

## CHAPTER THREE

## ISAIAH 6:9-10 IN THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in general and the Isaiah Scroll in particular have allowed biblical scholars an unprecedented view into the formation of the Hebrew Bible. 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>, dated broadly in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE,<sup>1</sup> has received enormous scholarly attention both because of its completed form, the only known complete biblical manuscript from the discoveries, as well as the importance of the book of Isaiah in biblical interpretive history.

Texts written in “Qumran practice,” which includes 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>, “reflect a free approach to the biblical text which is reflected in adaptations of unusual forms to the context, in frequent errors, and in numerous corrections.”<sup>2</sup> With all these individual variations from the MT scholars have expended great energy in discussing potential emendations to MT or theological divergences from MT on the basis of Qumran ideology.<sup>3</sup> Rosenbloom states that the 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> can be viewed “as an interpretive copy of the MT and at the same time a manuscript very closely related to the MT.”<sup>4</sup> In light of all these discussions Tov maintains that “the bottom line of any comparative

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<sup>1</sup> Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 2d ed. (Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress Press, 2001), 106.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>3</sup> Emmanuel Tov, “The Text of Isaiah at Qumran,” in *Writing and Reading the Isaiah Scroll*, eds. Craig Broyles and Craig Evans (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 497 n.27, 499.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Rosenbloom, *The Dead Sea Isaiah Scroll: A Literary Analysis and Comparison of the Qumran Scroll with the Masoretic Text of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, Minn.: Eerdmans, 1970), 81.

analysis of the texts of Isaiah is that the amount of variation is relatively limited. The present textual data for Isaiah thus point to a picture of textual *unity*.<sup>5</sup>

Outside of 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> there are two fragments which attest to Isaiah 6:9-10 (4QIsa<sup>a</sup> and 4QIsa<sup>f</sup>). These fragments add nothing of substance to the passage as represented in 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>. 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> contains many variations diverging from the MT in chapter 6 of Isaiah. I will provide the text and a translation of Isaiah 6 in 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>. Following this will be discussion as the impact of the variations on the meaning of Isaiah 6:9-10.

### *Text<sup>6</sup> and Translation of 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> Chapter 6*

v.1

In the year of king Uzziah's death  
I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne  
high and exalted  
with his robe filling the Temple.

בשנת מות המלך עוזיה  
אראה את אדני יושב על כסא  
רם ונשא  
ושוליו מלאים את ההיכל

v.2

Seraphim were standing over him.  
Each had six wings.  
With two they covered their face,  
With two they covered their feet,  
And with two they were flying.

שרפים עומדים ממעלה לו  
שש כנפים אחד  
בשתים יכסה פניו  
ובשתים יכסה רגליו  
ובשתים יעופף

v.3

They were calling out, this one to that,  
"Holy, Holy, LORD of Hosts  
his glory fills all the earth."

וקראים זה אל זה  
קדוש קדוש יהוה צבאות  
מלא כול הארץ כבודו

v.4

The foundations of the entrance shook  
from the sound of the shouting  
and the place was filled with smoke.

וינועו אמות הספים מקול הקורה  
והבית נמלא עשן

<sup>5</sup> Tov, "The Text of Isaiah at Qumran," 505.

<sup>6</sup> The Hebrew transcription of 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> is taken from M. Burrows, J. C. Trever, and W. H. Brownlee, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls of St. Mark's Monastery: The Isaiah Manuscript and the Habakkuk Commentary* (New Haven, Conn.: ASOR, 1950).

v.5

I said, "Woe is me! I am void."  
 Because I am a man of unclean lips  
 and I dwell among a people of unclean  
 lips.  
 [and because] my eyes of have seen the  
 king, the LORD of Hosts.

ואמר אילי כי נדמית  
 כיא איש טמא שפתים אנוכי  
 ובתוך עם טמא שפתים אנוכי יושב  
 . . . א את המלך יהוה צבאות ראו עיני

v.6

Then one of the Seraphim flew to me.  
 In his hand was a coal which he took  
 with tongs [from upon the alter].

ויעוף אלי אחד מן השרפים  
 ובידו רצפה במלקחים לקח [ל המן]

v.7

...  
 He said, "See, this has now touched  
 your lips.  
 Your guilt is shed and your sin has been  
 removed."

[  
 יואמר הנה נגע זה על שפתך<sup>7</sup>  
 וסר עוונך וחטאותיך תכפר

v.8

Then I heard the voice of the Lord  
 saying,  
 "Who shall I send?  
 Who will go for us?"  
 I said, "Here I am, send me!"

