted You': The Function of Figurative Language in Isaiah 1:7-26 and 66:7-14," in *Desert Will Bloom: Poetic Visions in Isaiah* (Leiden: Brill; SBL, 2009), 43.

and comfort of Yahweh's servant (vv.7-14), and (3) the theophany of Yahweh and its result—the eschatological vision of the New Heaven and New Earth (vv.15-24).²⁷⁾ When it comes to the vindication of the servants of Yahweh in Isa 66:1-6, Isa 66:7-14 vividly expounds on the idea of their comfort and glorification in Zion.²⁸⁾

Here, we see a main agenda of the comfort motif in Isa 66:7-14—the reversal of Zion's fortune from mourning into joy. But joy and gladness appear in Isa 66:10-14 through the occurrence of many of their cognate terms: *שמחו* (be joyful, v. 10), *גילו* (rejoice, v. 10), *שמ* (glad, vv. 10 and 14), and *מְתַנְּחֵהָ* (be delighted, v. 11). According to the parallelism in the Hebrew text of Isa 66:10, it is obvious that those who are encouraged to rejoice with Zion (v. 10a and c) are none other than those who once mourned over her dejected situation. What then makes them rejoice? According Isa 66:7-14, it is obvious that the overflowing numbers of Zion's children in Isa 66:7-9 make them extremely glad. In Isa 40-55, Zion is depicted as a mother (Isa 49: 17-23; 50:1), but a miserable mother bereft of her children (Isa 51:17-20). However, the fact that Zion will give birth to sons and that they will become numerous in Isa 66:7-9 shows just how dramatically Zion's fortune has been restored. Furthermore, we note that Yahweh as comforter takes “the role of a consoling mother” for her child in Isa 66:11-14.²⁹⁾ In particular, Isa 66:13 epitomizes

27) Childs, Beuken, Koole, and Oswalt divide Isa 66 into three major sections: vv. 1-6, 7-14, and 15-24. See Childs, *Isaiah*, 539 - 42; Beuken, “Isaiah Chapters 65-66”; Koole, *Isaiah 56-66*, 468 - 531; Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40 - 66*, 663 - 693.

28) Beuken, Blenkinsopp, and Maier argue that Isa 66:7-14 is the conclusion to the third major segment of the Book of Isaiah, namely Isa 56-66. See further, Beuken, “Isaiah Chapters 65-66,” 207; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, 19B:304; Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 201 - 02.

29) Maier, “Zion's Body as a Site of God's Motherhood in Isaiah 66:7-14,” 240.

all of the mothering activities of Yahweh with triple repetitions of key terms—**חנן** (comfort); “As one whom his mother comforts (**וַיְחַנְּנֵהוּ**), so I will comfort you (**אֲנִי אֲחַנְּנֶךָ**), and you will be comforted in Jerusalem (**וַיְחַנְּנֵהוּ**).” In turn, this denotes that just as a mother is the most necessary and essential comforter for her child, so too Yahweh is the true and perfect comforter for his people.

In conclusion, with Zion’s motherly comfort, the comfort motif reaches its highpoint in Isa 66:7-14. According to A. vander Woude, “As a mother who brings comfort, Zion finds Yhwh at her side. In much the same way as she takes care of ‘her children’ (Isa. 66:8), he looks after ‘his servants’ (66:14).”³⁰ With the tender care of Yahweh, Zion will experience the lavish divine comfort. Placed in the conclusion of the whole Book of Isaiah, it is true that the comfort motif in Isa 66:7-14 reaches its culmination in a way that shows the ultimate nature of its abundance in the eschaton.

8. Conclusion

So far, we have attempted to trace the thematic and theological trajectory of the comfort motif in the five major comfort-texts—Isa 12:1-6, 40:1-11, 49, 61:1-11 and 66:7-14—and have been able to detect three main thematic characteristics. First, it is the Holy One of Israel, Yahweh, who ultimately achieves the comfort of Zion in these five major comfort-texts. In Isa 12:1-6, the Holy One of Israel is emphatically described as “great one (**גָּדוֹל**).” In

30) A. vander Woude, “The Comfort of Zion: Personification in Isaiah 40-66” in “*Enlarge the Site of Your Tent*”: *The City as Unifying Theme in Isaiah* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 163.

Isa 40: 9-11, he is portrayed as the king, warrior, and shepherd, demonstrating that he can achieve the great reversal of Zion's fortune with his power, wisdom, and tender care. Furthermore, in Isa 49: 14-26, Yahweh is depicted as warrior, savior, redeemer, and the Mighty One of Jacob, who can bring about the return of Zion's children and restore her glory and fame in the world. The image of Yahweh as comforter Isa 49:14-16 reaches its highpoint in Isa 66:7-14, which contains the image of the motherly, consoling Yahweh. Within the deliberate development of Yahweh's image in the subsequent comfort-texts, the Book of Isaiah shows that the Holy One of Israel is the sole and ultimate protagonist who can achieve the comfort of his people within the redemptive history.

Second, comfort is paradigmatically epitomized by the joyful reversal of Zion's fortune in these five focal texts: the reversal from Yahweh's wrath to Yahweh's salvation in Isa 12:1-6, the reversal by the forgiveness of sin and the end of exile in Isa 40:1-11, the reversal by the total restoration of Zion in Isa 49, the reversal of Zion with her growth as oaks of righteousness in Isa 61:1-11, and finally the reversal from the servants' mourning into joy and gladness in Isa 66:7-14. To demonstrate the comfort of Zion, it is evident that the reversal theme develops throughout its variations in each focal text. To be more specific, the reversal of Zion's fortune from Yahweh's wrath into Yahweh's salvation in Isa 12:1-6 is made possible by the forgiveness of Zion's sin by Yahweh in Isa 40:1-11. But the reversal of Zion's fortune by the end of exile in Isa 40:1-11 raises another thematic expectation, and this is met by the return of Zion's children from the Babylonian exile and their repopulation of Zion in Isa 49. In the same way, the reversal of Zion's fortune from bereaved mother to consoling mother in Isa 49:18-21 raises another

thematic expectation, which reaches its climax in Isa 66:7-14, where Yahweh comforts the community of servants like a comforting mother.

Third, the servant theme starts to appear in Isa 49 and shows that this servant is Yahweh's actual agent, destined to achieve the total restoration of Zion, or her comfort. This theme develops significantly within the course of Isa 40-55 and reaches its highpoint in Isa 61-62, where the Spirit-anointed servant proclaims and embodies the comfort in Zion. According to our discussion, it is feasible to state that the comfort motif makes a coherent development in the Book of Isaiah in a way to highlight Yahweh's eschatological plan and purpose for his people in Zion—the reversal of her fortune from mourning into joy and restoration.

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