

A Reading of Isaiah 11 in the Context of the Divided Korea with focus on a Reunification Theology of Isaiah in his Messianic Prophecy¹

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I. Introduction: The National Reunification Theology of the 8th century BCE prophets

The present paper is an exegetical inquiry into Isaiah 11 with special focus on its realpolitical implication for the reconciliation between southerners and northerners. The Davidic-Solomonic kingdom was divided in 922/921 BCE into two kingdoms during the reign of Rehoboam because of its violation of the unity of the league of Twelve Tribes. About 170 years after the division of the Davidic-Solomonic kingdom there appeared four great prophets: Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah. The Neo-Assyrian empire was just launching its military expansion toward Palestine-Syria and Egypt when these prophets arose as heralds of divine judgment against the two divided kingdoms. In this transitional period these four great prophets analyzed the international and domestic state of affairs (the threatening advance of Assyria to Palestine) in the light of God's intention and purpose and went on to propose a way of escaping the catastrophic avalanche from the north.³ Extremely shocked at the untimely termination of the northern kingdom in 722/721 BCE, they proclaimed various oracles to kings, power elites, and commoners regarding how to cope with and survive the Assyrian deluge. One of the common oracles among them was an oracle of the reconciliation and reunification of southerners and northerners. Interestingly enough, all of them saw the destruction of the northern dynasty as an opportunity for the resuscitation of a Davidic kingdom (Amos 9.11-14; Hos 2.14-23; 3.5; Isa 9; 11; 32; Mic 5.2).⁴ Isaiah above all best represented this prophetic vision in that he saw the downfall of Israel as a middle stage for the reconciliation and reunification of the southerners and the northerners. In particular, his oracles about both the remaining people of the northern kingdom and a messianic king functioned as a realpolitical propaganda for the remaining northerners to return to an ideal Davidic kingdom, not the current kingdom of Judah (cf. 2 Chr 30.1-4[es/ v. 8]; Isa 10.20-23).⁵ Isaiah's theology of national reconciliation and reunification is best documented in Isaiah 11.

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³ Martin Noth's comment on the prophetic view of human history as the arena for the fulfillment of divine intention and purpose merits direct quotation: "The [8th century] prophets were the first to interpret the events of their time from this universal point of view, not explaining the past retrospectively or making a vague forecast of the general trend of future event, but discerning in the events of their own age the beginning of the operation of a divine plan" (Martin Noth, *The History of Israel* (London: Adam and Charles, 1956), 256).

⁴ Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39 with an Introduction to Prophetic Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 61.

⁵ For a more elaborated discussion of this topic, refer to my two papers written in Korean: "Messiah Yeonsi Isaiah 9:1b-7(MT 8:23b-9:6) eh daehan Juseokjuk Igki" (An Exegetical Reading of a Messianic Poem Isaiah 9:1b-7(MT 8:23b-9:6)," *The Korean Journal of Old Testament Studies* 15(2003), 147-173; "Nameun Ja Sasang eh natanan Isaiaheui Minjok Tonghap Shinhak"(Isaiah's Theological Proposal for Unifying the Southerners and the Northerners:

Reading a theology of national reconciliation and reunification in the oracles of Isaiah's messianic⁶ oracles is one of the ways of engaging the Bible in an Asian context. Awareness of Asian contexts offers a new way of listening to the prophetic voices of the OT, as will be presently illustrated. Perhaps it is living in a nation divided for over a half century into two hostile, rival states which has made me so sensitive to such a variety of prophetic oracles which speak of national reconciliation and unity, especially Isaiah's messianic oracles. These oracles can be understood not merely as predicting a golden age to come but also as an invitation for audiences to share their visions and participate in the fulfillment of the oracles in history. It is somewhat surprising that such little attention has been paid to this topic in the book of Isaiah among western scholars of Isaiah. It is hoped that the following exegetical inquiry of Isaiah 11 can help us to construct a theology of national reunification and reconciliation for our divided country.

II. The Place of Messianic Oracles in the Book of Isaiah 1-39.

One of the themes running through the entire book of Isaiah is Yahweh's reign and his messianic kingdom. Isaiah saw Yahweh the Holy One of Israel sitting on the throne, high and exalted (over a host of lesser deities) in his calling vision (Isa 6). His vision of Yahweh King of glory sitting on the highly exalted throne forms a theological backdrop for his oracles of a messiah (Isa 9, 11, 32).⁷ In the book of Isaiah a messiah comes from the Davidic royal lineage ("the stump of Jesse").⁸ He did not expect a divine messiah to come down from the heavens (contra Dan 7:13).

