

## CHAPTER SIX

## ISAIAH 6:9-10 IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Dealing with the NT incorporation of the Isaiah 6:9-10 marks a shift from the basic transmission of meaning (whether in the original language or in translation) to the *application* of meaning. Vanhoozer argues that an ethical instance of meaning applied does not alter the author's intended meaning. To demonstrate Vanhoozer quotes Hirsch, "When I apply Shakespeare's sonnet to my own lover rather than to his, I do not change his meaning-intention but rather instantiate and fulfill it."<sup>1</sup> The question for this section asks whether the New Testament writers have faithfully applied the intended meaning of Isaiah 6:9-10 in light of our best understanding of the Hebrew text.

The hermeneutical issues revolving around the NT's use of the OT have created an enormous amount of secondary literature. Many of the contributions made would be helpful in a study such as this. However, there are two reasons why I will not incorporate any of it. First, the responsible handling of that literature remains beyond the scope of this paper. In addition the question posed asks whether *Vanhoozer* provides an adequate model for dealing with these issues.

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1998), 262.

I am dealing strictly with those instances in the New Testament where any part of Isaiah 6:9-10 appears to be directly quoted. Evans points out that the motif is not foreign to Paul's writings.<sup>2</sup> However, because these writings offer no direct formulation it can not be determined whether Paul is attending to Isaiah's message only and not to other passages or books. All four Gospels and the book of Acts explicitly incorporate this passage. Each instance will be dealt with separately, after which a conclusion will draw together the observations made.

With respect to the original form of the following NT passages Tov's model again becomes useful.<sup>3</sup> That the Gospels developed over a period of time can hardly be discounted. However, the definition of "original" being employed here looks at the text that stands at the end of composition and the beginning of transmission. Therefore this section will not concern itself with uncovering the most primary building blocks of the Gospel, but with the most accurate reading of the Gospels accepted by the Church as canonical. I should also note that my concern is not in interpreting the "authentic" words of Jesus but with the Gospel authors' intentions for each of their works.

#### I. Prolegomena to the Synoptics: The Parable of the Sower

The Synoptics all incorporate Isaiah 6:9-10 in the Parable of the Sower. The meaning and function of this parable remains widely discussed and debated.<sup>4</sup> To

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<sup>2</sup> C. A. Evans, *To See and not Perceive: Isaiah 6: 9-10 in Early Jewish and Christian Interpretation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 81-90.

<sup>3</sup> Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 2d ed. (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2001), 177.

<sup>4</sup> For a recent contribution to this discussion see Richard Longenecker, ed., *The Challenge of Jesus' Parables* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2000), 79-150.

avoid the complexities and nuances which compound in this section the essential aspects of the Synoptics' use of Isaiah must remain at the forefront of this process. The Synoptics are not simply trying to transmit and preserve the passage from Isaiah. Their concern comes with the portrayal of Christ in a particular context. To *this* context, the Parable of the Sower, the Synoptics apply Jesus' use of Isaiah 6:9-10.<sup>5</sup>

It should be stated, and is usually underemphasized, that both contexts (Isaiah 6 and the Parable of the Sower) demonstrate the domain of God's Lordship. Isaiah 6 begins with a vision of Yahweh as king with his glory filling the earth. Yahweh's dominion is expansive. In the Parable of the Sower a farmer may not be the most striking image of a king, but we are informed as the chapter develops that God's kingdom parallels a sown field. The farmer appears not as one who judiciously spreads his seed on fertile ground, but one who spreads it out to the end of his reach. So too God's glory in Isaiah 6 "fills all the earth" (6:3b; note also how the LXX repeats this phrase in verse 12b paralleling God's glory with, "the forsaken [who] will fill the earth"). The messages in both texts are to affect not only particular audiences, but to all those upon whom God's presence/word/seed fall.

In Isaiah the Word of God has come (1:2). Neither the prophet Isaiah nor God's people evoked it. When Isaiah receives his vision and word from God little room remains for deliberation. Isaiah cries out in woe and claims to have been struck (LXX reads "pierced", an interesting term in light of a parable in which a seed penetrates or pierces the soil). This drives Isaiah to acknowledge his guilt (what other

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<sup>5</sup> There is no reason to deny these words as authentic to Jesus. Evans has marshalled a broad range of scholars in support of this position (see Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 104). However, this debate need not detain the notion that Mark, Matthew, and Luke *authored* the texts being dealt with and to their intentions I am attending.

response was available to him) after which he receives cleansing and enabling to respond to Yahweh's request. However, Isaiah is not the only one to receive God's word. Isaiah sends the word out and, as the farmer of Jesus' parable, the seed is not to be used judiciously but is spread broadly.<sup>6</sup> In Jesus' parable most of the seed does not reach fruition so too Isaiah's message ends in desolation and devastation throughout the land (6:11-12). However, both passages end with the reality that some will find fertile soil. In both Isaiah and Mark this process begins with the intention of God, with his knowledge of how his word (or seed) will react given the conditions. In Isaiah the vision looks past the stump with the knowledge that,

As the rain and the snow  
 come down from heaven,  
 and do not return to it  
 without watering the earth  
 and making it bud and flourish,  
 so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,  
 so is my word that goes out from my mouth:  
 It will not return to me empty,  
 but will accomplish what I desire  
 and achieve the purpose for which I sent it (Isa 55:10-11).<sup>7</sup>

With the same confidence in God's plan Jesus offers subsequent parables which add that,

This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head (Mark 4:26-28).

