


# An analysis of Isaiah 62:6–7 – A psychology of religion approach

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This article argues that prayer does not only offer hope of restoration in the future but also presents a restoration of the supplicants. Isaiah 62:6–7 will be presented as a case study. The psychology of religion will be used as the methodology to achieve this goal: present restoration of the prayers in Isaiah 62:6–7.

**Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications:** This article combines exegetical insights from biblical studies and psychology of religion.

**Keywords:** Book of Isaiah; prayer; exile and restoration; psychology of religion; mental health.

## Introduction

Although the unity, the date(s) and the authorship(s) of the Book of Isaiah are disputable amongst scholars, the content of this book is incontestable. Its content covers at least three main problems of Israelites. The first challenge is a spiritual decline of Israelites. It is caused by other nations and idolatries (Isaiah 40:18–20; 44:9–20) (Davies 2000:95–96).<sup>1</sup> The second dilemma is social injustice. Around 810 up to 750 BC, Judah took pleasure in peace and prosperity, both economic and military expansion, they had not known since the time of king Solomon (Oswalt 1986:5). Nevertheless, these benefits were enjoyed by the higher class only. The taxation and exploitation of the trade routes from north to south through the land bridge of Palestine have caused rapid economic growth but for the wealthy class. The poor, widows and orphans were exploited and abused (3:14–15). Oppression goes right to the heart of Israelite society. The third problem is political turmoil. During Isaiah's ministry, it was a time of great political turmoil for the nation of Judah because facing the opposition coming from the north and east (Oswalt 1986:5).

In the midst of these challenges, Isaiah encourages Israelites to take no rest to remind God through their prayers. In Isaiah 62:6–7, Isaiah encourages the readers to pray unceasingly and reveals the *future* reason of this prayer in verse 7. This article will use the psychology of religion to identify and clarify what implied reasons when restated in the religious-psychological language of the chosen interdisciplinary perspective.

## Methods

In this section, the prayer in Isaiah 62:6–7 will be examined through the lens of psychology of religion. The psychology of religion is a general scientific psychology whose goal is the understanding of the processes that mediate human religiousness in all its variations (Emmons & Paloutzian 2003:377–402). One of the main purposes of psychology of religion is to describe religious experiences, expressions and attitude (Wulff 2010:732–735). There are two methodological principles of the psychology of religion. The first methodology is called as *principle of the exclusion of the Transcendent*. It states that the psychology of religion should neither confirm nor deny the existence of God as the object of religious experience and reflection. However, the experience with God could not be excluded; rather such experience should be observed carefully (Flournoy 1902:327–366). The second methodology is the *principle of biological interpretation* that focuses on physiological conditions of its object of study and the developmental perspective, which gives attention to hereditary and environmental factors of the object (Flournoy 1902:327–366). This article will employ the second methodology, 'principle of biological interpretation', for a couple of

1. The idol passages are particularly noteworthy. Idolatry and its dangers are a continuing interest of the whole book. Amongst other things, this is evidenced by the large number of different words used in Isaiah to denote idols. There are nine terms that Isaiah uses to describe idolatry. *Eliil* occurs eight times (2:8, 18, 20; 10:10, 11; 19:1, 3; 31:7) and Isaiah employs this word for idol. *Atsav* and *otsev*, both also mean idols, occur three times in 10:11, 46:1 and 48:5 and a further synonym, *aven*, is found in 66:3. In addition, there are words which describe specific forms of image such as *pasil* (four times, in 10:10; 21:9; 30:22; 42:8), and its cognate *pesel* (the most commonly occurring of these words in Isaiah, appearing nine times, all in 40–55, 40:19, 20; 42:17 44:9, 10, 15, 17; 45:20; 48:5), which both mean 'graven image', and two words for 'molten image', *masekah* (30:22 and 42:17) and *nesek* (41:29 and 48:5). Furthermore, the root *chmd*, meaning 'desire', and hence 'object of desire', is used in the context of pagan worship in 1:29 and 44:9, and *elohim* is used in its plural sense, 'gods', in eight verses (21:9; 36:18, 19, 20; 37:12, 19 [twice]; 41:23 and 42:17).

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reasons. Firstly, Isaiah 62:6–7 is the case study of this article. Contextually, Isaiah 62 declares God's future restoration. Thus, Isaiah 62:6–7 assumes the existence of God as the object of religious experience and reflection. Secondly, the primary goal of this research is to argue for the present restorations as the benefits of prayer, which are stated implicitly in the text but could be explored through the psychology of religion. For instance, Martha Rubinart, Albert Fornieles and John Deus explored the psychological impact of two months of prayers. They researched on Jesus' prayer amongst a sample taken from a community of middle-aged Catholics in Spain. They gathered quantitative data on psychological symptoms with the Revised Symptom Checklist 90 (SCL-90-R) and on personality traits with the Revised Temperament and Character Inventory (TCI-R) at three different times: baseline, post-intervention and five months after the two-month intervention. Their research showed lower scores on interpersonal sensitivity ( $p = 0.009$ ) and phobic anxiety ( $p = 0.03$ ) psychological symptoms after the two-month intervention. Furthermore, the data also demonstrate lower scores and strong effect sizes on tension ( $p = 0.03$ ,  $d = 1.029$ ) and fatigue ( $p = 0.001$ ,  $d = 1.390$ ) after 25-minute intervention. The short-term result is that the prayer deeply reduces participants' states of anxiety, depression, confusion, anger and fatigue (Rubinart, Fornieles & Deus 2017:487–504).

