

EXILE AND THE PURPOSE OF JESUS' PARABLES (MARK 4:10–12; MATT 13:10–17; LUKE 8:9–10)

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Jesus' statement regarding his use of parables (Mark 4:10–12; Matt 13:10–17; Luke 8:9–10) has always been a challenge to scholars because it contains a cluster of difficult exegetical and theological issues, which are especially intense in Mark 4:10–12. For example: What is the “secret” of the kingdom of God? How is it “given” to the disciples? What are the lines along which Jesus divides disciples from “those outside”? What is the function of the Isa 6:9–10 quotation in his argument? and, perhaps the most important and difficult question: Does he desire that certain people not be saved? Various types of responses have been offered, especially for the last question. We will first sketch the solutions to the last question in broad strokes to demonstrate the need for a new proposal, and the remainder of the article will present a new proposal with discussion that covers all of the questions asked above and more. Our focus throughout will be primarily on Mark's version of the pericope, but we will cover Luke's and Matthew's thoroughly as the issues in those texts parallel or supplement those in Mark. Thorough evaluations of the various proposals are available in the literature, which the reader is encouraged to consult, but for brevity's sake we will devote the vast majority of space to the presentation of a new proposal that avoids many of the weaknesses inherent in the other offerings.¹

The contention of this article is that, contrary to the standard approaches to Jesus' purpose statement, Jesus adopts a meaning for Isa 6:9–10 virtually identical to the original meaning in Isaiah. The fundamental differences are that Jesus applies the passage to his own ministry and speaks the words at a different stage of salvation history. The first difference is significant. Jesus attributes an Isaianic character to his own preaching. Certainly the words of Isa 6:9–10 originally applied to the prophet Isaiah and, I would

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¹ For useful discussions of the different views on the issues, see Mary Ann Beavis, *Mark's Audience: The Literary and Social Setting of Mark 4.11–12* (JSNTSS 33; ed. David Hill; Sheffield: JSOT, 1989) 69–86; Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 198–204; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 193–201; Heikki Räisänen, *The “Messianic Secret” in Mark's Gospel* (Studies in the New Testament and Its World; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990) 81–87; and Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26* (WBC 34a; Dallas: Word, 1989) 209–12.

suggest, not to Jesus.² Nevertheless, it is legitimate for Jesus to employ the quotation as a means of declaring that his preaching bears the identical function as that of Isaiah's. Perhaps Jesus saw himself as an antitype to Isaiah. Regarding the different stage of salvation-history, it will be shown that the time frame referred to in Isa 6:9–10 itself, especially in the broader context of the book, may encompass the messianic period. If so, the disjunction is insignificant, even non-existent, because God's word in the passage would be intended for rebellious Jews from Isaiah's day through to Jesus' day and probably beyond. Accordingly, Jesus' preaching had essentially the identical function and audience as Isaiah's, but at a later time. If the view briefly described above, and developed throughout this article, is correct, most of the tensions that interpreters of Mark 4:10–12; Matt 13:10–17; and Luke 8:9–10 struggle with are resolved.

I. REVIEW OF PREVIOUS PROPOSALS

Jesus' quotation of Isa 6:9–10 in the purpose of parables passages raises the question of whether he desired some people not to be saved, which is really the central exegetical issue. One general approach to this matter has been to soften the meanings of ἵνα (Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10) and μήποτε (Mark 4:12; Matt 13:15). For example, "in order that" becomes "with the result that," and "lest" becomes "unless" or "perhaps." With this reading, preaching in parables has the result that people do not perceive or understand, but there is hope that they might turn and be forgiven.³ In other words, Jesus may not intend to obscure his message, but this is the result, unless the hearer repents and receives salvation. Indeed, ἵνα may sometimes take this sense when the context demands it, but μήποτε with the subjunctive does not appear to allow a softer sense. The fundamental sense of this grammatical construction in every instance in the LXX is aversion. What is introduced in the μήποτε + subjunctive clause is considered disadvantageous, something to be avoided. In the large majority of cases, the text explicates action (to be) taken to avoid the disadvantageous possibility expressed in the clause, and where action is not explicated it is implied. In every case, μήποτε + subjunctive may be interpreted as having the meaning "lest" with the sense "for the aversion of."⁴ Interestingly, the same holds true for possibly every instance of this construction in the NT (Matt 4:6; 5:25; 13:15; 15:32; 25:9; Mark 4:12;

² *Sensus plenior* would allow (though not require) the divine intent behind the words to apply to both Isaiah and Jesus, hence potentially avoiding the issue. The position espoused here is that *sensus plenior* is not necessary for Jesus to apply the passage legitimately to himself.

³ T. W. Manson introduced this approach in *The Teaching of Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935) 75–80. R. T. France takes a nuanced approach to this position, stating, "While it may not be legitimate to claim that in Mark ἵνα can mean 'with the result that' . . . , the force of the quotation cannot be far from that sense" (*Gospel of Mark* 199).

⁴ There are about 87 instances of the construction in the LXX.

Luke 4:11; 12:58; 14:8, 12; 21:34; Acts 5:39; 28:27; Heb 2:1).⁵ In the instances in Greek literature where BDAG suggests that the meaning of μήποτε is “perhaps,” either the construction is not μήποτε + subjunctive, or the meaning actually need not be softened from “lest” to “perhaps,” as in Sir 19:13. Gundry writes, “we should reject attempts to evade the telic ἵνα, ‘in order that’; for the combination with μήποτε, ‘lest,’ comes as close as possible to insuring the telic meaning The changes made by Matthew and Luke make it apparent that they did not see a way of softening the telic meaning apart from dropping the μήποτε-clause as well as making earlier changes.”⁶ Craig Evans provides ample argument for the telic force.⁷ In summary, it is probably best to adopt the telic sense in Mark 4:12 (and Matt 13:15).

Some scholars soften the harshness of Jesus’ quotation by suggesting that Mark’s ἵνα is shorthand for the introductory formula, ἵνα πληρωθῆ (“in order that it might be fulfilled”).⁸ Accordingly, the quotation of Isa 6:9–10 is not an explanation of why he told parables, but a “commentary on the contemporary situation in which the purpose of God was coming to fulfillment.”⁹ It was not that Jesus told parables to conceal the truth. It was simply that people did not understand his parables. Mark 4:11–12 is, in effect, Jesus’ lament at the failure of the great majority to hear, in the sense to understand, what he was saying. Matthew 18:16 is typically cited as the single other example of this use of ἵνα, but there the meaning is not fulfillment of a prophecy but obedience to an OT command. The category is completely different. Furthermore, under this view the μήποτε clause (“lest . . .”) becomes a clumsy appendage with no real meaning for its new context.

Blomberg does not apparently seek to soften the grammar (at least he does not comment on it), but presents what he believes to be the essential meaning Jesus draws from the quotation. He observes,

A speaker or writer who has a viewpoint he wishes his audience to accept that it does not currently hold will seldom succeed by means of a straightforward explanation of his position. Rather he has to think of some innocuous method of introducing the subject, while at the same time challenging his listeners to think of it in a new way. A carefully constructed allegory may well accomplish what its nonmetaphorical, propositional counterpart could never do.¹⁰

Quoting T. F. Torrance, he amplifies, “Jesus deliberately concealed the Word in parable lest men *against their will* should be forced to acknowledge the

⁵ If 2 Tim 2:25 is μήποτε + subjunctive (μήποτε δὸν αὐτοῖς ὁ θεὸς μετένοιαν), then the construction can possibly mean “perhaps.” However, Westcott and Hort take 2 Tim 2:25 ἀμήποτε + optative (cited in A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* [Nashville: Broadman, 1934] 996), which quite naturally has the meaning, “perhaps,” as in the only other instance in the NT, Luke 3:15. See BDAG. The LXX does not have this optative construction.