And again,

[The Kingdom] is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden

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<sup>6</sup> For a reading which views the sowing as done judiciously see Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20* trans. James E. Crouch (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1989), 241-2.

<sup>7</sup> For the relationship of this passage to Isaiah 6 and the Sower Parable see C. A. Evans, "On the Isaianic Background of the Sower Parable," *CBQ* 47 (1985): 464-68.

plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade (Mark 4:31-32).

God's restoration of Israel began with desolation and God's plan of salvation in Jesus began with rejection.<sup>8</sup> In both texts no question exists as to the ability of God's plan to come to fruition. In Isaiah God's word will not return empty (Isa 55:11). In the Synoptics even if only a little seed finds fertile soil it will produce one hundredfold (Mark 4:8).

The placement of the Parable of Sower within the broader framework of the Gospels should be noted. In Matthew and Mark the parable comes after confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders (Mark 3:22-30; Matt 12:22-45) as well as Jesus and his own family (Mark 3:20-21, 31-34; Matt 12:46-50). In Luke the conflict reads more implicitly as the parable comes after Jesus, in the presence of the Pharisees, accepts the offering of the "sinful woman" and controversially forgives her sins (7:36-50). These contexts share another affinity with Isaiah 6 in that they come after conflict with and disbelief in God's message has begun. Isaiah's vision is prefaced with Uzziah's death. Uzziah was afflicted by God because of his disobedience in attempting to burn incense in the Temple (2 Chr 26:16ff). In addition both passages do not render God's judgment instantaneously. They forewarn of the exile and restoration of Israel and the death and resurrection of Christ. Though event is not immediate, its reality remains assured. Just how the individual Gospel writers understood the role of this passage given the similar contexts will now be attended to.

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<sup>8</sup> For Mark's use of Isaiah 6 as movement towards the crucifixion see Robert Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993), 198. Walter Brueggemann *Isaiah 1-39* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 63, relates these two events by calling Jesus' crucifixion the "Friday stump."

## II. Mark

*The Text<sup>9</sup> and Translation of Mark 4:10-12*

v.10

And when he was alone  
the ones around him with the Twelve  
asked him about the parables.

Καὶ ὅτε ἐγένετο κατὰ μόνας,  
ἠρώτων αὐτὸν οἱ περὶ αὐτὸν σὺν  
τοῖς δώδεκα τὰς παραβολάς.

v.11

He said to them, “To you is given the  
mystery of the Kingdom of God  
but to those outside everything is given  
in parables

καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς· ὑμῖν τὸ  
μυστήριον δέδοται τῆς βασιλείας  
τοῦ θεοῦ·  
ἐκείνοις δὲ τοῖς ἔξω ἐν παραβολαῖς  
τὰ πάντα γίνεται,

v.12

in order that looking carefully they might  
not perceive  
and listening closely they might not  
understand  
lest  
they might turn and their sins be  
forgiven.”

ἵνα βλέποντες βλέπωσιν καὶ μὴ  
ἴδωσιν,  
καὶ ἀκούοντες ἀκούωσιν καὶ μὴ  
συνιῶσιν,  
μήποτε  
ἐπιστρέψωσιν καὶ ἀφεθῆ αὐτοῖς.

There are no major text-critical issues in this section of Mark. As noted in the chapter on Targum Isaiah it appears that Mark’s use of Isaiah 6:9-10 was based on the Aramaic tradition of this passage. However, Mark clearly deviates from the Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic sources by reversing the order of the verb sequences placing “seeing” before “hearing.” Mark also does not incorporate the Aramaic relative ܘܢ, “who.” Mark does not follow the Greek in changing the verbs to second person future indicatives, nor does he maintain the Hebrew imperatives, but he follows the Aramaic third person indicatives. Most notably Mark concludes the citation with the words ἀφεθῆ αὐτοῖς, “it be forgiven of them,” which departs from both the Greek and Hebrew which speak of “healing” and accords with the Aramaic which also

<sup>9</sup> All texts from the New Testament are taken from NA<sup>27</sup>.

speaks of “forgiveness.” From this evidence good reasoning can locate the source of Mark’s quotation in the Aramaic tradition of Isaiah. However, Robert Gundry warns not to limit Mark to the Targum giving the deviances noted above.<sup>10</sup>

*Mark’s Use and Interpretation of Isaiah 6:9-10*

The presence of Mark’s ἵνα clause in verse 12 has generated much discussion. This discussion asks whether it reads as telic in function. The problem is theological as the discussion largely omits the most obvious reading and offers alternatives which clear Jesus’ intention for the parables as creating obduracy. The following examples capture some of the various options.<sup>11</sup>

- ἵνα is the mistranslation of the Aramaic relative particle ܐܢܝܢ.
- ἵνα is to be understood as referring to God’s greater purpose and not Jesus’ purpose for parables.
- ἵνα should be read as causal “because” with the following μήποτε understood as “perhaps.”
- ἵνα should be read as an imperative “let them see . . .”.