Psychologies have proved the benefits of prayers through the psychology of religion. Dangel and Webb's research (2017:246–259) discovered that the supplicants may benefit from spirituality. The supplicants who experience high distressing level could reduce their emotional pain through meditation. Prayer also helps the supplicants to find creative or new outlets for establishing a greater sense of connection to others. In short, meditation has therapeutic benefits in personal and social levels.

Maltby, Lewis and Day (2008:119–129) uncovered the connection between prayer and subjective well-being. They used a cognitive-behavioral framework. The research reveals although ritual prayer, meditative prayer, prayer experience and praying with others were significantly correlated with subjective well-being, only meditative prayer, frequency of prayer and prayer experience accounted for unique variance in subjective well-being.

Ranaie, Zaheri and Ardalan (2009:678) found that regular prayer helps people recover from depression. Harris, Schoneman and Carrera (2002:253–265) affirmed that prayer will help the supplicant heal from mental illness, anxiety and stress. Kirk and Lewis (2013:1030–1043) added that people who consistently engaged in prayer were found to have higher levels of life satisfaction and purpose of life. The supplicants demonstrated a more positive attitude towards life and positive mental health (Robbins, Francis & Edwards 2008:93–99). Koenig, King and Carson (2012:174–190) found that prayer reduces the potential of suicidal behavior. Thus, the research in psychology of religion reveals that prayer benefits the supplicants physically, mentally, psychologically and socially.

## Analysis of Isaiah 62

Isaiah depicts a fabulous picture of redemption, both for Israel and the other nations. House (1998:295) stated just as two kinds of Israel: servant or remnant and unbelievers; thus, Isaiah presents two types of nations: the servants of Zion (Is 60:10–11) and rebellious nations that are punished (Is 60:12–14). As Zion is the central location of this redemption, the glorious hope of Zion is the primary topic of Isaiah in these chapters. Specifically, Isaiah 62:1–12 describes God's restorations (Chia & Juanda 2019:57–66) and assurances (Chia & Juanda 2020:37–43). Although the people of God live in the darkness, God promised future restorations. These restorations include the returning of their children, wealth and the rebuilding of Jerusalem (Is 60–62). These promises, however, bring out an ambiguity of the reality of these restorations' applications because Judah is ruled by a powerful empire historically (Goldingay 2014:79). To resolve this ambiguity, Isaiah has placed the watchmen on Jerusalem's walls (Is 62:6–7). In terms of time, Isaiah informs that they will never be silent day or night. In terms of duty, they will remind the Lord of his promises to Jerusalem. They will not rest until God fulfils his promises (Quinn-Miscall 2006:170).

## Analysis of Isaiah 62:6–7

Although the Israelites have multi-layers of problems spiritually, socially and politically, Isaiah encourages Israelites to pray until God establishes and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth (62:6–7). Isaiah 62:6–7 is joined with 62:1–5 by repetition of the refusal to be silent. Verse 62:1 started with a declaration from God that he will not keep silent for Zion's sake, and he will not keep quiet for Jerusalem's sake. Although the subject of verse six is different, this verse is also begun with the same intonation: they will never keep silent.

Blenkinsopp (2003:238) and Westermann (1969:373) provide the parallelism between verse 1 and verses 6–7 (Box 1).

In 62:6, God has appointed watchmen upon Jerusalem's walls that it may receive the utmost in protection. Their primary duty is the lookout on the city wall or tower (Jdg 7:19; Jr 51:12; Ps 127:1). The term 'watchmen' also signifies the bodyguard responsible for protecting the person of the ruler (1 Sm 28:2), a palace guard (2 Ki 11:5), a military scout (Jdg 1:24), or the keeper of the royal wardrobe (2 Ki 22:14). The term can be used for temple personnel, principally Levites (Nm 3:21; Ezk 44:14) and the priest-guardians of the threshold (2 Ki 12:10; 22:4). These watchmen on Jerusalem's walls are further described in the second half of the verse 6 as those who remind the Lord.

**BOX 1:** The parallelism between Isaiah 62:1 and 62:6–7.

1a	I will not keep silent.	6	I have appointed watchmen; All day and all night they will never keep silent.
1b	Until her righteousness goes forth like brightness, And her salvation like a torch that is burning.	7	Until he establishes and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.

Source: Oswalt, J.N., 1998, *The book of Isaiah, chapter 40–66*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI.