The tension between God and the people of Israel-Judah which occupies a predominant place in Isaiah 1-39 comes to be dissolved or radically lessened in Isaiah's messianic oracles. In these messianic oracles the judgment of God is assumed to have been already executed and is transmuted into a salvific zeal of God for his own people. They are intended to be not merely a prediction of what will happen in the future but are an invitation for a contemporary audience to build up an ideal society marked by justice and righteousness. In this sense Isaiah's messianic oracles represent a contrasting construction of reality from the viewpoint of his hostile audiences. The oracles are critical of the status quo and try to transcend it by breaking through it.⁹

The Idea of the Remnant)," *Korea Journal of Christian Studies* 37(2005), 41-43. Or one may refer to my 2001 unpublished PTS dissertation, *The Plan of Yahweh in First Isaiah* (esp. chapter 6), 235-289.

⁶ The term *messiah* in the OT usually refers to a human agent who carries out a divine rule (the priest (Lev 4.3)); ministers of the divine word (Ps 105.15); Cyrus (Isa 45.1); Israelite or Judean king (1Sam 14:6); an eschatological earthly viceroy acting as a divine agent (Dan 9:25)). While the term *messiah* itself does not occur in Isaiah 1-39, it is implied in several Isaianic passages such as Isaiah 9, 11, 32 (esp. 11.1). In this essay I use the term in order to refer to an ideal Davidic king, who is supposed to rule with justice and in righteousness (2 Sam 8.15; 23.1-7; cf. Ps 72).

⁷ J. J. M. Roberts, "The Divine King and the Human Community in Isaiah's Vision of the Future," in *The Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of George E. Mendenhall*, eds. H. B. Huffmon, F. A. Spina, and A. R. W. Green (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 127.

⁸ According to the Zion-Royal Theology, a central theology of the Judean royal house, all upcoming Davidic kings are supposed to be anointed as a messiah, an ideal viceroy of Yahweh the divine suzerain (Pss 72; 89; 132; Isa 9; 11; 32; cf. 1 Sam 24.10; Lam 4.20). Thus S. Mowinckel argues that the term *messiah* in the OT mostly denotes a non-eschatological and earthly king (S. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, trans. G. W. Anderson (New York/Nashville: Abingdon, 1954), 3, 7; so Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1991), 483.

⁹ Johannes Fichtner, "Jesaja unter den Weisen," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 74 (1949): 79.

Isaiah 1-39, in a nutshell, offers a theological rationale for two waves of the Assyrian deluge. Roughly speaking, chapters 2-5 telescope both the downfall of Israel caused by the first Assyrian deluge (722/721 BCE) and the destruction of Judah by the second Assyrian flood (701 BCE) into a sequential event and present the aftermath of these two Assyrian deluges in terms of what they would contribute to the national reconciliation and renewal of both Israel and Judah. Isaiah's messianic oracles dream of an ideal future society which will emerge ironically from the catastrophic finale of both Judah and Israel imposed by Assyria, presenting it as a contrastive and counter world state, namely an ideal Davidic kingdom, against the Assyrian empire.

III. The Historical Background of Isaiah 11: the Tragic Consequence¹⁰ of the Syro-Ephraimite War and the Assyrian Crisis¹¹ 701 BCE

Chapter 11 is placed in the larger corpus that deals with the decline of the Assyrian empire and the subsequent rise of a messianic empire in Zion. Chapter 9 presents a Davidic messiah who is expected to save the oppressed people of the northern kingdom from Assyrian slavery and anticipates a Davidic messiah's rule of the whole world in peace.¹² Chapter 10 deals with the hubris of the Assyrian empire which destroyed the northern kingdom beyond its original commission to only punish it. Chapter 11 presents a Davidic empire taking the place of Assyria (cf. Dan 2.44; Rev 11.15).¹³ Chapters 9-11 together which anticipate or reflect the decline of Assyria help us get a general feel for Isaiah's prophetic pathos that reached its peak at the 701 BCE Assyrian invasion into Judah and was most condemnatory of the Assyrian hubris.¹⁴

Chapter 12 pictures a festive celebration of Yahweh's mighty and wonderful redemption of his own people among the nations and peoples. It deals with the return of the Israelite and Judean captives from Assyria, Egypt, and Babylon.¹⁵ Their return led by an ideal Davidic king is celebrated as the climax of God's great redeeming acts (Isa 11.10-12). In this broad context, the two messianic oracles in Isaiah 9 and 11 can be best understood as embodying the nationalistic sentiment and aspiration of the 8th century BCE Isaiah of Jerusalem, namely national reconciliation and reunification.¹⁶ More specifically, chapter 11 is a messianic oracle which was proclaimed against the historical backdrops of at least two historic

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion of various scholarly opinions about the historical background of Isaiah 11.1-9, refer to B. S. Childs, *Isaiah* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 99-102. Both B. Duham and R. B. Y. Scott argue for its Isaianic authenticity whereas R. E. Clements and Hermann Barth date it to the post-exilic period (esp for vv. 6-9) in the light of its alleged dependence on Isa 66.25 and Hab 2.14 which they regard as dated to the post-exilic period.