Evans rejects all of these proposals and sides with M. Black and D. Daube, as well as a host of recent scholars, who read the text plainly as telic in function. With this understanding Evans concludes that “the logion seems to be saying that the purpose for giving ‘outsiders’ all things ‘in parables’ is to prevent them from understanding, repentance, and forgiveness.”<sup>12</sup>

Mark does not use imperatives (nor do any of the NT citations) to account for Isaiah 6:9. The imperatival function of these verbs can be assumed from Mark’s

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<sup>10</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 202.

<sup>11</sup> See Evans, *To See and not Perceive*, 92-9 for an excellent summary of the various contributions to understanding this clause.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 98. In recent support of Evans’ reading see Gundry, *Mark*, 202; Burton Mack, *A Myth of Innocence* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 164.

context as it prefaces the parable, “Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed . . .” (Mark 4:3, 9, 23; see also Matt 13:9, 19; Luke 8:8).

Mark’s account of Jesus use of Isaiah 6:9-10 reflects a deep understanding of the context and theology of Isaiah. Mark’s agenda does not appear to buttress either predestination or free-will through this account. “The hiding for the purpose of preventing later conversion and forgiveness tends towards predestinarianism, but the definition of insiders as those who are already doing God’s will (3:35) tends towards human responsibility.”<sup>13</sup> Mark does not attempt to resolve anything that the text of Isaiah 6 also did not attempt to resolve. His account applied the meaning of Isaiah’s vision of God’s word to Jesus’ audience. This application included the understanding that an absence of understanding or repentance was indivisible with the message. However, both contexts did not deny the remnant of the righteous (Isa 3:10; 6:13; as well as the image of Isaiah himself in 6:1-8; “the Twelve”, Mark 4:11; “the good soil”, Mark 4:8). Given the broader context of the Parable of the Sower as well as Mark’s own citation of the passage there is ample evidence of a strong affinity with a *literal* reading of Isaiah 6:9-10 in the MT. The trajectory of Isaiah’s message was that obduracy would occur *until* (Isa 6:11b) judgment was complete. This message would be completed with the knowledge that an ambiguous seed would remain. The trajectory of the Parable of the Sower appears to be for the *purpose* of obduracy so that God’s plan of the cross might be completed. This too would be completed with the knowledge that even God’s promised seed “grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade” (Mark 4:32). Mark’s application of Isaiah 6:9-10 fits well within Vanhoozer’s

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<sup>13</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 203.



understanding of a “thick” reading. Mark does not answer *our* questions about the text of Isaiah and in so doing remains faithful to a difficult message.

### III. Matthew

#### *The Text and Translation of Matthew 13:11-15*

v.11

He answered them and said, “To you is given knowledge into the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not given.

ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς·  
ὅτι ὑμῖν δέδοται γνῶναι τὰ μυστήρια  
τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν,  
ἐκείνοις δὲ οὐ δέδοται.

v.12

Whoever has, to him it will be given and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, what he does have will be taken away from him. For this reason I speak to them in parables

ὅστις γὰρ ἔχει, δοθήσεται αὐτῷ καὶ  
περισσευθήσεται·  
ὅστις δὲ οὐκ ἔχει, καὶ ὃ ἔχει  
ἀρθήσεται ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ.  
διὰ τοῦτο ἐν παραβολαῖς αὐτοῖς  
λαλῶ,

v.13

because seeing they do not see and hearing they do not hear nor do they understand. With them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which said that, ‘You will listen carefully, but not understand,’ ‘and you will look closely, but not perceive.’

ὅτι βλέποντες οὐ βλέπουσιν  
καὶ ἀκούοντες οὐκ ἀκούουσιν  
οὐδὲ συνίουσιν,  
καὶ ἀναπληροῦται αὐτοῖς ἡ  
προφητεία Ἡσαΐου ἡ λέγουσα·  
ἀκοῆ ἀκούσετε καὶ οὐ μὴ συνῆτε,  
  
καὶ βλέποντες βλέψετε καὶ οὐ μὴ  
ἴδητε.

For the heart of this people is fattened,

ἐπαχύνθη γὰρ ἡ καρδία τοῦ λαοῦ  
τούτου,

Their ears are plugged,  
And their eyes are shut  
Lest  
They might see with their eyes  
hear with their ears  
and understand with their heart  
then they might return and I would heal them.”

καὶ τοῖς ὠσὶν βαρέως ἤκουσαν  
καὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτῶν  
ἐκάμμυσαν,  
μήποτε  
ἴδωσιν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς  
καὶ τοῖς ὠσὶν ἀκούσωσιν  
καὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ συνῶσιν  
καὶ ἐπιστρέψωσιν καὶ ἰάσομαι  
αὐτούς.

There are no substantial text-critical issues involved in the verses of particular interest (vv 13b; 14b-16). A few manuscripts omit οὐδὲ συνίουσιν, “nor do they understand” from verse 13. This could be the result of smoothing the text out for style. A selection of other manuscripts replaces οὐ with μὴ. These same manuscripts also replace ὅτι with ἵνα. This would be a significant variant if it was not the likely case that scribes were conforming this reading to the one found in Mark.