⁶ Gundry, *Mark* 202.

⁷ Craig A. Evans, *To See and not Perceive* (JSOTSup 64; Sheffield: JSOT, 1989) 92–99.

⁸ See, e.g., William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 159.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1990) 54.

Kingdom, and yet He allowed them enough light to convict them and to convince them.”¹¹ As will be seen later, this reasonably coheres with the Isa 6:9–10 quotation in its Gospel contexts, but it misses on one important point. The μήποτε clause conveys the idea of the divine avoidance of forgiveness (“lest . . .”). Blomberg seems to argue the opposite. Moreover, would God forgive persons who are forced *against their will* to acknowledge the kingdom? Blomberg does not adequately respond to these challenges.

C. E. B. Cranfield represents another solution.¹² He writes, “If . . . the ἵνα is given its proper final force, its significance is that the fact that the secret of the kingdom of God, in accordance with O.T. prophecy, remains hidden from many is something that is within the purpose of God.”¹³ On μήποτε, he prefers the meaning “unless,” based on the possibility that Jesus used the Aramaic word *dil'mā'*, or the meaning “perhaps,” which sense for μήποτε is found outside the NT; though he admits that the Hebrew of Isa 6:10 must mean “lest.”¹⁴ In this case, Jesus allows the possibility of forgiveness. There are some difficulties, however, with this proposal. First, Jesus imports a dramatically different meaning to the Isaiah text from its original sense. Although this is certainly possible, it is best to determine if the original intent is acceptable in the new context. Second, if Jesus intended the meaning “perhaps,” there are more clearly synonymous Greek words available to communicate this: for example, ἄρα, ταχα, τυχόν, ἴσως, and μήτι. Also, as above, extrabiblical Greek literature may not support the softened meaning for μήποτε + subjunctive.

Joel Marcus takes ἵνα and μήποτε with their full force and sees the withholding of forgiveness as judicial, a keeping from salvation specifically of Jesus' opponents who have already hardened themselves.¹⁵ This view does not account well both for the absence of opponents in this scene (Mark 4:1–34) and for the fact that Jesus spoke predominantly in parables even to the favorable crowds.¹⁶

N. T. Wright provides the final type of proposal that we will examine.¹⁷ For Wright, Jesus believes that the Jews are still in exile, but to say so openly would incur their wrath and intensify their opposition. Therefore, in numerous parables he merely implies that the Jews are in exile. When we take into consideration the theme of Isaiah 6—exile—the purpose of parables

¹¹ Ibid. 55 (emphasis added).

¹² C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (CGTC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959) 155–58.

¹³ Ibid. 156.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8* (AB 27; New York: Doubleday, 2000) 301–7. Rikki E. Watts arrives at a similar conclusion by positing effectively three groups, with the uncommitted crowd neither “inside” nor “outside” (*Isaiah's New Exodus and Mark* [WUNT 88; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997] 184–210). His view suffers much the same weaknesses as Marcus's and depends on overly subtle audience criticism.

¹⁶ For a related approach with similar problems, see M. E. Boring, *Mark: A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006) 127–28.

¹⁷ N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God 2; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 236–39.

pericope must be viewed in this light. Accordingly, Jesus' intent behind speaking in parables is largely to proclaim the exile yet avoid intensified opposition. Wright is correct in noting the importance of the exile theme, but Isa 6:9–10 in context is not about secrecy but about clarity.¹⁸ We will comment more thoroughly on this later. Furthermore, he does not explain the grammar of Mark 4:12, or why Jesus might wish some not to be forgiven.

We have not demonstrated the inadequacies of the above proposals on all the issues of the text, just the crucial one. This should be enough to show the need for another proposal, one that both accounts for the grammar in a natural way without too readily softening ἵνα and μήποτε and understands the Isaiah passage in an appropriate manner. We will now begin to explore the building blocks of a new proposal that should meet these requirements and resolve several other issues in the text that will be noted as they become important to the discussion.

II. THE LITERARY CONTEXT AND MEANING OF ISAIAH 6:9–10

Jesus grounds the purpose for his speaking in parables in the Isaianic commission statement of Isaiah 6. Any attempt to understand Jesus' intended meaning must grapple with the meaning of the quoted passage in its original literary and historical contexts. Indeed, Jesus could have attributed different meaning to the words of Isa 6:9–10 than one might glean in reading Isaiah in its own right, in a sense borrowing the words for his own distinct purpose. However, until a reasonable understanding of Isa 6:9–10 in its literary context is determined, it will be difficult to evaluate how Jesus in fact treats the text.¹⁹

The commission of Isaiah the prophet, chapter 6, follows a lengthy section of indictment and judgment against Judah and Jerusalem, punctuated by expressions of hope. The overall tone is gloomy despite these glimmers of hope. The people have persistently rebelled against God, and his patience has reached its limit. Already the theme of exile has been introduced (5:13)²⁰ and will be reiterated shortly (6:12;²¹ and from the perspective of return from exile, 11:11, 12, 16). Into this setting God sends Isaiah to preach.

¹⁸ See J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity, 1993) 79.

¹⁹ François Bovon only minimally considers the Isaiah passage in his discussion of the Lukan parallel (*Luke 1* [Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002] 311–13).

²⁰ See Motyer, *Isaiah* 71; John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33* (WBC 24; Waco, TX: Word, 1985) 61; Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12* (Continental Commentaries; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 201–2; John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 160; Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1–39* (Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998) 52; Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001) 47; John Goldingay, *Isaiah* (NIBC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001) 53–54; C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, repr. 1982) 171.

²¹ It is broadly accepted that Isa 6:12 refers to the exile. See, e.g., Motyer, *Isaiah* 79; Watts, *Isaiah 1–33* 76; Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12* 274; Keil and Delitzsch, *Isaiah* 202. Some commentators see a reference to exile, but attribute it *ex eventu* to a later editor: R. E. Clements (*Isaiah 1–39* [NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980] 78), who provides no argument for the conclusion; and Joseph Blenkinsopp (*Isaiah 1–39* [AB 19; New York: Doubleday, 2000] 223), who bases his decision merely on the third person reference to Yahweh.

The message given to the prophet and its intended result are startling. He is to “tell this people: ‘keep on listening, but do not perceive; keep on looking, but do not understand’” (Isa 6:9),²² and the result of Isaiah’s preaching will be to “render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim, lest they see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and repent and be healed” (6:10).

9 ויאמר לך ואמרת לעם הזה שמעו שמעו ואל-תבינו וראו ראו ואל-תדעו:
10 השמן לב-העם הזה ואזניו הכבד ועיניו השע פך-יראה בעיניו ובאזניו ישמע ולבבו יבין ושב ורפא לו:

The imperative followed by its cognate infinitive absolute for both שמע, “hear,” and ראה, “see,” in verse 9 produces an intensified imperatival force.²³ Additionally, “the inf abs following its cognate finite verb indicates continuation of the action.”²⁴ Therefore, most probably the wording of the MT is not a description of the people, though they were indeed already hardhearted (Isaiah 1–5). It is a divine command that judicial hardening take place over a period of time, and to a degree well beyond what was already the case.²⁵ God directly addresses Isaiah again in verse 10, where he affirms the effect that the prophet’s preaching is to have on the people’s ears and eyes. He is to harden them. In the light of God’s hardening of Pharaoh and others in the OT, we need not reject the possibility of such intent here. Perhaps the most difficult issue arises, however, in verse 10b. The complete dulling that must occur through Isaiah’s proclamation is divinely accomplished *lest* they see, hear, understand, *repent and be healed*. Unlike in the case of Pharaoh, where divine hardening had an immediately obvious function, the release of the Israelites, here the immediately expressed function is the withholding of repentance and healing from the Israelites. This is indeed a surprising intention on God’s part, and Isaiah himself finds it astounding (Isa 6:11). The *crux interpretum* is the Hebrew conjunction ׀, “lest.” We may say for ׀ in the MT what we said above for μήποτε + subjunctive. In every instance, what is introduced in the ׀ clause is considered disadvantageous, something to be avoided.²⁶ In the vast majority of instances, the text specifies action (to be) taken to avoid the disadvantageous possibility expressed in the ׀ clause, and where action is not explicated it is implied. In every case, ׀ may be interpreted as having the meaning “lest” with the sense “for the aversion

²² All English scripture quotations are from the NASB unless otherwise stated.