¹¹ Christopher R. Seitz opines that at least vv. 10-16 can be read as reflecting the 701 BCE Assyrian crisis. *Isaiah 1-39; Interpretation Series* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993), 108-110.

¹² All the royal epithets, titles, and duties attributed to a Davidic king were expected of an earthly king in the line of the Davidic succession, not an eschatological king. These royal virtues and duties were incumbent upon a Davidic king. See George Adam Smith, *The Book of Isaiah* (London: Harper, 1927), 135.

¹³ Barry Webb, *The Message of Isaiah on Eagles' Wings* (Leicester: IVP, 1996), 74.

¹⁴ Seitz, 110.

¹⁵ The biblical passages dealing with the return of the captives contemporize the return of the northern Israelite captives from Assyria and Egypt with that of the Judean captives from Babylon and Egypt (11.11, 15-16). Here the chronological gap is dissolved between Babylon and Assyria (see the identification of Assyria with Babylon in Isaiah chapters 13-14 and the identification of Assyria with Persia in Ezra 6, the identification of Rome with Babylon in 2 Peter and the Book of Revelation).

¹⁶ Hae Kwon Kim, *The Plan of Yahweh* (UMI Dissertation service; Princeton Theological Seminary, 2001), 256-274.

events: the Syro-Ephraimite war and its aftermath, the downfall of the northern kingdom (732-721 BCE) and the Assyrian crisis (701 BCE).¹⁷ Both chapters 9 and 11 envision a great restoration of Israel and Judah initiated by a Davidic messiah which culminates in the reconciliation of the northerners to the southerners. They rivet the attention of audiences/readers to a period of national reconciliation and unity to come and in this sense they are best understood in the context of Isaiah's prophetic efforts to dissolve the hostile separation between the southerners and the northerners. Even the 200 year long conflict and rivalry between the two kingdoms could not eliminate the ancient Israelite prophets' vision of and commitment to the whole Israel consisting of twelve tribes. Elijah made a pilgrimage to Horeb home of the Mosaic theocracy on the route through the southern kingdom. Amos was dispatched to the capital city of the northern kingdom and proclaimed a series of disasters that would befall it soon. Whereas chapter 9 saw the possibility of reconciliation between the northerners and the southerners as the northern kingdom was rapidly coming to an end, chapter 11 hoped for the reconciliation of the northern returnees to the southern returnees and their joint effort to restore the glory of the Davidic empire (Amos 9.11-14).

Chapter 11 is divided into two sections: vv. 1-9 and vv. 10-16. The first section depicts a messianic kingdom which is to be established in Zion and the second section envisions a peaceful future of both the Israelite remnant and the Judean remnant who will be reconciled to each other by a Davidic messiah. The establishment of a messianic kingdom in Zion is coterminous with the national reconciliation between the southern returnees and the northern returnees.

IV. A Cosmic Messianic Kingdom Replacing the Assyrian empire, A Davidic Empire.

1. Translation

1. A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
a branch shall grow out of his roots.
2. The spirit of Yahweh shall rest on him.
the spirit of wisdom and discernment
the spirit of counsel and valor,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of Yahweh
3. His perception (smelling)¹⁸ is in the fear of Yahweh
He shall not judge by what his eyes see

¹⁷ Some scholars tend to date chapters 9 and 11 to either the period of the Josianic reform in 621 BCE (Hermann Barth, R. E. Clements, Marvin A. Sweeney) (Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, 204-205) or the post-exilic Persian period (W. Werner, *Eschatologische Texte in Jesaja 1-39: Messia. Heiliger Rest, Völker* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1982), 25-26, 85-86). But they cannot present any compelling reason for the impossibility of situating them in the historical situation surrounding Judah in the 8th century BCE. On the other hand, other scholars date them to the Hezekian period of the 8th century BCE: J. J. M. Roberts, "The Old Testament's Contribution to Messianic Expectations," in *The Messiah. Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 39-51 (esp. 44); H. Williamson, *Variations on a Theme. Messiah and Servant in the Book of Isaiah* (London: Paternoster, 1998), 28-29.

¹⁸ Like BDB (p. 926) a number of commentators regard *hārîḥû* (his smelling or perception) as a dittography of *rûaḥ* in the previous clause (repetition of the final clause of v. 2). However, this is not the only possible reading. I would stay with the OT. Roughly translated, this phrase would mean "his smelling (perception) (construct state of causative infinitive) is in the fear of Yahweh." Namely, "he breathes in and out the fear of Yahweh" or "He makes himself alive by fearing Yahweh."