ואשמע את קול אדוני אומר  
 את מי אשלח  
 ומי ילך לנו  
 ואמרה הנני שלחני

v.9

And God said, "Go and say to this  
 people,  
 'Listen carefully, but do not understand.  
 Look closely, but do not comprehend.'"

ויואמר לך ואמרתה לעם הזה  
 שמעו שמוע ועל תבינו  
 ראו ראו ועל תדעו

v.10

"Fatten the heart of this people.  
 Plug up their ears.  
 Smear their eyes shut.  
 Lest  
 they see with their eyes,  
 hear with their ears,  
 understand with their heart,  
 then turn and be healed."

השמ לב העם הזה  
 ואוזניו הכבד  
 ועיניו השע  
 פן  
 יראה בעיניו  
 ובאוזניו ישמעו  
 בלבבו יבין  
 ושב ורפא לו

<sup>7</sup> 4QIsa<sup>f</sup> reads שפתים.

v.11

Then I asked, “For how long LORD?”  
 God replied, “Until cities lie ruined  
 without inhabitants,  
 and the houses are without people  
 and the land wasted,  
 a desolation.”

ואמרה עד מתי יהוה  
 ויואמר עד אשר אם שאו ערים  
 מאין יושב  
 ובתים מאין אדם  
 והאדמה תשאה  
 שממה

v.12

Until the LORD sends the people away  
 and devastation is great in the midst of  
 the land.

ורחק יהוה את האדם  
 ורבה עזובה בקרב הארץ

v.13

And there will still be a tenth  
 It will also turn and be consumed as  
 terebinth and as oak  
 which leaves a stump.  
 In this stump is the Holy Seed.

ועוד בה עשיריה  
 ושבה והייתה לבער כאלה וכאלון  
 אשר משלכת מצבת  
 במה זרע הקודש מצבתה

### *Interpretive Issues in 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> and Isaiah 6:9-10*

In light of my translation (compared to my translation of MT Isaiah 6:9-10) there appears to be little if any issue with respect to the preservation of meaning in these verses between the MT and 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>. Indeed many of the variants are well accounted for. The addition of *waw*, *he*, and *yod* in 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> are well attested as a matter of orthography and need not detract from the issue of maintaining the meaning of the original text.<sup>8</sup> Rosenbloom notes the tendency of the Qumran scribe to omit repeated words which would account for the absence of the second **שש כנפים** in verse two and the third **קדוש** in verse three.

<sup>8</sup> Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 108-9. For particular instances see E. Y. Kutscher, *The Language and Linguistic Background of the Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa<sup>a</sup>)* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974).

In contrast to this Evans, adopting the earlier work of W. H. Brownlee, claims that “as the text [1QIsa<sup>a</sup>] now stands the meaning [of verse 9-10 are] completely transformed.”<sup>9</sup> Evans provides this translation.

Keep on listening, *because* you may understand;  
 Keep on looking, *because* you may perceive!  
*Make* the heart of this people *appalled*:  
 Stop its ears  
 And turn away its eyes  
 Lest it see with its eyes  
 And hear with its ears.  
*Let* it understand in its heart  
 And return and be healed.<sup>10</sup>

Evans thus interprets the variants recorded in 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> in an entirely different light.

There are three variants which Evans cites in support of his interpretation. In verse 10a 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> omits the final *nun* on the MT’s השמן (hifil imperative “make fat”). Verse 10b of the MT reads ולבבו, “and their heart” where 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> reads בלבבו, “with their heart.” Finally where MT reads אל (functioning as a negative) in verse 9 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> reads על (functions as a negative or a causative). Evans admits that conceivably “all these textual variants [could be viewed] as scribal errors and thus the text was never intended to read any differently from what we have preserved in the MT.”<sup>11</sup>

However, he does not accept this conclusion.

1QIsa<sup>a</sup>’s reading of על in place אל is an interesting variant. Evans views this as a switch from an abverb of negation to carrying a causal meaning (abbreviated from על אשר).<sup>12</sup> It is possible to dismiss this occurrence as another scribal tendency.

Kutscher cites this reading as one of numerous instances of similar scribal

<sup>9</sup> C. A. Evans, “The Text of Isaiah 6:9-10,” *ZAW* 94 (1982), 416.