²³ W. Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar* (GKC; ed. E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley; 2d ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1910) 343. The commentaries frequently note or assume this. See, e.g., Keil and Delitzsch, *Isaiah* 199; Motyer, *Isaiah* 79; Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–18* (NICOT 1; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) 255; Childs, *Isaiah* 56. Wildberger notes the imperatives but prefers to see them as a characterization of the people rather than a command to be enacted. He argues that God is still addressing Isaiah in 6:9b, and the change in addressee at verse 9b is merely formal (*Isaiah 1–12* 271). This argument appears to demand greater literary simplicity than is typically observed in Isaiah.

²⁴ Watts, *Isaiah 1–33* 69, citing GKC § 113r.

²⁵ Interestingly, the LXX softens the passage by translating the imperatives with indicatives, thus transforming it into a description of the people.

²⁶ There are about 88 instances in the MT.

of.²⁷ Aversion naturally excludes the possibility that in Isa 6:10 ׀פ means “perhaps” in the positive sense that Judah might repent and be healed. In fact, BDB, *TWOT*, and *NIDOTTE* never offer “perhaps” as a possible meaning.²⁸ According to the Hebrew wording of this passage, God simply does not want the people to repent. Isaiah’s preaching empowered by God is the action that avoids the people’s repentance. It appears that the ultimate function of the hardening is to ensure that the exile, now ordained by God as the just punishment for Judah’s sins, necessarily occurs. The merciful character of God would require that he relent if the people repented; but his just intent was to punish, and hardening is the means of avoiding any possibility of averting the exile. Most commentators, driven by the force of ׀פ, place the responsibility of this final hardening on God, who is nevertheless justified because of the persistent, willful hardness of the people.²⁹

A vital point about Isa 6:9–13 that is fundamentally important for our treatment of Jesus’ quotation is that the repentance and healing mentioned in verse 10 is not about individual salvation. The reference is to corporate hardening, corporate repentance and corporate healing. As Delitzsch puts it,

Israel had delivered itself up through its continued obstinacy in sinning. And consequently the Lord now proceeded to shut the door of repentance against His people. Nevertheless He directed the prophet to preach repentance, because the judgment of hardness suspended over the people as a whole did not preclude the possibility of the salvation of individuals.³⁰

Indeed, there were faithful, “saved” Jews who went into exile, for example Daniel and his associates. One contention of this article is that Jesus was not inferring individual salvation in his quotation, but corporate exile in the Isaianic sense. We will develop this later.

The severity of the pronouncement in Isa 6:9–10 is mitigated somewhat in verses 11–13 by a limit to the duration of the hardening:

Then I said, “Lord, how long?” And He answered, “Until cities are devastated and without inhabitant, Houses are without people And the land is utterly desolate, The LORD has removed men far away, And the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. Yet there will be a tenth portion in it, And it will again be *subject* to burning, Like a terebinth or an oak Whose stump remains when it is felled. The holy seed is its stump.

Jeremiah expresses the idea of limit in more clear terms, seventy years (25:11–12; 29:10), but this refers strictly to physical exclusion from the land

²⁷ BDB lists the types of implied actions present in all the instances where an avoidance action is not explicit in the context. When these are considered, one may reasonably translate every instance of ׀פ in the MT as “lest” in the sense of “for the aversion” (William Gesenius, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* [ed. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs; Oxford: Clarendon, 1906] 814–15).

²⁸ BDB 814–15; Victor P. Hamilton, “׀פ,” *TWOT* 2.726–27; and Allan Harman, “Particles,” *NIDOTTE* 4.1035–36.

²⁹ Childs thoroughly and lucidly argues this point (*Isaiah* 56–57). See also Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1–39* 61–62; Oswalt, *Isaiah 1–39* 189; Watts, *Isaiah 1–33* 75; and Keil and Delitzsch, *Isaiah* 200–201.

³⁰ Keil and Delitzsch, *Isaiah* 201.

(and only a fraction of the exiles did in fact return from their dispersion even by NT times). Isaiah's *terminus ad quem* for Judah's punishment appears to extend well beyond this timeframe (6:9–13). Specifically, the concept of exile extends chronologically to the messianic period in the picture of the remnant returning from exile when the Messiah is active (Isa 11:10–16³¹; 49:1–13; 51:17–53:12; 60–61; cf. Jer 23:1–8; Mic 2:12–13; 4–5³²).³³ There is perhaps a cryptic hint as early as Isa 6:11–13 that Judah's hardness and exile will endure into the messianic period. God responds to Isaiah's question, "How long?"³⁴ The hardness would last at least until the people are exiled (vv. 11–12). Brueggemann sees only "termination" of Jerusalem in the oracle and not exile.³⁵ However, although the language employed in these verses is difficult, the majority of scholars see deportation, exile, as clearly in view.³⁶ Will the divine hardening continue beyond the completion of the deportation and devastation of the land? Verse 13 furthers the description of God's punishment of the people during which they will remain hardened, but in terms that have raised much debate. There is yet another burning, a stump in the land, and a holy seed.³⁷ Several commentators understand the imagery as

³¹ For the view that these verses refer to the return of the remnant under the Messiah, see Oswalt, *Isaiah 1–39* 286–87.

³² For exegesis that demonstrates these portions of Micah to speak of the return of the remnant under the Messiah, see Thomas Edward McComiskey, *The Covenants of Promise: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985) 18–45.

³³ What about the "return" under Ezra/Nehemiah? It appears either that Isaiah's conception of the exile was not merely physical (displacement from the land and lack of agricultural productivity, etc.), but also spiritual (see, e.g., Isa 6:9–13; 8:12–22; and perhaps 10:21), or that the true return at best had its beginnings under Ezra and was ultimately to a spiritualized land and/or an expanded land encompassing the world (e.g. Isa 2:1–4; 54:3; 61:4–9).

³⁴ There is virtual unanimity among commentators that Isaiah is asking how long the hardening will last. Brueggemann, however, suggests that "[t]he question does not want an answer about length of suffering, but it suggests that God is unfair or inattentive, and the speaker . . . deserves something better from God" (*Isaiah 1–39* 61). This hardly seems likely given that God's response to Isaiah regards duration.

³⁵ Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1–39* 61–63.

³⁶ See Keil and Delitzsch for a fairly thorough argument in favor of exile (*Isaiah* 201–2). See also Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12* 274; Motyer, *Isaiah* 79; Young, *Isaiah 1–18* 263; Clements, *Isaiah 1–39* 78; and Watts, *Isaiah 1–33* 76. Interestingly, the *Targum of Isaiah* makes it explicit in 6:13 (*The Isaiah Targum: Introduction, Translation, Apparatus and Notes* [The Aramaic Bible 2; trans. B. D. Chilton; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1987] 15).