In comparison to the Hebrew version of this passage there are several issues which need to be discussed. Two uses of the Isaiah passage occur in this section. In Matt 13:13b an abbreviated or paraphrased quote introduces the longer quote in verse 14b-15. This latter quote reads verbatim with the best witnesses to the LXX reading of Isaiah 6:9-10.<sup>14</sup> Evans notes three important elements in the former citation.<sup>15</sup> First, Matthew reads ὅτι and not ἵνα as found in Mark’s citation. A common understanding of this variance sees the presence of a shift from Mark’s position that Jesus spoke parables for the *purpose* of divine judgment to Matthew who viewed the hardness of the people as the *reason* Jesus spoke parables.<sup>16</sup> Matthew also abbreviates the citation by simply negating the second verb in the sequence and omitting the final negative. Instead of *looking closely and not perceiving* they are simply *looking and not seeing*. Matthew does include the final οὐδὲ συνίουσιν, *nor*

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<sup>14</sup> For the differences between the LXX and MT see chapter four.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 107-8.

<sup>16</sup> Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 107; Robert Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 2 ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 256; W. D. Davies and Dale Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, vol. 2, *Commentary on Matthew VIII-XVIII* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 392; Luz, *Matthew*, 246. The contrast between these two conjunctions can only be taken so far as Plummer has pointed out in his commentary on Luke. He writes that “the principle the he who hath shall receive more, while he who hath not shall be deprived of the he seemeth to have, explains both the ἵνα and the ὅτι. Jesus speaks in parables, *because . . . and . . . in order that* they may see without seeing and hear without hearing.” Alfred Plummer, *Gospel According to St. Luke* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1942), 219-20.

*do they understand*, in addition to the two primary verb sequences. Why would this change have been made? Evans views it as a simple streamlining of the passage whereas Gundry sees it as an intensification of guilt, “in Mark nondisciples do not *perceive* what they see, in Matthew false disciples do not even *see* what they see!”<sup>17</sup> Finally, this citation omits entirely the μήποτε clause which quells the people’s movement towards repentance. This clause is of course found in the full LXX quotation which follows. Both Evans and Davies and Allison view this omission as part of Matthew’s project in not wanting to implicate Jesus in creating obduracy in the people.<sup>18</sup> In light of this abbreviated citation as well as the latter full quotation how did Mathew understand and use Isaiah 6:9-10?

*Mathew’s Interpretation and Use of Isaiah 6:9-10*

The decisions made by Matthew in forming this pericope have led many interpreters to agree that Matthew deliberately shifted the overwhelming weight of responsibility onto the people who hear Jesus.<sup>19</sup> This conclusion finds support in several observations. First, Matthew replaces Mark’s ἵνα clause with ὅτι leaving Jesus’ parables as a response to the people’s hardness, not with the intent of creating or intensifying hardness. Second, in citing a full quotation of Isaiah 6:9-10 Matthew adheres strictly to the LXX which has already shifted away from the MT’s emphasis on God’s role in the hardening of the people.

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<sup>17</sup> Gundry, *Matthew*, 256.

<sup>18</sup> Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 108-10; Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 393.

<sup>19</sup> Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 113; Gundry, *Matthew*, 257; Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 392; Luz, *Matthew*, 246.

Though most scholars agree that Matthew shifts the weight of responsibility upon the people, not all agree on whether Jesus' parables actually aid or hinder their potential understanding. Citing that Matthew replaces Mark's "those outside" with "them" Evans believes that "the effect of this substitution is to narrow the gap between believers and unbelievers. Unlike Mark, who is probably less optimistic about his church's external relations, Matthew (who, it should be remembered, emphasizes the missionary enterprise) wishes to tone down the distinction."<sup>20</sup> Evans views Matthew's account as portraying Jesus as potentially more enabling of those who wish to become disciples. Gundry rejects this reading and claims that, even though Jesus' parables do not *cause* the people's hardening, they still "obscure the truth judgmentally."<sup>21</sup> This impasse finds no easy solution. While there appears to be a softening of God's role in judgment this passage *does not* look to Jesus' parables as that which brings repentance. The knowledge of the kingdom of heaven "has been given" and not earned by insight into the parables.

Can Vanhoozer's model of ethical interpretation accept Matthew's reading of Isaiah 6:9-10? Does Matthew allow his missionary concern distort the intended meaning of Isaiah? In an almost homiletical manner I believe that Matthew adds to a "thick" reading of Isaiah 6:9-10. Mark tells his readers about a God who sent his word with the knowledge and intention of its rejection. Matthew seems content in emphasizing that both contexts reflected the rejection of God. The harshness of this message may be mitigated compared to Mark but it is still no message of comfort save the hope of the see finding "good soil."

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<sup>20</sup> Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 109.

<sup>21</sup> Gundry, *Matthew*, 256.

Taking the larger context and continuity of Matthew's account with Mark and the affinity of the Parable of the Sower with Isaiah 6 we can hardly say that Matthew's intention was to substantially distort the application of Isaiah found here. He likely wrestled with it and nuanced it. He did not, however, violate it.