- or decide by what his ears hear.
4. He shall judge the poor in righteousness
and decide on behalf of the lowly of the earth with justice.
He shall strike down the ruthless¹⁹ with the rod of his mouth
and slay the wicked with the breath of his lips.
 5. Righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins,
truthfulness the girdle of his waist.
 6. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb
the leopard shall lie down with the kid;
The calf and the young lion and the fatlings together²⁰
and the little boy shall lead them.
 7. Also the cow and the bear shall graze
Their young shall lie down together
And the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
 8. The nursing child shall play by the hole of the cobra
and the weaned child shall put his hand on the viper's den.
 9. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountains.
For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Yahweh
As the waters cover the sea.
 10. In that day it will happen the nations will resort to (consult)²¹ the remaining root of
Jesse who shall stand a signal for the peoples;
And his resting place shall be glorious.
 11. In that day Yahweh shall again reach out his hand the second time to recover the
remnant of his people who are in Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar,
Hamath, and from the islands of the sea.
 12. And He shall lift up a signal for the nations,
and shall assemble the exiled ones of Israel
and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.
 13. Then the jealousy of Ephraim shall depart,
and those who harass Judah shall be cut off;
Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah
and Judah shall not harass Ephraim.
 14. And they shall swoop down on the slopes of the Philistines on the west;
Together they shall plunder the sons of the east.
Their hands shall reach Edom and Moab

¹⁹ While most English versions take the MT reading (land, earth), I join BHS's textual emendation of into 'ārīṣ in the light of its paralleling word, the wicked (rāšā') (so Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, 461). However, it is not impossible to take the MT if we mean the landed classes who are politically oppressive and ruthless by the word 'ereṣ (see Jan de Waard, *A Handbook on Isaiah Textual Criticism and the Translator*, Volume 1 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 54).

²⁰ I take BHS's proposal with attention to the poetic regularity of v. 6.

²¹ The word dāraṣ used with the preposition 'el refers to an act of consultation with a superior teacher or mentor (Isa 8.19) (BDB, p. 205).

and Ammon shall be subject to them.

15. And Yahweh shall destroy the tongue of the Sea of Egypt²²
and he shall wave his hand over the River with his scorching wind;
And he shall strike them into seven streams
and shall make people walk over dry-shod.
16. And there shall be a highway from Assyria
for the remnant of his people who will be left
just as there was for Israel
in that day they came up out of the land of Egypt

2. Interpretation

A Davidic Messiah who rules with justice and in righteousness (vv. 1-9)

While the Assyrian empire is compared to a tree whose boughs shall be terribly lopped off and leave nothing substantial, the shoot²³ of Jesse shall grow to form a united nation of Israel and Judah. It is inferred from the present phrase that the people of God (Israel and Judah) had been already felled down and left like a stump (Isa 6.12-13). However, v. 1 strongly focuses on the resuscitation of a Davidic kingdom by contrasting the shoot of Jesse to the trees bereft of stump and boughs (Assyria, see Isa 10.34). Yahweh cut down the thickets of the forest of Lebanon (Assyria) with an iron axe. In this connection, the declaration of the prophet “A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, a branch shall grow out of his roots” sounds hopeful of the restoration of a Davidic kingdom, because the shoot sprouting from the stump and root of Jesse shall grow to mediate the salvation of God to his own people and the entire world (cf. Isa 4.2; 6.13).

While the stump of Jesse refers to either the fallen Davidic kingdom²⁴ or the Davidic kingdom nearly nearing its termination, it may entail an indirect critique against a current Judean king who was not able to actualize the political vision of David in his kingdom.²⁵ In a sense, the prophet is saying that there must be a fresh start on the part of God’s people which will rehabilitate the original glory of the Davidic kingdom ushered by David son of Jesse.²⁶

It is clear from vv. 2-5 that the shoot or branch refers to a royal figure. Upon him the spirit of Yahweh rests. Especially the spirit of strategy is anointed on the royal figure. The Hebrew word rendered as “counsel” is *ēṣâ*, a central concept that runs through the whole book of Isaiah. It refers to a royal deliberation or planning. The Hebrew word translated as “valour” *ḥūṣā*, which means military leadership expected of a king in ancient Israel. Both virtues were the most essential leadership elements of a king especially when he conducted a war or carried out an important policy.

Verse 3 more obviously inclines the reader to see the shoot or branch as a kingly person. He rules, judges, guarantees the human and political rights of the poor and lowly by constraining the greedy

²² While it is not impossible to emend *ḥrm* (utterly destroy) into *ḥrb* (dry up), one may stay with the MT taking *ḥrm* as meaning “drying up” (so John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 1-39* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986], 285).

²³ The word *neṣer* rendered as “shoot” is used as a metaphor for an eschatological messiah (Matt 2.23; A Nazirite; cf. Zech 3.8; 6.12).

²⁴ Barry Webb, *The Message of Isaiah on Eagles’ Wings*, 75.

²⁵ Roberts, “Messianic Expectations,” 45.