³⁷ Watts perceives in the holy seed a picture of the returning exiles as "a continuing reminder of the nation that was now dead and of the reason why it was destroyed" (Watts, *Isaiah 1–33* 76). In other words, the last temporal reference in Isa 6:11–13, Isaiah's *terminus ad quem* for the hardening, is the physical return of the exiles. He bases his conclusion mainly on two thoughts. First, he believes that the "holy seed" ורע (קרש) of 6:13 refers back to what he sees as a self-description of the returnees in 4:3 as "holy" (קרש). It is doubtful, however, that "holy" is a self-reference in 4:3, and the verbal repetition is far from decisive. Second, Watts translates מצבתה in 6:13 as "monument," a monument to destruction (*Isaiah 1–33* 68, 76). Yet, in the context of the tree imagery of 6:13, מצבתה is better translated "stump." A different approach to 6:13 is preferable. Brueggemann is happy to see in this verse "an enigmatic trace of assurance" that points vaguely beyond the exile, an assurance that the Gospel writers saw as parallel to the hope of Christ (*Isaiah 1–39* 62–63).

an affirmation that God's people will not be obliterated by the judgment, but will continue in some form ultimately into the messianic period, with Motyer and Goldingay referring also to Isa 11:1–12:6.³⁸ Perhaps the question of whether Isa 6:13 is a subtle messianic allusion cannot be conclusively decided. If it is such an allusion, then at this early stage of Isaiah the duration of the people's hardening is associated with the advent of the Messiah. This is the view espoused here, but it is not essential to our overall argument, only helpful.

An examination of the interplay between the command to harden the people (Isa 6:9–10) and God's response to Isaiah's question about the duration of the hardening (Isa 6:11–13) may shed some light on the duration of the elements of punishment associated with the hardening in verses 11–13. It seems reasonable to assume that God's punishment of the people was not merely to consist of hardness of heart. The hardness was also to achieve an end, the punishment intended by God. Verses 11–13 explain not only the duration of hardness but they also present the intended end of that hardness, devastation of the land and exile. Spiritual hardness is intended to bring exile and devastation, and that hardness is to endure throughout the period of exile and devastation depicted in these verses. Accordingly, if verse 13 indeed does refer to the messianic period, then the spiritual hardness that justifies the punishment likely must remain into that period. This concurs with the passages from Isaiah noted earlier that show the faithful remnant returning in conjunction with messianic activity.

III. THE NATURE OF THE EXILE AND ITS TERMINATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Important to our understanding of how Jesus employs Isa 6:9–10³⁹ is his conception of the exile, namely its nature and closure. Unfortunately, the vast majority of comments on Jesus' citation of this text fail to recognize or accept the association of the text in Jesus' mind with the exile and punishment of Isa 6:11–13. His theology of the exile would certainly be influenced by the OT and would at least have points of contact with the theology of his contemporaries. Obviously, the theme of exile in the OT and first century Judaism is massive in its own right.⁴⁰ We will only attempt a summary of

³⁸ Keil and Delitzsch, *Isaiah* 203; Motyer, *Isaiah* 79–80; Goldingay, *Isaiah* 62; Young, *Isaiah 1–18* 265 n. 54. Wildberger refers to “the eschatological community” and “the future time of salvation” without specific reference to the Messiah (*Isaiah 1–12* 275). I assume that he means the messianic period.

³⁹ I believe Jesus interpreted the passage in the light of its context within Isaiah and not as an out-of-context proof text.

⁴⁰ Numerous volumes specifically on the exile are available. See, e.g., Ralph W. Klein, *Israel in Exile: A Theological Interpretation* (OBT; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979); Lester L. Grabbe, ed., *Leading Captivity Captive: 'the Exile' as History and Ideology* (JSOTSS 278; ed. David J. A. Clines, Philip R. Davies and John Jarick; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998); Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002); P. R. Ackroyd, *Exile*

elements that are directly relevant to the subject at hand. In the present section, we will very briefly analyze the theme of exile in the OT. In the next section we will briefly discuss the exile theology of first century Judaism.

Within the prophetic books that deal with the Babylonian and Assyrian exiles, several components to the state of exile are identifiable. Each of the ones treated here has an antithetical component in the prophesied state of restoration. These antithetical pairs are deportation from the land vs. return to the land, removal of economic and political blessing vs. bestowal of such blessing,⁴¹ and suppression of spiritual vitality vs. rejuvenation of spiritual health. Naturally, exile involves deportation (e.g. Isa 5:13; 6:11–12; 27:8; 32:9–14; Jer 13:19, 24; Ezek 5:10; Hos 9:3; Amos 5:27; 7:11; Mic 1:2–2:11), and restoration obviously involves return to the land (e.g. Isa 27:12–13; 32:15–20; Jer 33:7; Ezek 34:11–13). Deportation, however, is not the entirety of exile. Within the prophets, exile, as one would expect, entails the removal of economic and political blessing (e.g. Isaiah 5; 32:9–14; Jer 13:18; Hos 11:5), though God does permit the people to achieve limited prosperity in exile (e.g. Jer 29:1–7, Daniel). Restoration entails bestowal of superlative economic and political blessing that exceeds what they experienced before (e.g. Isa 2:1–5; 30:23–26; 41:11–20; 54:1–17; 60–61; Ezek 36:8–15, 33–38; Amos 9:11–15; Zech 8:1–17). In order to initiate the exile, God suppresses the spiritual vitality of the people, what little was there in the first place (e.g. Isa 5; 6:9–13; 29:10; Amos 5:21–24; 8:7–12). Restoration then brings vibrant, corporate spiritual health (e.g. Isa 2:21–31; 30:19–22; 31:6–32:8; 35:5–10; 55:1–13; 60–61; Jer 31:27–34; Ezek 36:16–32; Hos 14:4). It is our contention that not all (if any) of the aspects of the promised restoration are fulfilled before the appearance of the Messiah, and that the OT actually pictures the exile's closure in association with the Messiah's activity.

When waves of Jews returned to their land (e.g. Ezra, Nehemiah, Second Temple period), of the three components of exile discussed above, one might suggest that God fulfilled his promise before the messianic era regarding their physical return. After all, the prophets envisage only a remnant being restored to the land (Isa 10:20–22; 11:10–16; Jer 23:1–8; 31:7–10; 43:5; Amos 9:11–15; Mic 2:12–13; Zech 8:6–8; cf. Ezra 9:8, 13–15; Hag 1:12, 14; 2:2). Whether these migrations ever fulfilled the prophecies is debatable, but physical return is only a portion of the restoration promises of God. In the light of passages like Isa 11:10–16; Jer 23:1–8; and Mic 2:13, there is clearly a remnant of exiles that will return during the activity of the Messiah, and

and Restoration: A Study of Hebrew Thought of the Sixth Century B. C. (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968); Daniel L. Smith, *The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile* (Bloomington, IN: Meyer-Stone Books, 1989); and James M. Scott, ed., *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish and Christian Conceptions* (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

⁴¹ John Bright includes these under the term "national hope" (*A History of Israel* [3d ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981] 429). Although we could well treat economic and political realms separately, they are coupled in this article for brevity. Peter R. Ackroyd uses similar categories (*Exile and Restoration*).

this may either be the culmination of God's promise of return or a separate type of return within the broader concept of restoration.

Obviously, exile devastated the Jews economically and politically as a nation, the second component of exile noted above. Unlike the return to the land, however, the prophesied abundant economic and political blessing is never even approximately realized.⁴² This fact further supports the contention that the exile (as a theological whole) is not fully completed by the time of Jesus.