#### IV. Luke

##### *The Text and Translation of Luke 8:9-10*

Luke 8:9-10

v.9

His disciples asked him what this parable was.

Ἐπηρώτων δὲ αὐτὸν οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ τίς αὕτη εἴη ἡ παραβολή.

v.10

He said, "To you is given knowledge for the mystery of the Kingdom of God But the rest it is given in parables, in order that seeing they might not see and hearing they might not understand."

ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· ὑμῖν δέδοται γινῶναι τὰ μυστήρια τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ, τοῖς δὲ λοιποῖς ἐν παραβολαῖς, ἵνα βλέποντες μὴ βλέπωσιν καὶ ἀκούοντες μὴ συνιῶσιν.

There are no important text-critical issues in this section. A few manuscripts (D, L, and W) read ἰδῶσιν, "to perceive" in place of βλέπωσιν, "to see." This is understandable given the possibility of a scribe balancing the quote with the latter compliment of "hearing" and "understanding."

Luke provides the most abbreviated citation of Isaiah 6 and his account displays tendencies from both Matthew and Mark. As in Mark, Luke maintains the ἵνα clause (and in so doing retains the verbs in the subjunctive while Matthew renders them in the indicative), but like Matthew he omits the μήποτε clause. Unlike Matthew, Luke does not retain the lengthier quotation as read from the LXX (though it is found later in the book of Acts). Like Matthew, Luke has abbreviated the clauses

regarding “seeing” and “hearing.” However, Luke seems to have combined Matthew’s “hearing they do not see nor do they understand” into “hearing they might not understand.”

### *Luke’s Interpretation and Use of Isaiah 6:9-10*

Evans offers several important observations regarding Luke’s choices as well as the immediate context surrounding this text.<sup>22</sup> By using ἵνα Luke maintains the telic sense of the passage which can be read with obduracy as the *purpose* and not *reason* for Jesus’ parables.<sup>23</sup> A key element in Luke’s account is the combination of omitting the μήποτε clause as well as altering a section of the Sower parable.

Comparing this alteration with Mark accentuates the force of Luke’s decision.

Mark 4:15

Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it,

Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them.

Luke 8:12

Those along the path are the ones who hear,

and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, *so that* [ἵνα] *they may not believe and be saved.*

Evans views this as Luke’s substitution for Mark’s μήποτε clause. “In other words,

Luke is saying that whereas *Jesus* does not prevent forgiveness and salvation, the

*devil* does.”<sup>24</sup> Darrell Bock agrees with this reading but adds unhelpfully that “God’s

<sup>22</sup> Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 116-8.

<sup>23</sup> This point can only bear so much weight see above n.16. Given Luke’s account (namely the omission of μήποτε) Joseph Fitzmyer comments that “in Hellenistic Greek, *hina* with the subjunctive is used at times as a substitute for *hoste* with an infinitive.” See Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX* (New York: Doubleday), 709.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 117; see also Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997), 328. I. Howard Marshall disagrees but only on the basis that Luke allows the full quotation of Isaiah 6:9-10 to be recorded in Paul’s Speech in Acts 28:26f. I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1978), 325.

and Satan's desires are very different."<sup>25</sup> Though we might agree with this statement, it reduces the tension of this passage to an apparent obviousness not found in the early interpretive tradition of Isaiah 6:9-10. Our received Hebrew text points to God sending his word out with the understanding that it *would cause a hardness of heart that ends in desolation*. In Luke this reads as the apparent motive of the devil.

This situation is not unlike the example found in 2 Samuel 24:1 and 1 Chronicles 21:1. In 2 Samuel Yahweh is the agent inciting David to take a census, while in 1 Chronicles "Satan" (שטן) incites David. This instance falls in line with Evans' view of the Israelite struggle in maintaining a monotheistic view.<sup>26</sup> Sara Japhet agrees that "evil, like good, originates in God, according to the general attitude of Chronicles."<sup>27</sup> However, the Chronicler, perhaps with Job in mind,<sup>28</sup> mediated God's role by importing שטן as the one who actually incited David. In a similar way Luke has mediated the role of God in those whose salvation is not attained. Does this reading unethically handle the intention of Isaiah which Luke incorporates?

Carson, Morris, and Moo cite Luke as "the theologian of *Heilsgeschichte*, the linkage of salvation with historical events."<sup>29</sup> They continue and say that "this gospel is a tender gospel, one in which it is impossible to miss the truth that God loves the sinners Jesus came to save. . . . This salvation is open to all . . . though [he] should not be understood in the sense that all people will be saved."<sup>30</sup> This theme sheds light

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<sup>25</sup> Darrell Bock, *Luke*, vol.1, 1:1-9:50 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: BakerBooks, 1996), 734.

<sup>26</sup> Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 16.

<sup>27</sup> Sara Japhet, *I & II Chronicles: A Commentary* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 375.

<sup>28</sup> H. G. M. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982), 143.

<sup>29</sup> D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992), 128; See also I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1971), 92.