<sup>10</sup> Evans, *To See and not Perceive: Isaiah 6:9-10 in Early Jewish and Christian Interpretation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 55.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 55. In support of this use of על see *BHSyn*, 11.2.13e.

substitutions found in 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>. In addition he cites its occurrence in the Bible as well as potentially being an Aramaic influence.<sup>13</sup> Kutscher cites this as a scribal error whereas Evans views the scribe as having “taken advantage of the fact that these words do have a similar sound, in order to facilitate and even justify the new reading.”<sup>14</sup> It should also be noted that this is the *only instance* where 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> makes this switch when לֹא functions as an adverb of negation and not as a preposition. This leaves both arguments with plausible explanations to which I will return.

Regarding the omission of the final *nun* in וְשָׂמַן good reason can be demonstrated to believe that it was an oversight on the part of the scribe. Evans claims that this was not an accidental omission but the introduction of the verb שָׂמַן (which in the hiphil imperative would read “make appalled”). However, there is no other textual witness which can be appealed to in support of this reading. It should also be noted that 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> does not read the final *mem* as might be expected.<sup>15</sup> This in addition to the reality of various miscellaneous scribal errors does not give sufficient grounds for Evans’ reading of שָׂמַן.

Evans, citing Brownlee, sees 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>’s reading וְלֹא בָּבֹו instead of וְלֹא בָּבֹו functioning “so that the force of the negative particle ‘lest’ is broken, so that ‘and (lest) it understand’ becomes ‘Let it understand.’”<sup>16</sup> However, as Evans notes this may have resulted from a “confusion due to the similar sounds of the radicals in

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<sup>13</sup> Kutscher, 410.

<sup>14</sup> Evans, *To See and not Perceive*, 55.

<sup>15</sup> In Evans’ defence it is not completely uncommon for Dead Sea Scrolls to neglect the final form of certain letters at the end of words, especially monosyllabic words as is the case here. The scribal practice of including final forms appears to have not been standardized in the Qumran practice. See Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 210.

<sup>16</sup> Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 55.

question.”<sup>17</sup> This is not the only explanation. Kutscher cites this as one of many examples in which 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> has omitted a *waw* where the MT reads a *waw*. His explanation is that 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> should perhaps be read *ישמע ובלבבו* instead of *ישמעו בלבבו* as it now reads.<sup>18</sup> This explanation finds support in the attestation of medieval manuscripts which read *ובלבבו*.<sup>19</sup>

For further support of his reading Evans offers a relevant passage from 1QH (Thanksgiving Hymns) which reads,

Turn my eyes from seeing evil,  
my ears from hearing of murder.  
Make my heart appalled [שמם] at evil thoughts.<sup>20</sup>

This reading is then linked to Isaiah 33:15 which speaks of the righteous person

who stops his ears from murder,  
and shuts his eyes upon evil.

Evans, again citing Brownlee, comes to the conclusion that “‘from this passage the words ‘evil’ and ‘murder’ were drawn by the writer as the unexpressed (but understood) objects of the verbs in Isa. 6:10.’ Thus the text of the 1QIsaiah<sup>a</sup> is to be read:

Make the heart of his people appalled (at evil)  
Stop its ears  
And turn away its eyes –  
Lest it see (evil) with its eyes  
And hear (of murder) with its ears.”<sup>21</sup>

The combination of insightful linguistic and literary analysis leaves Evans with a well crafted argument. However, should it be accepted?

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>18</sup> Kutscher, *The Language and Linguistic Background of the Isaiah Scroll*, 425.

<sup>19</sup> See *HUBIsa*.

<sup>20</sup> Evans, *To See and not Perceive*, 56.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

*1QIsa<sup>a</sup> and the Transmission of Meaning*

The question of 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> and an altered meaning of Isaiah 6:9-10 rests on Evans' work and must be addressed. In isolation each variant in question has a reasonable, and in many ways preferable explanation to what Evans offers. However, he makes the argument that, taken in combination, these variants should not be dismissed too quickly. At what point does the meaning of a passage change in substance? To use Vanhoozer's language, at what point does the change in matter (locution) of a text affect its trajectory (illocution)? Does Evans' argument support the conclusion that the scribe(s) of 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> intended a different perlocutionary effect than that of the author?

With respect to the final *nun* of השמן and the omitted or replaced *waw* in ולבבו there is a strong case for an unintentional change in the text. This would lead to the conclusion that the scribe's goal was still to faithfully transmit the author's original intention. Evans makes a stronger case with respect to the switch from אל to על in 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>. However, even here a very acceptable explanation has been put forth. What should not be overlooked is Evans' comment that the scribe "has *taken advantage* of the fact that these words do have a similar sound, in order to facilitate and even justify the new reading" [emphasis mine].<sup>22</sup> This bold statement could imply a level of deception on the part of the scribe. It means that the scribe understood the intended text of Isaiah to be transmitted and deliberately altered its meaning. Not only did the scribe intentionally alter the meaning of the text but it was

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 55.



done in a manner so as to “slip it in.”<sup>23</sup> There have been instances when theologically difficult passages have been altered by scribes, but Tov warns that “the number of such changes is probably smaller than is usually assumed.”<sup>24</sup> Can the accusation made by Evans be justified in light of the rest of Chapter 6 and 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> as a whole?