Not only are the vast majority of Jews still scattered throughout the inter-testamental and NT periods, and the land politically and economically dominated by others, but also the returnees themselves are never corporately faithful to their covenant God. Ezra and Nehemiah chronicle the rather pervasive social ills that arise even with the first returnees. The Qumran literature depicts (albeit from a radical perspective) a backslidden nation still exiled and under the condemnation of God. Even the Gospels paint a somber picture of the spiritual health of corporate Israel, especially its leaders. In fact, never do the Jews as a corporate body attain the spiritual vitality prophesied with respect to their return from exile.⁴³ Indeed, the close of the exile is a process that concludes in association with messianic activity. Micah 5:1–5a is a helpful example. The prophet sees Israel as abandoned until the Messiah appears and the remainder of the remnant is gathered, including Jews and Gentiles.⁴⁴

Brant Pitre poses the most developed challenge to our view. He argues that the exiles of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms should be viewed separately, with the exile of Judah concluded by the first century and that of Israel continuing, so that Jesus could not rightly consider his Palestinian contemporaries as still exiled.⁴⁵ He bases this on the definition of exile as "expulsion from the land."⁴⁶ When it is remembered both that when Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem it meant that the northern tribes *could* return, and that some people from the northern tribes *did* return with the southern returnees, then Pitre's distinction is hard to maintain.⁴⁷ Apparently, none remained "expelled," but the vast majority chose not to

⁴² See Bright, *History of Israel* 429; N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992) 268–72; and T. R. Hatina, "Exile," *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000) 348.

⁴³ N. T. Wright argues these points in several locations throughout *People of God*.

⁴⁴ See Bruce K. Waltke's exposition (*Micah* [The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary 2; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993] 706–7). See also T. E. McComiskey, who notes about Mic 5:1–5a that "the future deliverance of God's people is presented in this way because the prophets saw the Captivity as continuing, in a sense, till the coming of the messianic King" ("Seventy 'Weeks' of Daniel" 428–30).

⁴⁵ Brant Pitre, *Jesus, the Tribulation, and the End of the Exile: Restoration Eschatology and the Origin of the Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) 31–40.

⁴⁶ Pitre, *Jesus* 39.

⁴⁷ See H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (WBC 16; Waco, TX: Word, 1985) 32. Williams also observes that "there is an almost unbearable contradiction between God's promise of freedom in the land and the present subservience of the people to foreign kings" (lii).

return. A case could be made that since many prophetic restoration texts have God appealing to the Jews to return to God and the land (e.g. Isa 31:6; 44:22; 48:20; 52:11–12; 54:6; Jer 3:14; 4:1; 31:21; 50:8; 51:6; Zech 2:6–7; 10:8; cf. Jer 24:7; Hos 5:4; 6:1; 12:6; 14:2; Joel 2:12–13) that those who have returned in the physical sense, but not the spiritual, have not actually returned from exile. This would account for the majority of Jesus' Palestinian contemporaries. On a further point, Pitre rightly observes that the prophets predominantly depict the restoration as involving both northern and southern tribes together, and often in a period of eschatological messianic activity.⁴⁸ Interestingly, however, he never explains adequately why Judah *needs* to return at that time when, by his definition, their exile had already concluded. Throughout the book, he contends also that the gathering of the twelve tribes occurs after a period of messianic tribulation beginning with John the Baptist and extending to the parousia.⁴⁹ This conflicts with our view that the restoration was already in process during Jesus' incarnate ministry. A serious weakness in his argument is the very frequent appeal to prophetic texts as depicting part or all of the sequence "messianic tribulation (of Messiah and/or saints), then perhaps parousia, then ingathering of the twelve tribes (and perhaps Gentiles)," when most of these texts more naturally suggest the sequence (or part thereof) "exilic tribulation (Assyrian/Babylonian), then gathering of Judah and Israel concurrent (if the chronology is clear) with messianic activity."⁵⁰ In other words, he often interprets texts that portray the suffering of the Jews in their pre-messianic exile as eschatological. There are also several important passages that appear difficult for his view and that receive no substantive comment.⁵¹ Finally, his position does not account well for passages like Isa 65:8–25 that speak of a return of Judah at a time of messianic activity and with no reference to Israel's return. Why would only Judah's restoration be mentioned if they had already returned? As I will argue below and more thoroughly elsewhere, it seems best to view the return of a few generally unfaithful people in the Ezra-Nehemiah era as either a failed return or as merely preparatory to a later, authentic return through the Messiah Jesus. Jesus' compatriots in Palestine, though in the land, would be considered either as *part of a nation* (both kingdoms) still

⁴⁸ Pitre, *Jesus* 36–38.

⁴⁹ Pitre, *Jesus*; see especially chaps. 3 and 4.

⁵⁰ See in Pitre (*Jesus*), e.g., on Isa 11:10–12, cf. Rom 15:12 (pp. 342–44); 34:4–5, 13; 35:6–10; 13:9–19; 14:1–2 (pp. 334–36); 49:5–6, cf. 2 Cor 6:2 (pp. 416–17); 52:7–15, cf. Rom 15:21 (pp. 256–59); 53:4–12 (pp. 416–17); Jer 30:3–9 (pp. 230–31); Ezek 5:8–14 (pp. 319–21); 37:1–28 (pp. 342–44); Mic 5:2–4 (pp. 229–31); 7:5–15 (pp. 208–9). These passages constitute the majority of his evidence for his proposed sequence of events; yet, he rarely ever interacts with the interpretations of other scholars. There is no space here to demonstrate that most commentators differ with Pitre's interpretations, but see for example the comments on these passages by John N. Oswalt (*Isaiah 1–39*; and *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998]); J. A. Thompson (*The Book of Jeremiah* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980]); Daniel I. Block (*The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997]; and *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25–48* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998]); and Bruce K. Waltke, *Micah*.

⁵¹ E.g. Isa 10:20–22; 27:7–13; Isa 40:1–11; 48:20–49:13; 52:11–15; Jer 23:1–8; Ezek 34:11–24; and Hos 1:11.

scattered in exile, or as still exiled in the sense that they have not yet entered the kingdom of God, the true resolution to their loss of kingdom in the exile.

A note on the prophetic concept of land would be helpful. Thomas McComiskey demonstrates that in the prophets, the land to which only righteous Jews are promised to return after exile (e.g. Isa 60:21; 62:4) is sometimes expanded through the concept of Gentile inclusion to encompass the world (e.g. Isa 2:1–4; 54:3; Amos 9:12; Mic 4:11–13; 5:4–6, 8–9), the acquisition of which land will be achieved by the Messiah (Mic 5:2–4). This expansion is reflected in Paul's discussion of Abraham in Romans 4 (e.g. v. 4) and Galatians 3 (e.g. v. 8).⁵² Certainly, the concept of the new heaven and new earth in Revelation 21 fits this scheme of global inheritance. This perspective encourages the view that true restoration from the Assyrian/Babylonian exile was never to be merely to the old, limited physical land, but to the world, perhaps with the Promised Land somehow central. Luke-Acts, with its focus on Jesus and Jerusalem, and the expansion of the gospel to the nations, accords well.

In the light of the above discussion, it seems best to view the exile in its full theological sense as continuing into the NT period. Our analysis of the components of exile noted above suggests that God's promises about the state of the people after the exile (in terms of location, politically, economically, spiritually) are not fulfilled before the advent of the Messiah. There must be more to come.⁵³

IV. SECOND TEMPLE AND FIRST-CENTURY JEWISH PERSPECTIVE ON THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THE OLD TESTAMENT EXILE

Recent studies of the Second Temple Jewish understanding of their position before God mesh remarkably well with the biblical perspective presented above.⁵⁴ The evidence suggests that a significant representation of Jews believed that the nation was still in exile. It is more likely, however, that Jesus founded his exile theology on the OT (and his innate divine knowledge) rather than on the theological beliefs of his contemporaries,

⁵² McComiskey, *Covenants of Promise* 48–55.

⁵³ For a somewhat similar depiction, see David W. Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus* (Biblical Studies Library; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000) chap. 4.