<sup>30</sup> Carson, Moo, and Morris, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 128.

on the possible reason and intention behind the variance found in the Parable of the Sower. Luke's theology likely found it difficult (and rightly so) to reconcile a God who *desired* all to be saved with a God who *intended* his message to blind people to the truth. Evans notes that Luke also softens a number of harsh critiques found in Matthew and Mark.<sup>31</sup>

Isaiah 6 should be read with the vision of God's holy mountain in Isaiah 2:2-4 as well as the comfort that begins Second Isaiah (Isa 40:1). Mark has maintained God's role of judgment in Isaiah 6. Matthew emphasized, with the LXX, the people's guilt in relationship to God. Luke offers a paradigm of God's desire for salvation in a history that does not deny judgment. It is perhaps a precarious step but worth mentioning that read canonically we have Matthew (the people's guilt), Mark (the word as judgment), and Luke (the seed that finds good soil). If this position is tenable the Synoptics offer us a "thick" reading *par excellence*.

## V. John

### *The Text and Translation of John 12:37-41*

John 12:37-41

v.37

He performed many of his signs before them and no one believed in him,

v. 38

In order that word of the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled who said, "Lord who believed our news? To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

v. 39

For this reason they could not believe, as the Isaiah said again,

Τοσαῦτα δὲ αὐτοῦ σημεῖα  
πεποιηκότος ἔμπροσθεν αὐτῶν  
οὐκ ἐπίστευον εἰς αὐτόν,

ἵνα ὁ λόγος Ἡσαΐου τοῦ προφήτου  
πληρωθῆ ὃν εἶπεν· κύριε, τίς  
ἐπίστευσεν τῇ ἀκοῇ ἡμῶν; καὶ ὁ  
βραχίων κυρίου τίνι ἀπεκαλύφθη;

διὰ τοῦτο οὐκ ἠδύναντο πιστεῦειν,  
ὅτι πάλιν εἶπεν Ἡσαΐας·

<sup>31</sup> Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 119-20.



v. 40

“He has blinded their eyes  
and he hardened their heart,  
in order that they might not perceive with  
the eyes  
nor understand with the heart  
nor turn, that I would heal them.”

τετύφλωκεν αὐτῶν τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς  
καὶ ἐπώρωσεν<sup>32</sup> αὐτῶν τὴν καρδίαν,  
ἵνα μὴ ἴδωσιν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς  
  
καὶ νοήσωσιν τῇ καρδίᾳ  
καὶ στραφῶσιν, καὶ ἰάσομαι αὐτούς.

v. 41

Isaiah said this because he saw his glory  
and spoke about him.

ταῦτα εἶπεν Ἡσαΐας ὅτι εἶδεν τὴν  
δόξαν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐλάλησεν περὶ  
αὐτοῦ.

There are no significant text-critical issues which concern the use of Isaiah 6:9-10. The alternate perfect reading of “to harden” in verse 40 likely resulted in conforming to the preceding perfect “to blind.” Though no complete consensus exists commentators have demonstrated that John likely used the Hebrew text of Isaiah as his source for this quotation.<sup>33</sup> This view finds support in the omission of several key words found in the LXX rendering. Only the final words of verse 40, “and I would heal them,” conform in any distinct way to the Septuagint. There are of course difficulties ascribing this passage to the Hebrew text as we have it. Whereas Luke appears to move God further away from the action of hardening and blinding John actually moves God closer placing him as the subject of the verbs. Also the order of eyes and then heart is maintained after the ἵνα clause not following the Hebrew chiasmatic structure.

John omits the references to “ears” and “hearing.” An appropriate explanation comes from the context of the signs which the people *saw* but apparently did not

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<sup>32</sup> A few manuscripts read this as a perfect, likely in stylistic conformity with the preceding perfect “to blind.”

<sup>33</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1978), 431; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), 448; Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (London: Oliphants, 1972), 437.

*understand*.<sup>34</sup> Another explanation looks to John's "emphasis on Jesus as the Light of the world."<sup>35</sup> Without any proof of another *Vorlage* Barrett offers a sound conclusion writing that "John was quoting loosely, perhaps from memory, and adapting his Old Testament material to his own purpose."<sup>36</sup>

### *John's Interpretation and Use of Isaiah 6:9-10*

Unlike the Synoptics John does not place this quote in the mouth of Jesus. Instead John cites this passage himself as commentary or explanation on the Jewish disbelief in Jesus' ministry.<sup>37</sup> Beasley-Murray views the second half of chapter 12 as forming "a conclusion not [only] to chap. 12 but to the whole account of the public ministry of Jesus in chaps. 2-12."<sup>38</sup> After his public ministry Jesus "hid himself" (John 13:36b), spent time with his disciples and prepared for the Passion. In this transition John offers a statement as to why the Jews, the very ones who looked for the Messiah, did not recognize him when he came.

A general consensus exists as to John's understanding and intention in using Isaiah 6:9-10. Unlike Luke, and Matthew to an extent, John does not mediate God's role in the Jew's inability to believe in Jesus. Evans states correctly that "the telic force of the Isa. 6.10 quotation is plainly evident."<sup>39</sup> The quote is prefaced with the statement, "for this reason they were unable to believe" (12:39). The quotation not

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<sup>34</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 431; Carson, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 449.