²⁶ Childs, *Isaiah*, 101.

and lawless desire of the landed classes and ruthless. Psalm 72 expects a Davidic king sitting on the throne of David (2 Sam 7.12-16) to substantiate such a messianic rule especially through the act of just and righteous judgment (cf. Isa 61.1-4). The ideal king here is richly anointed by Yahweh with the spirit of wisdom and discernment, strategy and valor, knowledge and fear of Yahweh. He is obviously commissioned a viceroy of Yahweh on the earth.

Verses 3-5 describe the way of a Davidic messiah's reign and its source. The messiah breathes a fear of Yahweh and gets energized by the fear of Yahweh. Fearing, loving, and trusting Yahweh enlivens him. Thus the messiah is equipped with Yahweh's insight and discernment. He does not judge based on what his eyes see and his ears hear. He judges perceptively and justly on behalf of those people who were likely to be marginalized and disadvantaged especially in their being judged. This prophetic praise of the Davidic messiah might have sounded a critique against a contemporary Judean king who failed to execute justice and righteousness.²⁷

In v. 4b we make a textual emendation following BHS by correcting 'ereš (land) into 'ānāš (the ruthless) in order to restore the poetic parallel in v. 4. 'ānāš is a more appropriate parallel to the wicked (rāšā'). What is revealing about the messiah's execution of justice and righteousness is that he smites the ruthless with the rod of his mouth and kills the wicked with the staff of his lips. The rod and staff are two essential tools for a shepherd, kingly person (Ezek 34; John 10.11-14; cf. Ps 23). The messiah constrains and kills the wicked and ruthless who were threatening the peace of the messianic kingdom through royal decrees and judgments, not physical violence or military means.

Verse 5 speaks of the source of the messianic authority, that is, righteousness (šedeq) and truthfulness ('ēmûnā). The former refers to the covenantal devotion and compassion of a king or other fellow citizens for the poor and lowly of the earth who are on the brink of being alienated from the covenanted community in poverty. The latter refers to a king or judge's correcting and constraining act of preventing the greedy and sinful acts of the wealthy and landed classes from dismantling the covenanted community of Israel. Both šedeq and 'ēmûnā are social and political manifestations of the people of Israel's fidelity to the Sinai covenant. The girdle of a king also represents a royal authority. From where comes the king's authority to smite the ruthless and kill the wicked? From the girdle of righteousness and truthfulness. It originates from the messianic king's close walk with and wholehearted obedience to God.

Verses 6-9 illustrate how a messianic king transforms a cruel and inhumane community into a peaceful and orderly one. Verses 6-8 speak of a holy safari where the wolf and the little lamb, the leopard and the kid, the calf and the young lion, the fatlings and the little child are at peace with each other.

Verse 7 states that some carnivorous animals have been transmuted into herbivorous animals under the reign of the Davidic messiah in the mountain of Yahweh. There come a herbivorous lion and a herbivorous bear! Verse 8 portrays a peaceful scene in which the nursing child plays with the viper, putting his hand into its den. In this holy mountain of Yahweh the weaned child leads ferocious and cruel animals in a peaceful procession. What is meant by this incredible holy safari? Isaiah is speaking of a nobly unified community where the poor and the lowly of the earth are entirely vindicated and protected from any wicked people. This messianic society effectively embodies the righteous and truthful rule of the messiah, who is completely committed to reconciling the oppressed to the oppressor, the victims to the victimizers, the landless to the landed. Isaiah thought that the prerequisite condition for incorporating the remaining people of the northern kingdom into the kingdom of Judah was the establishment of righteousness and justice, as illustrated here.

²⁷ Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*, 75.

Verse 9 anticipates a day in which the peaceful reign of the Davidic messiah shall infiltrate every area of the whole world.²⁸ No hurting or destruction will be experienced in all the holy mountain of Yahweh, for the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of Yahweh (cf. Hab 2.15; Hos 4.4-6). The image of the waters covering the sea in v. 9b is a reversal of the Noahide flood (cf. Amos 5.24). No wonder the establishment of a messianic peace community is followed by the return of both the Israelite-Judean captives and their reconciliatory union, for the schism between Israel and Judah had been caused by the failure of the Davidic kings to execute justice and righteousness for the whole people of Israel (1 Kings 12).

A Messianic King who gathered the exiles of Israel and the dispersed of Judah to the holy mountain, his glorious abode (vv. 10-16)

A number of historical-critical commentators attribute vv. 10-16 to a post-exilic redactor on several shaky grounds. They include the reference to the exiled Israelites and Judeans scattered all over the world, the dependence of vv. 10-16 on the allegedly post-exilic documents such as 2 Isaiah and others (Obad 19-21; Mic 7.7-20; Zech 10.3-12), and the hope for the reconciliation of the northerners and the southerners, which they believe was very likely foreign to Isaiah of Jerusalem the 8th century prophet BCE. I will dispute them for the following reasons.