The Hebrew word *mazkirim* also means that these watchmen keep 'putting God in remembrance'. When God remembers, it does not mean he has forgotten. It is a way of saying he goes into action and does something about the situation. These watchmen will not stop calling on God to act until he fulfills his promise to make Jerusalem 'the praise of the earth' (Horton 2000:443). The participle of the Hebrew word *mazkirim* expresses the thought of calling something to God's attention, engaging in unceasing prayer. The Hebrew word *mazkirim* is used for officers who write and persevere of the official records (2 Sm 8:16; 20:24; 1 Ki 4:3; 2 Ki 8:18, 37; Is 36:3, 22). The term could be translated somewhat literally as 'remembrancer' and if we are to believe Herodotus, the Persian king Darius I had a servant whose task was to keep repeating to him, after the disastrous defeat at Marathon, 'Master, remember the Athenians'. We might then say that the 'remembrancer' of 62:6 is performing the standard prophetic task of intercession, following the example of Abraham and Moses as paradigmatic prophetic figures (Gn 20:7; Ex 5:22–23; 8:8; 32:11–14). Therefore, the term *mazkirim* communicates the duty of these watchmen is to make continuous prayers for the arrival of their salvation. This unstoppable prayer is reiterated by the last clause, 'let there be no cessation to you' (Westermann 1969:478). Verses 6 and 7 are related. In verse 7, Isaiah explains more of the purpose and the time of the watchers: they will not give him a rest, and they will offer their prayer continually until two things happen, which is denoted by two prepositions *ad*. Firstly, their intercessory prayer will not give rest to Yahweh until he fulfills his promises regarding Zion in Chapter 60. Secondly, the time of their ministry will not stop until Jerusalem has been divinely transformed into the city that evokes praise from the whole earth for what Yahweh has done. In short, not only there will be no cessation to the ones who pray fervently, but also they are not to give cessation to God until he has made Jerusalem as the praise on the earth (Young 1972:471). This reminds us that the final words of verse 1, 'until her salvation goes forth as brightness', are equalled in verse 7b 'until he establishes Jerusalem a praise in the earth'. The same ending is communicated in both verses. And therefore it is to be assumed that the final part of the poem, verse 1, follows directly on verse 6 (Westermann 1969).

One of the Greek revisers, Symmachus, translates, 'do not be silent and do not let him be silent until he prepares and makes Jerusalem to sing on the earth'. Symmachus believes that Holy Spirit encourages and exhorts the Israelites to continue in these prayers. People's intercession should not be quiet and ever cease, but they should pray with shouts and cries to God. Their supplication should never give God peace (Elliott & Oden 2007:247). Another Greek reviser, Aquila, reads these verses as the people of God will not be able to silent and to keep quiet; rather, it is a must for them to cry aloud day and night and to devote themselves to prayers and petitions until the righteousness of Jerusalem and its restoration shall shine forth like light to all nations (Eusebius 2013:300).

In summary, Isaiah 62:6–7 urges the people of God to pray fervently not to allow God rest but awaken him with relentless cries so that God should keep the promises to the end (Eusebius 2013:301).

## Implications from the psychology of religion

Isaiah 62:6–7 reveals that their prayers are related to their hope for restoration. This future hope will grant them resilience and relentless cries to their current tribulation time. Their prayer will also enable them to have a satisfactory life although social injustice surrounded them because prayer brings out a more positive attitude and mental health during their hardships. The prayer does not change their external situation but changes their internal situation. Greek reviser in late 2nd century AD, Symmachus, believes that this prayer encourages and enables the Israelites to persevere in the midst of social injustice around them (Elliott & Oden 2007:247). Another Greek reviser in 140 AD, Aquila, believes that instruction to pray in Isaiah 62:6–7 is a must for them to cry aloud day and night and to devote themselves to prayers and petitions because this devoted prayer will grant them resilience and relentless attitude towards God until the righteousness of Jerusalem and its restoration shall shine forth like light to all nations (Eusebius 2013:300).

As Baker confirms, the psychological benefits of people who experience physical, economical and emotional pain, are more likely to offer prayer in an effort to gain supernatural favor and good standing with the divine. In other words, social factors will play a fundamental role in determining how communication with God manifests itself by influencing people to pray and the need prayer addresses (Baker 2008:169–185).

## Conclusion

The historical background of the book of Isaiah reveals multi-layered problems: spiritual, social and political tribulations. These afflictions generate the desire in people to call out to a higher power as it is mentioned in Isaiah 62:6–7. The field of psychology of religion has proved that supplication will provide some psychological benefits to the supplicants. As Koonz (2012:146–154) states, prayer is a conversation in a relationship where the supplicants can honestly speak to and attentively listen to the living God with possibilities of healing, comfort, hope and transformation. Thus, the psychology of religion contributes to Isaiah 62:6–7 that their prayer would grant them resilience, satisfaction and a more positive life to face their multi-layers of problems.

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