<sup>35</sup> George Beasley-Murray, *John* (Waco, Tex: Word Books, 1987), 216.

<sup>36</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 431; See also Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 131-2.

<sup>37</sup> Carson, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 447; Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 132; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to St. John*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 535.

<sup>38</sup> Beasley-Murray, *John*, 207.

<sup>39</sup> Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 132.

only alludes to God as the source of Isaiah’s message, but actually places God as the direct subject of “blinding” and “hardening.” Most commentators agree that John remains content in keeping, unresolved, the tension of presenting God’s will for *blinding* the people as well as his plan of *salvation* for the people.<sup>40</sup>

John should be viewed as faithfully carrying the trajectory of Isaiah’s intention. Isaiah does not seek to resolve the tension of God’s salvation-history but attempts to work faithfully within it. He carries from God a message which keeps the recipients from repentance, but also cries to God for compassion on his people (Isa 63:17). In this way D. A. Carson reminds us that John’s retelling of the unsettling accounts of God’s sovereignty can also be a cause for hope, “for if he is not sovereign in these areas there is little point in petitioning him for help, while if he is sovereign the anguished pleas of the prophet . . . make sense.”<sup>41</sup> And with the troubling image of sacrifice Leon Morris reminds us that “Had the Jews accepted the gospel it is difficult to understand how it could have gone out to all the nations. But when the Jews rejected it, it became a world religion.”<sup>42</sup>

## VI. Acts

### *The Text and Translation of Acts 28:25-28*

#### Acts 28

##### v. 25

Having disagreed with each other Paul spoke a final word as they were leaving, “The Holy Spirit spoke accurately through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers

ἀσύμφωνοι δὲ ὄντες πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἀπελύοντο εἰπόντος τοῦ Παύλου ῥῆμα ἕν, ὅτι καλῶς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἐλάλησεν διὰ Ἡσαΐου τοῦ προφήτου πρὸς τοὺς πατέρας ὑμῶν

<sup>40</sup> Beasley-Murray, 216; Morris, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 536-7; Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 430-1; Carson, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 448-9.

<sup>41</sup> Carson, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 449.

<sup>42</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 537.

v. 26

saying, ‘Go to this people and say,  
You will listen carefully but not  
understand,  
You will look closely but not perceive.

λέγων· πορεύθητι πρὸς τὸν λαὸν  
τούτου καὶ εἰπόν· ἀκοῆ ἀκούσετε καὶ  
οὐ μὴ συνῆτε καὶ βλέποντες βλέψετε  
καὶ οὐ μὴ ἴδητε·

v. 27

For the heart of this people is fattened.  
Their ears are plugged,  
and their eyes are closed.

ἐπαχύνθη γὰρ ἡ καρδία τοῦ λαοῦ  
τούτου καὶ τοῖς ὠσὶν βαρέως  
ἤκουσαν καὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτῶν  
ἐκάμμυσαν·

Lest

they see with their eyes,  
hear with their ears,  
understand with their heart,  
and return so that I would heal them.

μήποτε  
ἴδωσιν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς  
καὶ τοῖς ὠσὶν ἀκούσωσιν  
καὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ συνῶσιν καὶ  
ἐπιστρέψωσιν, καὶ ἰάσομαι αὐτούς.

v. 28

Let it be known to you that this salvation  
from God is sent to the Gentiles and they  
will listen.

γνωστὸν οὖν ἔστω ὑμῖν ὅτι τοῖς  
ἔθνεσιν ἀπεστάλη τούτο τὸ  
σωτήριον τοῦ θεοῦ· αὐτοὶ καὶ  
ἀκούσονται.

There are no substantial text-critical issues in this passage. The quotation from Isaiah 6:9-10 is nearly verbatim from the LXX.<sup>43</sup> There are two minor differences in this account from both Matthew and the LXX. Unlike Matthew, Luke adds the introductory statement for the quotation, “Go to this people and say.” This phrase differs slightly from the best witnesses to the LXX which reads “Go and say to this people.” The inclusion of this phrase is important for understanding its function within its context.

### *Luke’s Interpretation and Use of Isaiah 6:9-10 in Acts*

A few observations should be made in order to understand the function of Isaiah 6:9-10 in Acts. The quotation reads directly from the LXX. Evans notes that

<sup>43</sup> For discussion on the differences between the LXX and MT see chapter four.

“the LXX is the only version of the Old Testament that the evangelist ever quotes.”<sup>44</sup>

While this may be the case (although the evangelist clearly does not use the LXX in his earlier citation found in Luke 8:10), the way in which the LXX differs from the MT appears to agree with Luke’s intention for this passage. Here Paul assumes the role of the prophet Isaiah alluding to himself as the one who was to “go and say to this people.”<sup>45</sup> The MT records Isaiah as being given the imperative to harden (fatten) the peoples’ heart. However, in Acts 28 Paul stands *at the end* of Luke’s account of the preaching of the Gospel to and rejection of it by the Jews (Acts 13:46; 18:6; 19:8-10). Here the LXX reads appropriately in the mouth of Paul, “For the heart of this people is fattened” (passive indicative). There reads no hint (or need) of Paul’s message producing hardening, only that a hardened people have rejected it. God is not depicted as hardening the people’s heart, the people carry the full burden of guilt in this account.<sup>46</sup>

That Luke places this quotation at the end of his work should be considered in how we interpret this passage. First, this citation may help explain the abbreviated quote earlier in his gospel. While Matthew provides a brief quote as well as the extended LXX quote Luke only offers the abbreviated quote. Luke Timothy Johnson writes,

Luke had not made full use of the Isaiah 6:9-10 passage in his Gospel, for that was the time for this first visitation of the prophet, and the rejection of the people was mitigated by the ‘ignorance’ of the people. It has been the argument of the narrative of Acts that God did not stop making the offer of

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<sup>44</sup> Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 121.