First, it is equally possible for 2 Isaiah,²⁹ Obadiah, Micah, and Zechariah to be dependent on vv. 10-16, not necessarily vice versa. Here one may be reminded of J. T. A. G. M. van Ruiten's argument for the dependence of Isa 65.25 on 11.6-9 (see footnote 27). Second, there is nothing against reading this section as referring to the return of the northern captives in the 8th century BCE to both their homeland and the Davidic kingdom, except for the references to the captives of Judah and the rivers of Euphrates. It is not entirely impossible to think that the Judean captives were those rural Judean peasants who were exiled by Sennacherib in 701 BCE (ANET, 287-288).³⁰ Finally, it is much more natural to put the hostility and conflict between Ephraim and Judah back into the Syro-Ephraimite War and its immediately preceding or following period. It is the least likely that the prophecies of the national reconciliation and reunification were proclaimed to the people of the Persian Yehuda. It is more likely that they were declared in the monarchic period in which Israel and Judah were competing against each other as realpolitical entities. The ideal that a Davidic king expands his rule to the entire world with Zion at its center does not nicely fit with the exilic period or post-exilic period because neither Babylon nor Persia would allow it to be realized or even circulated among the community of the returned exiles in one way or another. This kind of political vision was most likely entertained or thought of while the Davidic dynasty was still existing in that it represented the Zion theology of the Judean royal house.³¹ Therefore, I argue for the Isaianic authenticity of vv. 10-16.

²⁸ While some scholars say that vv. 6-9 speaking of the peace of the animal world are dependent on such a post-exilic passage as Isa 66.25, others argue for the vice versa: so J. T. A. G. M. van Ruiten, "The Intertextual Relationship between Isaiah 65:25 and Isaiah 11:6-9," in *The Scriptures and the Scrolls. Fs. A. S. van de Woude*, eds. F. G. Martinez et al. VTSupp. 49 (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 31-42 and Childs, *Isaiah*, 101-102.

²⁹ Hugh G. M. Williamson's dating this section to a post-exilic period only based on its thematic and lexicographical connection with the so-called 2 Isaiah (40-55) is not compelling at all (*The Book Called Isaiah. Deutero-Isaiah's Role in Composition and Redaction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 127).

³⁰ Benjamin D. Sommer, *Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 808.

³¹ Roberts, "Isaiah in Old Testament Theology," *Interpretation* 36/2 (1986): 138-139.

Unlike those who tend to disconnect vv. 1-9 from vv. 10-16 (or vv. 1-10 from vv. 11-16), we argue for their interconnection and thematic continuity. Verses 10-16 consist of four smaller themes: the return of the exiles (vv. 11-12), the termination of the jealousy and enmity between Ephraim and Judah (v. 13), the political fortunes of the reunited nation of Israel (v. 14), and the highway for the returning exiles to return to their homeland (vv. 15-16).

One obvious purpose of the final redactor's arrangement of vv. 10-16 after vv. 1-9 may be that v. 10 beginning with "In that day" is intended to highlight the implication of the universal peace in vv. 1-9 for the future of Israel and Judah. What binds these two sections is the stump of Jesse or Jesse. Especially v. 10 is a very suggestive clue that inclines the reader to see these two sections as a unity by referring back to the stock of Jesse. It speaks of a world-historical significance of the return of both the Israelite and Judean captives to their homeland. The Davidic messiah will be consulted by nations and peoples for their guidance and instruction.³²

Then when will it happen that nations shall seek the Davidic messiah's counsel and peoples shall follow his signal? Verse 11 projects this scene into a somewhat remote future. In that day Yahweh will lift up his hand to recover his own people from the four corners of the world. Verse 12 states that the stock of Jesse shall become a standard for nations and peoples so that he may gather all the exiles and dispersed people of God to their homeland.

Verse 13 shows how the returning exiles of both Israel and Judah will be reconciled and united with each other under the reign of the Davidic king. Reconciled and reunified with each other, both Judah and Israel shall be able to restore the territory of the Davidic-Solomonic empire by subjugating its neighboring states to them. Under the peaceful and just reign of the Davidic king, Judah and Ephraim shall terminate their enmity and jealousy against each other and become strong enough to reclaim their political hegemony over the once vassal states of the Davidic-Solomonic empire.

The Philistines and the people of the east in v. 14 annexed some parts of the Israelite and Judean territory while Israel and Judah were rivaling each other especially during the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis (735-732 BCE). Moab, Ammon, and Edom which were once David's vassal states, also took some parts of Judah and Israel when they were invaded by Assyria. The imperialistic vision that Isaiah entertained of his own reunified country can be justified only when we assume that the reign of the Davidic-Solomonic empire is totally committed to executing the righteousness and justice of God for the entire world (Isa 16.5; 2 Sam 8.15; 23.3-4).