There are certainly other variants found in 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> differing from the MT of Isaiah 6. Few have been identified as having substantial significance in terms of meaning.<sup>25</sup> However, verse 13 provides a variant worth noting. There are several difficulties in this verse which cannot be responsibly attended to at this point. The concern comes in the introduction of the definite article connected to שְׂדֵה קִדְמוֹת. The MT reads generally as “in this stump is a holy seed.” It can be argued that the scribe of 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>, in the belief that he understood who this holy seed was, added the definite article for clarification. The Qumran sect may have understood themselves as *the* holy seed which would remain.<sup>26</sup> This appears to be a fair argument. Evans uses this to further support his reading of verses 9-10 citing that their “hermeneutic simply did not allow for such self-criticism [as is found in the MT].”<sup>27</sup> What Evans *does not discuss* with respect to Qumran is the fact that he understands *other* early communities (an example is his work in the Church Fathers) to make the object of God’s hardening those other than the community reading the text.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, there would be no reason for them to alter the text according to their theology, simply to interpret the text as aimed to those outside of their sect. This understanding can

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<sup>23</sup> I am not trying to accuse the scribes of sinister deceit, only that *according to Evans* the scribes likely *understood* what the passage was trying to say but decided to take advantage of a linguistic coincidence and subtly distort the meaning.

<sup>24</sup> Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 265.

<sup>25</sup> Wilberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, 248-51.

<sup>26</sup> Evans, *To See and not Perceive*, 57-8.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 147-62.

maintain the addition of the definite article to קודש as an intentional addition without supporting Evans' case for the radical alteration of meaning in verses 9-10.

Outside of chapter 6 there are several variations which appear to intentionally alter the text which the scribe was copying. It is commonly agreed that the vast majority of the variants found in 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> are for the purpose of clarifying or simplifying the text, accommodating the text to its audience.<sup>29</sup> The corrections that are made usually bring the text into conformity with the MT.<sup>30</sup> However, cases have been made of individual instances where the text seems to diverge for theological purposes. Rosenbloom tentatively offers a handful of variants which may reflect intentional theological influence.<sup>31</sup> Even in these instances he offers plausible alternatives.

Variants are expected in early transmission and, unless a convincing explanation is present, the variant will reflect the interests of the community translating or transmitting the text.<sup>32</sup> This can be observed in our current translations. A prime example of this is the NIV's rendering of רוח קדוש as "Holy Spirit" in Psalm 51:11 indicating a proper noun, a person. Neither grammar nor theology requires this form of English translation.

As Vanhoozer has put it, "readers can never wholly recover the selfsame meaning of the original."<sup>33</sup> The question of asking whether the scribe intentionally

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<sup>29</sup> Rosenbloom, *The Dead Sea Isaiah Scroll*, 83; Kutscher, *The Language and Linguistic Background of the Isaiah Scroll*, 8.

<sup>30</sup> Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 284.

<sup>31</sup> Rosenbloom, *The Dead Sea Isaiah Scroll*, 81.

<sup>32</sup> Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 384-93.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

altered the meaning of these verses in conformity with their ideology remains. If so does this alternation unethically change the meaning of the passage?

I agree with Evans that *if* his interpretation is correct then the resultant meaning discards the prophetic critique which Isaiah intended for his audience. However, we cannot recover the psychology of the scribe. As much as the socio-religious information regarding Qumran can aid in our understanding of DSS we are still left with reading the text itself. With this in mind and in accordance with the overwhelming tendency of 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> to conform to the MT and the plausible and largely preferable textual explanations for the variants found I conclude that the scribe *was not intending* to alter the passage's meaning but rather was attempting to faithfully transmit the received original. It is Evans who is liable of the charge of reading Qumran theology *into* the scribal errors of 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Realizing the difficulty of the passage in question there may be an argument for the unintentional alteration of לֵאל to עַל. This would be on the grounds of the scribe's inability to understand this difficult passage. For this he can hardly be faulted. For comments on the scribes' possible limitations see Kutscher, *The Language and Linguistic Background of the Isaiah Scroll*, 17ff.