⁵⁴ Hatina states, "During the Second Temple period, many in Palestine still considered themselves as being in exile because they were under foreign rule, which was an indication to the faithful that Yahweh had not yet returned to Zion (Ezra 9:8–9; Neh 9:36)." He continues, "The underlying reason why many Jews saw themselves as still remaining in exile was their assumed perennial state of sinfulness (Bar 1:15–3:8; *1 Enoch* 89:73–75)" ("Exile" 348–49). Regarding the few number of Jews who actually returned, see the variety of Second Temple texts noted by Craig A. Evans, including Tob 14:5: "But God will again have mercy on them, and God will bring them back into the land of Israel; and they will rebuild the temple of God . . . After this they all will return from their exile" ("Jesus and the Continuing Exile of Israel," in *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N. T. Wright's Jesus and the Victory of God* [ed. Carey C. Newman; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999] 87–91).

which to his thinking would not necessarily have divine basis. No doubt he was aware of these beliefs and communicated with the people in a manner that connected with those beliefs; but if he were merely reflecting popular exile theology, there would be no particular authority behind the teaching except where it coincidentally concurred with the truth. Under this presumption, the value of studying first-century Jewish thought is not to determine what Jesus believed, although it does help us to flesh this out, but to clarify the common theological language and set of ideas that Jesus took advantage of in communicating with his audiences. Accordingly, it is not essential for our argument to prove that the Jews believed they were still in exile, only that Jesus believed it; but if the former can be proven, then it serves to confirm the likelihood that Jesus entertained if not employed the idea. Our discussion need only be brief and, for brevity here, we will depend on the analysis of others.

The most influential recent work on Second Temple Jewish belief that the nation remained in a state of exile is that of N. T. Wright.⁵⁵ Certainly, there are scholars who anticipated or propounded this view many years earlier, such as John Bright;⁵⁶ but Wright has produced the most thorough defense. Indeed, he has his critics on this thesis.⁵⁷ For example, Pitre argues that Wright's treatment of the exiled Jews as a single group is wrong because only the northern tribes remained in exile, not the southern; and he argues that Wright consequently ignores the geographical aspect of exile, spiritualizing it, in order to have Jesus' Palestinian contemporaries still exiled.⁵⁸ However, see my responses to Pitre above that answer the latter concern and show the former to be unnecessary. Wright also has his supporters.⁵⁹ There is inadequate space here to evaluate thoroughly the scholarly discussion on the issue, so a brief summary of the evidence mustered by Wright and others will suffice.

Wright offers a précis of the historical circumstances for the Jews from the demise of Babylon to the Roman occupation. He notes that, apart from the brief period of independence after the Maccabean revolt, the nation never was politically independent. What is more, even in the autonomous century

⁵⁵ Wright defends his thesis that most Jews believed that they were still in exile both in *People of God* (268–72, 299–301) and in *Victory of God* (xvii–xviii, 126–27, 203–4). For similar views, see Scot McKnight, *A New Vision for Israel: The Teachings of Jesus in National Context* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Hatina, "Exile"; Evans, "Continuing Exile of Israel"; Daniel G. Reid, "Jesus: New Exodus, New Conquest," in *God is a Warrior* (ed. Tremper Longman III and Daniel G. Reid; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) 91–118; and Scott, ed., *Exile*.

⁵⁶ Bright suggested in the 1959 edition of *A History of Israel* that the promised post-exilic restoration of Israel was incomplete and that Second Temple Jewish eschatology cast the fulfilled restoration in the form of a new age, perhaps a messianic age. He develops this argument throughout chapter 12 and in the epilogue of the third edition of 1981.

⁵⁷ See, for example, Maurice Casey, "Where Wright is Wrong: A Critical Review of N. T. Wright's *Jesus and the Victory of God*," *JSNT* 69 (1998) 95–103.

⁵⁸ Pitre, *Jesus* 31–40.

⁵⁹ See C. A. Evans's evaluation ("Continuing Exile of Israel").

following the revolt, the political circumstances were far from what was anticipated under the restoration.⁶⁰ Wright states, "The ambiguity of the subsequent years, in which the heirs of the successful revolutionaries ruled as priest-kings, did not dim the sense of the victory of their god, but created the same sort of puzzle that was left after the so-called 'return from exile': a great vindication had occurred, but it now seemed as though there must be yet another one still to come."⁶¹

If this is an adequate summary, then the Jews of this period could justifiably consider the prophetic promises of national autonomy following the captivity to be unfulfilled, or at least only partially fulfilled. Jewish literature from the return from captivity to the time of Jesus somewhat regularly reflects this perspective, and to this we now turn.

N. T. Wright discusses a range of Jewish texts that speak in terms that suggest implicitly or explicitly that the nation is not yet restored from exile, or that it is finally being restored in the community from which that text emerges. These include Neh 9:36–37; 4QDa 1:3–11; Tob 14:5–7; Bar 3:6–8; and 2 Macc 1:27–29.⁶² Relating importantly to Pitre's contention that the exile of Judah ended at the decree of Cyrus and that Jews in Palestine would not consider themselves still in exile, Wright cites CD 1:3–11 as a text that depicts Judah still in exile long after the era of Ezra-Nehemiah.⁶³ Wright concludes, "Not until YHWH acted decisively to change things and restore the fortunes of his people would the exile be at an end. At the present time, the covenant people themselves were riddled with corruption, still undeserving of redemption."⁶⁴ Whether one agrees with all of his interpretations, he has indeed established something of a case.

VanderKam notes that there are two streams in Jewish apocalyptic literature regarding the duration of exile, "a specific limited, historical period, one with a beginning and an end separated only by a few decades," and "an ongoing condition that extends to the present time of the authors and beyond to the final judgment."⁶⁵ Three of his texts of the second type add to Wright's list, *1 Enoch* 93:1–10; 91:11–17; *T. Levi* 16–17; and *Jub* 1:7–18.⁶⁶ VanderKam sees these types of texts as either presuming the physical, historical return of the Jews or acknowledging it and then extending the non-physical "condition" further in time.⁶⁷ This is reasonable, but there is no clear reason in these texts not to see the physical state actually extending into the eschaton. It would simply require that the authors have interpreted the "return" in the Ezra-Nehemiah era as invalid or not conclusive.

⁶⁰ Wright, *People of God* 157–61.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 159.

⁶² *Ibid.* 268–72. Evans and Hatina provide an additional sixty or so texts (Evans, "Continuing Exile of Israel" 78, 80–91; and Hatina, "Exile" 349).

⁶³ Wright, *People of God* 269–70.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 272.

⁶⁵ Willem C. VanderKam, "Exile in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature," in *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Conceptions* (ed. J. M. Scott; Leiden: Brill, 1997) 91.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 95–96, 100–104. On the *1 Enoch* text Pitre concurs, adding Israel to Judah (*Jesus* 43–47).

⁶⁷ VanderKam, "Exile" 94–104, 109.

It is naturally difficult to determine what most Jews believed from extant documents, because individuals who may or may not have represented popular belief wrote them. One also may not be persuaded about the relevance of certain texts marshaled by scholars in defense of the view. Nevertheless, there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate at least a strong undercurrent of belief that the nation was still, in some sense, in exile. This conclusion is more than sufficient for our thesis that Jesus asserts, to some degree in concert with Jewish belief, that Israel remains in exile.

V. EXILE IN THE TEACHING OF JESUS

The purpose of this section is not to explicate precisely what Jesus taught about or presumed in his teaching regarding the exile, however useful that would be. For brevity's sake, we will demonstrate simply that Jesus significantly incorporated exile theology into his teaching. This will provide groundwork for our contention that Jesus based his quotation of Isaiah 6 on exile theology. In other words, if Jesus clearly shows an interest in exile theology elsewhere, then it is reasonable to assume that he could have it in mind in Mark 4:10–12 and parallels.