Verses 15-16 mention three empires that once acted as agents of the divine judgment of Yahweh against his own people: Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon. The people of both Judah and Israel were exiled into one of these three empires from which God shall be redeeming his own people to their homeland. To this end, Yahweh shall dry up (split up) the rivers of Euphrates into seven streams and shall make a dry land in the midst of the Egyptian rivers for his own people to walk. In other words, Yahweh will work out a second exodus for the exiles of Israel and Judah.

Verse 16's reference to the highway for the exiles remaining in Assyria to come back to their homeland, makes clear that the leading of the Assyrian exiles back to their homeland by Yahweh is a second Exodus. Indeed these Isaianic prophecies have become a self-navigation system and roadmap for the Babylonian exiles to return to Zion. It is very probable that Isaiah's oracles concerning national restoration and reunification must have sounded an invitation for his audiences to fulfill them in a real

³² Childs, *Isaiah*, 105; Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, 482.

life-setting and not simply a detached prediction about a remote future.³³ If it had not been for these oracles of national restoration and reconciliation, the returned exiles from Assyria and Babylon could not have reestablished themselves as the golah community in Jerusalem and Judah (Neh 5).

For ancient Israelite prophets, biblical promises and prophecies were to be welcomed and acted out in a specific history. They were to be believed, obeyed, and engaged by audiences. My reading of Isaiah 11 seeks to recover this kind of engaging and listening to divine prophecies and promises. Our paramount intention is to attempt a biblical interpretation that goes beyond a cold and objective, disengaged and detached analysis of biblical texts to create a whole-hearted and at the same time realpolitical response to them. We want to let biblical promises and oracles sharpen up our sociopolitical perception and practice in order to build up a more just and peaceful community in the world.

V. Implications of Isaiah 11 for the Reconciliation and Reunification of Two Divided Korea

Korea has been divided into two national governments with two quite oppositional ideologies since its 1945 emancipation from the imperialistic Japanese regime. Its modern history has been punctuated by internal war, ideological jealousy, and alliances with foreign superpowers. That has been the case with both Koreas. Thus the role of the Korean Church as a religion in making peace and reconciliation in the divided Korean peninsula has been a huge and long term challenge, for the Korean church itself has been at war because of its theological conflict and dirty church politics. What was most urgently to be reconciled and reunified was none other than the Korean Church which was divided into conservative and progressive, rightist and leftist sides. This situation continued until the mid-1990s, when the North Korea-South Korea sharing movement was started in 1994 under the joint leadership of both sides of the Korean Church. In a sense, since then the Korean Church has learned to make peace among people with different convictions, ideas, and ideologies. The Korean church made some contribution to achieving national reconciliation and peace in the midst of political and military tension lying between two Koreas since the 1970-1980s, which resulted in the emergence of Korean Reunification Theology (KRT).³⁴ Thus far non-Christian civil reunification movements, which mostly appealed to nationalistic sentiments in making reunification movement within the Korean society, have been enriched and strengthened through the participation of the Korean church fully inspired by a biblical or theological idea.

Isaiah 11 offers some clues for our commitment to making peace and reunification for our divided country. First of all, it makes sure that a messianic political leadership supported by a just and peaceful civil community alone can achieve national reconciliation and reunification in the Korean peninsula. Peace is the fruit of justice and righteous, as well demonstrated in the exegetical analysis of vv. 1-5. Isaiah 11 suggests that the Korean church should exert a messianic leadership as a royal priest (1 Pet 2.9) in order for South Korea to be transformed into a messianic community under the leadership of a just and righteous political leadership. A possible national reconciliation and reunification that we might envision from Isaiah 11 is execution of justice and righteous rule in the South and then its extension to the North. Secondly, this messianic poem shows what should be the ultimate goal of national peace and reconciliation between Judah and Israel. It should be the expansion of universal peace and justice to all

³³ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 1-39*, 289.

³⁴ For a brief overview of the history of KRT, refer to Ji-Seok Jung, "Korean Reunification Theology: A Theological Reflection on Peace in the Situation of Conflict and Division between North and South," *Madang* 3 (June 2005), 27-48 and idem, "Theological Issues of Reconciliation in the Korean Peninsula," *Madang* 5 (June 2006), 7-22. The former essay chronicles the process of the emergence of KRT and articulates its key ideas (peace, nation, minjung), while the latter essay analyzes four theological issues involved in the reunification of the Korean Peninsula: repentance, jubilee and sharing, memory and eucharist.

creatures living in the entire world. No national or regional peace and unity should be welcomed or promoted unless it contributes to global peace and creaturely peace. Our foregoing exegesis implies that the ultimate goal of Korea's national reconciliation and reunification will be conducive to the extension of global peace and justice even to the extent of being enjoyed by the most marginalized creature.