<sup>45</sup> Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, vol. 2, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1990), 348.

<sup>46</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville, Mich.: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 476; Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* trans. Bernard Noble and Gerald Shinn (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971), 724.

salvation to Israel through the proclamation of the raised Prophet Jesus. Only now, after so many attempts at persuading this people, is it time to employ this most chilling prophecy.<sup>47</sup>

This image finds consistency with Luke as the Theologian of Salvation. Robert Tannehill observes that Luke, even to the end of his work, records attempts to communicate the Gospel to the Jews.<sup>48</sup> Even after levelling the words of Isaiah against the crowd Luke records that Paul “welcomed *all* who came to see him” (Acts 28:30 see also Luke 2:32; 24:47; Acts 1:8). Luke leaves the reader with two realities. First, the Gospel *is* for all people and should always be treated as such. Second, not all will accept it and that the Jewish rejection functions somehow in God’s plan.

Some have argued that this passage marks the Christian belief in the Jewish inability to believe the Gospel.<sup>49</sup> This position argues that even those who were “convinced” by Paul (28:24) were still not converted to the Christian faith. The emphasis then lies in the fact that even though some were convinced, *all* were still obdurate. Conzelmann writes that “the scene has been constructed with the express purpose of conveying the impression that the situation with the Jews was hopeless.”<sup>50</sup> Evans argues convincingly to the contrary. He writes that “there is no good reason not to understand those who were persuaded as actually believing Christians. The same word is used in Acts 17:4 [see also 17:10]: ‘And some of them were persuaded, and joined Paul and Silas.’”<sup>51</sup> Luke’s emphasis does not come from *every* Jew rejecting Christ’s message, but that “Israel *as a whole* has not believed the Christian

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<sup>47</sup> Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 476.

<sup>48</sup> Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 345.

<sup>49</sup> Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 729; Hans Conzelmann, *A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* trans. James Limburg, A. T. Kraabel, and Donald H. Juel (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1987), 227. John Sawyer argues similarly in *The Fifth Gospel: Isaiah in the History of Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 36.

<sup>50</sup> Conzelmann, *Acts*, 227.

<sup>51</sup> Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 126.

message” [emphasis mine].<sup>52</sup> This thinking bears in mind the “seed” of Isaiah 6 as well as the Synoptics.

Luke’s use of Isaiah 6:9-10 in Acts performs a specific function. Limiting the context of the MT and some NT quotations, this context does not emphasize God’s role in the inability of the Jewish people to respond. However, Luke has faithfully carried the trajectory of Isaiah 6. In the gospel account Luke retains the telic force of this passage (“in order that . . .”). Like Isaiah Luke knows that there are the righteous (Isa 3:10a; Luke 8:8a) who will receive the word and bear fruit (Isa 3:10b; Luke 8:8b). The remainder of Luke and Acts record the word being spread to all people (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8). However, at the end of Acts Luke concludes that even though some may be persuaded the *Jewish people* have rejected this message and in so doing have found themselves separated from the healing offered by God.

## VII. Conclusion

By attending to the intention of Isaiah 6 in light of its entire context I have demonstrated that the NT provides a “thick” reading of Isaiah 6:9-10. Isaiah 6 offers readers an unsettling look into the interplay of human responsibility and God’s sovereign plan. The NT as a whole does not attempt to harmonize the difficulties presented in Isaiah 6. Rather, the accounts offer various emphasises and applications. In each account the word/seed is spread to all. However, its intended function and performance remained difficult pin down, as can be seen in the variations. Ultimately, the Jewish rejection of Jesus in the NT, and the exile for that matter in the OT, were a part of God’s will. In this way we can agree with Evans who said that

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

“this affirmation of faith also carried with it the belief that ultimately good would come of it.”<sup>53</sup>

Vanhoozer’s call to attend to the author’s meaning through literal/literary readings of the text as well as his understanding of a “plural unity” fits well into the investigation of the NT use of Isaiah 6:9-10. While each author’s influence can be detected in their accounting of the Isaiah passage this study has no way reduced their contribution to the pragmatism of Stanley Fish. With Fish, interpretation is ruled by the community’s standards. In the case of the NT’s use of Isaiah 6:9-10 the reading finds itself *against* the community’s interpretive self-understanding. There is a meaning in the text of Isaiah independent of the community’s attempt to conform it to their norms and values. With that intent, inspired by God, the writer’s of the NT wrestled.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 165.