Craig Evans delineates several ways in which exile theology forms part of the foundation for Jesus' teaching and actions. His strongest two points are as follows. First, the appointment of twelve apostles may symbolize the reconstitution of the twelve tribes of Israel. Second, in the temple scene of Matt 21:12–13, Jesus' direct application of Isa 56:7, drawn from a section of Isaiah on restoration from exile, indicates his belief that that eschatological time had arrived.⁶⁸ We shall build on his foundation by briefly examining several quotations by Jesus of OT texts with the exile theme.

One such instance is where Jesus quotes Mic 7:6 ("For son treats father contemptuously, Daughter rises up against her mother, Daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; A man's enemies are the men of his own household.") in Luke 12:53 and Matt 10:35–36. This verse in Micah resides in a passage that justifies the Assyrian exile.⁶⁹ Micah 7:4–6, specifically, expects deep family division to occur in conjunction with God's punitive visit (פְּקֻדָּה), namely the inception of the impending exile.⁷⁰ The passage that follows (Mic 7:7–20) anticipates restoration from that exile and forgiveness for the sins that demanded it.⁷¹ In both Luke and Matthew Jesus quotes Mic 7:6 to support his mission statement, that he came to bring division. In Luke, the context of the quotation from Mic 7:6 is a lengthy eschatological discourse within which Jesus states his mission on earth (Luke 12:49–53). Here, the chronological component of Jesus' eschatology provides further means to discern how he understands his connection to the passage in Micah. Just as

⁶⁸ Evans, "Continuing Exile of Israel" 77–100.

⁶⁹ See Waltke, *Micah* 747–48.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 747–49.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 754–64.

in Micah (7:4), family division occurs in conjunction with God's visitation.⁷² For Jesus, this very visitation includes the incarnation (Luke 12:49–59), but also the parousia and the associated consummation of the kingdom, which Jesus speaks of earlier in the discourse. It appears, then, that he perceives himself as one who causes family division as expected by Micah in conjunction with divine punitive visitation, which in Jesus' scheme involves himself and culminates in the parousia. Further in line with Micah (7:13), Jesus envisages restoration (from exile) in the consummated kingdom following the parousia. My contention is that Jesus believed the punitive visitation of God in the OT exile was continuing, with the added significance now of his own divine presence. Forgiveness of the personal sins that contributed to the corporate exile is available in Jesus, through whom one exits exile and enters the kingdom. The full restoration expected by Micah must be experienced only after the full period of punishment that extends from the OT exile through the judgment at the parousia. In other words, Jesus explains his part in the chronological scheme of Micah, a scheme where familial division extends from the Assyrian invasion to the restoration that occurs throughout the church age and ultimately at the parousia.⁷³

If Jesus' conception of eschatology and his place in it resembles the above description, then his quotation and application of several other OT exile passages may be seen as direct (referring to a single salvation-historical period extending from the captivity through the incarnation) rather than merely analogous (comparing his own salvation-historical period with that of the exile). We will discuss just a couple more of these to illustrate. One example is found after Jesus gives mission instructions to the twelve, when John the Baptist asks Jesus whether he is the "Coming One," the Messiah (Matt 11:1–3). Jesus responds (Matt 11:5) with a strong verbal allusion to, virtually a quotation of, Isa 35:5–6a ("Then the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer"). Oswalt believes that Isa 35:1–10 encompasses three or more separate concepts: "a literal return from exile, a millennial kingdom, a spiritual condition to which these statements bear a typological reference, etc."⁷⁴ Need these concepts in fact be entirely separate? If, as argued in this article, the close of the exile is a process and not a punctiliar or brief event, then all three may legitimately be incorporated together. How so? The physical return appears at the beginning of the lengthy process and is only anticipatory of things to come. Those who step out of exile through faith in Christ proleptically receive spiritual blessing akin to, but only a foretaste of, what will be. Finally, the kingdom is consummated, and Isa 35:1–10 is fully realized. In

⁷² Pitre attempts to place the familial discord that Micah refers to purely in the messianic period. Micah clearly sees it commencing with the Assyrian invasion. Pitre also suggests that the restoration of Mic 7:8–18 would begin after the period of familial discord, yet there is nothing in the text to require that sequence. The refrain, "in that day" (7:11, 12), allows for overlap. Pitre, *Jesus* 208, 259–61. See also Waltke, *Micah* 745–64.

⁷³ See Waltke's discussion of Mic 7:1–13 (*Micah* 745–58).

⁷⁴ Oswalt, *Isaiah* 1–39 620–21.

other words, the single intended fulfillment of the marvelous description of restoration from exile in Isa 35:1–10 may occur gradually or in stages such that there appear to be separate fulfillments that are in fact aspects of the one progressive fulfillment.

Another instance of a quotation with the protracted exile/restoration theme is Isa 29:13 (LXX) in Mark 7:6–7, “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far away from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men” (par. Matt 15:8–9). Jesus states that Isaiah was prophesying about the Pharisees and teachers of the law that Jesus was addressing (Matt 15:7). He *equates* his audience with the very people whose insincerity, according to Isaiah, resulted in the devastation and exile of the prophet’s era.⁷⁵ If Jesus (and the Jewish leaders) held to the continuation of the exile, then his quotation would naturally imply the exiled state of the Jewish leaders and would not be anachronistic. The leaders would merely be a subset of a *chronologically* much larger group.

Other OT quotations by Jesus that apparently engage the protracted exile/restoration theme are Isa 29:13 (LXX) in Mark 7:6–7 (par. Matt 15:8–9); Isa 56:7 in Mark 11:17 (par. Matt 21:13; Luke 19:46); Dan 7:13 in Mark 13:26 (par. Matt 24:30; Luke 21:27) and Mark 14:62 (par. Matt 26:64); Dan 7:21 in Mark 13:26 (par. Matt 24:30; Luke 21:27); Zech 13:7 in Mark 14:27 (par. Matt 26:31); Isa 61:1–2 (LXX) in Luke 4:18–19; Isa 53:12 in Luke 22:37; Hos 10:8 in Luke 23:30; and Isa 54:13 in John 6:45. We must, however, move on.

If the reader is interested in an extensive treatment of exile theology in Jesus’ teaching and actions, N. T. Wright provides this throughout *Jesus and the People of God*.⁷⁶ His arguments are often quite general and involve insufficiently tested assertions that could be countered by equally strong opposing assertions (which is possibly a consequence of the massive scope of the book), but he is regularly persuasive. Unfortunately, he does not offer substantial comment on the OT quotations of Jesus, but his chosen line of argumentation is quite useful.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ The immediate context of Isa 29:13, namely 29:1–16, does not explicitly mention exile, but focuses on the destruction of Jerusalem and the spiritual blindness of its people. Captivity, however, is introduced in 28:13. (For the view that 28:13 refers to the captivity, see Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 19–39* [NICOT 2; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969] 280). So the reader knows in advance that Ariel’s (Jerusalem) destruction, described in chapter 29, involves captivity.

⁷⁶ Wright, *Victory of God*. See especially pages 126–29, 226–27, 243, 248, 363–64, 428–30, 436, 445–46, and 470.

⁷⁷ Hatina, “Exile” 349–50, helpfully summarizes Wright’s conclusions on the exile in the teaching and activities of Jesus:

According to Wright, Jesus understood himself to be the Messiah who had come to liberate Israel from its continuing state of exile (“the present evil age”) and bring it into a state of restoration (“the age to come”). He came as a messiah who not only represented the people of Yahweh by taking on himself the suffering of the nation in the tradition of the Jewish martyrs and the wrath of disobedient Israel but also enacted their liberation from exile by intentionally dying in order to achieve victory over Satan, who constituted the true enemy of Israel. The result is a renewal of the covenant, the forgiveness of sins, the coming of the kingdom of God and the fulfillment of Israel’s original mission to be a servant people who are a light to the world.