VI. Summary and Conclusion

Isaiah 11 as a messianic oracle sets forth Isaiah's theology of national restoration and reunification. Our study of this poem suggests that Isaiah's theological vision for national reconciliation and reunification can be carried out in a real situation like the contemporary Korean peninsula. As well documented in Isaiah 9, the prophet Isaiah expected that the downfall of the northern kingdom would be an opportunity for the revival of the Davidic kingdom in that a Davidic messiah would fulfill the political ideal of the Davidic rule, righteousness and justice for the remaining people of Israel and thus be able to incorporate them into a messianic kingdom ruled by a Davidic messiah. As clear from Isaiah 11, the prophet proclaimed that the establishment of a messianic society is a prerequisite for the national reconciliation and unity, for national reconciliation and reunification is a fruit of a messianic rule marked by a just and righteous social order. The trajectory of the nation of Israel headed by a Davidic messiah is expected to take its course from the founding of a national community on righteousness and justice, through the reconciliation of the northerners and the southerners, and to the extension of the Davidic reign to neighboring states. The world-wide expansion of the Davidic messiah's reign to subjugate neighboring states is justified (Isa 9.6; 11.14; 16.5) because it incarnates the righteous and just rule of Yahweh.

Seen in this light, Isaiah's messianic oracles engage the audience to act as an agent of building a messianic community on righteousness and justice simply beyond looking for a savior from a transcendental realm. Here the stump of Jesse merits much more serious attention in that it clearly points to an earthly messiah who identifies himself with David, the exemplary king of justice and righteousness. The Davidic messiah breaks through the domination of Assyria and Babylon to embrace the divine reign of Yahweh into his realm. Any one who wishes to be a Davidic messiah shall get nourished by biblical promises and prophecies challenging the secular hegemony of a world-wide empire which asserts itself over marginalized states and manipulates them by coercing, threatening, and enslaving. Isaiah 11, read against the power politics of an Assyrian or Babylonian imperial kingdom, encourages us to subvert their dominant paradigms of constructing reality. The restoration and reunification of the nation of Israel can be achieved only when the Davidic rule will dismantle the self-serving system and structure which serves the interests of the ruthless and wicked such as the landed and power elites. One of the ways of mapping and engaging the Bible in Asian culture is to be reminded that God is the God of the poor, the marginalized, and the victims, both in the Old Testament and in the contemporary world and the necessary purpose of biblical study is to destabilize all imperialistic (Assyrian or Babylonian) claims for truth in order to achieve the liberation of all the exiled all over the world. As Leo G. Perdue observed, "the test of any theology is how it is able to lessen human suffering, promote justice and egalitarianism, bring about liberation, and build community among all groups."

Abstract

One of the Asian ways of reading the Bible is to engage biblical promises and prophecies in a real and sociopolitical context. Historically, for Asians the Bible has always been a book of divine word that needs to be acted out in a real life setting. It was the case both with M. Gandhi when he led a peaceful

movement against the British imperial regime over fields of salt (the 1930 Salt March) and with the Korean Christians in the 1930-40s when they resisted the Shinto worship of the Japanese imperialistic regime. The then Korean Christians were able to successfully resist the forced Shinto shrine worship because they were able to find spiritual nourishment in various biblical oracles that inspired them to counter the human powers of the imperialistic regime by the Divine Sovereign. They acted out biblical prophecies that castigated human emperors and dictators, and acted upon them even when they were threatened to be jailed or sentenced to death. The Korean church thus has been anchored in the tradition of faith that embraced the Word of God as instructive and directional in one's daily life and made it to bear upon their real life issue.

Living on the divided Korean peninsula has strongly motivated me as a biblical scholar to pay much more serious attention to those biblical oracles which proclaim the unification of a divided people under the hand of the sovereign God (Isa 9 and 11; Ezek 36-37; Amos 9.11-14). Isaiah 11 is an example of a passage in which it is possible to demonstrate how an Asian reading makes a difference in interpreting biblical prophecies. With my reading of Isaiah 11, I will attempt to exemplify an Asian reading of the biblical oracle by making it address the Korean people who have been suffering a lot from the hostility and disunity between South Korean and North Korea since 1945. The essence of such a reading lies in reading biblical prophecy as something to be humanly acted out and lived out rather than a retrospective memoir or futuristic forecasting. My reading is intended to encourage people suffering from hostility and disunity like the Korean people to achieve peace reconciliation. It is with this kind of Asian engagement with the Bible that my paper will be concerned. The present paper specifically makes an exegetical inquiry into Isaiah 11 with special focus on its realpolitikal implication for the reconciliation between southerners and northerners.

Key Words: Isaiah, Reunification Theology, Messiah, Isaiah 11, Peace, Reconciliation

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