From the evidence above, Jesus engages in exile theology to a degree that makes it exceedingly reasonable to expect that he could be expressing it in Mark 4:10–12 and parallels.⁷⁸ We are now prepared to draw together all the threads of our discussion so far into a new understanding of Jesus' statement regarding the purpose of his parables.

VI. A NEW PROPOSAL

We have covered much ground and examined perhaps all of the pieces necessary to assemble adequately a new proposal, aside from direct comment on the purpose texts, which will follow shortly. Throughout the article I have been careful to speak tentatively where necessary. While assembling the proposal in this section, I will assume the factuality of earlier tentative conclusions to demonstrate with less verbal clutter (statements such as "If Jesus believed . . .") that the proposal is coherent and fits the exegetical and theological data of the passages on the purpose of Jesus' parables and their contexts.

Isaiah is commissioned in chapter 6 to preach the mind of God to his people with such clarity that their already rebellious hearts will harden still further.⁷⁹ God's purpose is to justify the punishment of exile for the full duration justly required by their incessant rebellion. The punishment will endure not just until the decree of Cyrus, but at least until the advent of the Messiah.

The OT typically portrays the exile as more than physical captivity. It additionally involves politico-economic and spiritual components. The witness of relevant OT texts and history is that restoration from all three components is at best partial by the first century. Even the returns following Cyrus' decree either failed to be valid because of continued unfaithfulness, or they were only preparatory or perhaps initial. Therefore the OT exile in its full theological sense continues. Accordingly, consistent with Jewish reasoning exemplified in Hebrews 4, God's promise of restoration remains open for those who "return" in the manner God stipulates because the promise has never been "cashed in."

Many Jews of Jesus' day believe that they are still in exile because they recognize that God's restoration promises are not fully realized. Jesus draws this theological perspective from the OT and employs it in his teaching as common ground with his audiences. This is particularly evident in his frequent quotation from OT texts with strong exile theology. He applies these texts to his audiences not indirectly but as though they are specifically intended for them. This is not a mere *peshet* technique that may violate the original meaning of the OT passages because, in fact, the original meaning legitimately incorporates the Jews of Jesus' day. Indeed, the prophets foresee

⁷⁸ There is much to commend in this position, but there are also some points for good contention. A good case can be made that approximately one quarter of the OT passages from which Jesus quotes in the four Gospels has the exile as a major theme.

⁷⁹ See Motyer, *Isaiah* 79.

a lengthy process of restoration from exile that begins at the physical return from captivity and continues through to the conclusion of the Messiah's restorative ministry at the consummation of the kingdom, and the Jews corporately remain rebellious and exiled throughout this period.

On one occasion of Jesus' teaching in parables, after the disciples realize his propensity to use them, they ask him about the matter. Not surprisingly, his response engages the theme of exile and employs an OT quotation heavily laden with that theme. Now we must approach the purpose of parables texts directly. Our purpose is not to exegete them comprehensively, but only sufficiently to demonstrate that exile is the governing theology for a proper understanding of Jesus' intention.⁸⁰

Mark specifies that the twelve and others with them approach Jesus after the parable of the sower (4:10). Matthew and Luke use the more general "disciples," probably intending the same group (Matt 13:10; Luke 8:9). In Mark and Matthew, Jesus is asked about the "parables," whereas in Luke he is asked about the "parable." Consequently, we should expect Jesus' response in Mark and Matthew quite naturally to cover his reason for using the parabolic genre. In Luke, we expect the answer to clarify the individual parable of the sower. All three Gospels, however, provide both Jesus' parabolic theory and his explanation of the parable. Jesus probably recognizes that their question, whatever the precise form, actually involves both elements. In fact, there appear to be sufficient points of contact between the parable of the sower and Jesus' theory of parables such that a question about the parable of the sower deserves comment about the use of parables in general. First, the parable depicts Jesus distributing the "word," in other words his teaching. The parable theory is about Jesus' use of parables, his preferred method of teaching. Second, according to the parable, Jesus indiscriminately disseminates teaching to people who respond variously, but ultimately most of them negatively. In the theory, parables are told to the crowd, who is generally characterized as hardened to the teaching. Third, the minority who respond favorably in the parable produce a crop, which in the Prophets is stock imagery for the restoration (kingdom) community (e.g. Isaiah 27; 55:10–13; 60:21; 65:21–22; 66:20; Jer 31:27–28; 36:29–30). In the theory, the few disciples around Jesus are described as in the kingdom (see the argument below), though admittedly there would be saved individuals in the crowd. The parallels between the parable and the theory will become clearer as we progress.

The opening of Jesus' answer has received much attention because of the variation in wording across the Synoptics.

Mark 4:11 ὑμῖν τὸ μυστήριον δέδοται τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ· ἐκείνοις δὲ τοῖς ἔξω ἐν παραβολαῖς τὰ πάντα γίνεται ("To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but to those who are outside everything is in parables")

⁸⁰ For a comprehensive exegesis, see Joel Marcus, *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God* (SBLDS 90; ed. Charles Talbert; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986).

- Matt 13:11 ὅτι ὑμῖν δέδοται γνῶναι τὰ μυστήρια τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν, ἐκεῖνοις δὲ οὐ δέδοται (“To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted”)
- Luke 8:10 ὑμῖν δέδοται γνῶναι τὰ μυστήρια τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ, τοῖς δὲ λοιποῖς ἐν παραβολαῖς (“To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest *it is* in parables”)

We shall make a few observations.

Notice that Mark says, “the mystery (sg.) of the kingdom . . . has been given,” and Matthew and Luke read, “given to *know* the mysteries (pl.) of the kingdom.” The word “mystery” is important here. We can safely abandon any idea of conscious dependence on or direct reference to the mystery religions.⁸¹ Rather, it likely has the Semitic sense (which has some degree of overlap with the Hellenistic sense) of “divine plans or decrees, often passed on in veiled language, known only to the elect, and usually relating to eschatological events.”⁸² Here it probably refers to God’s plan of entry into the kingdom through Jesus.

Before discussing the pluralizing of μυστήριον, a comment on δίδωμι is beneficial. Many commentaries note that the reader more expects a mystery to be revealed (ἀποκαλύπτω), or something akin to this, rather than to be “given.” Matthew and Luke insert γινώσκω for clarification. Although there is nothing to say that “give” cannot be used to mean “reveal,” there is perhaps a better reason for the presence of δίδωμι. If Jesus merely intends that the disciples have some degree of an intellectual grasp of the kingdom, then one

⁸¹ See W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew, Chapters 1–7* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988) 389; and D. A. Carson, *Matthew* (EBC 8; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 307. An interesting study of the term μυστήριον in the Hellenistic and Semitic milieu is A. E. Harvey, “The Use of Mystery Language in the Bible,” *JTS* 31 (1980) 320–36. Harvey argues convincingly that although the term probably obtained a technical sense early in its usage in the mystery cults, and that aspects of that sense may have remained attached to it in other contexts, the mere use of the term in those other contexts does not infer direct contact with the mystery cults. The word with its multifaceted nuances overlapped with shades of meaning desired even by writers who had little or no knowledge of the mystery cults, and so was in such instances used with no intention of allusion to or dependence on the cults. He notes that along with the Hellenistic sense of the term exists the “Semitic” sense. The distinction he observes is that in the Greek sense “the mystery is something which, by definition, is never to be spoken or revealed; only the initiates have access to it” (p. 330); or, in other terms, it is “an esoteric philosophical discipline, accessible by its very nature only to an inner group” (p. 336), whereas in the Semitic sense the mystery is “a secret design, known only to God, which is due to be revealed to certain privileged individuals” (p. 329). R. E. Brown holds that all instances of the term in the NT are of the Semitic kind (*The Semitic Background of the Term “Mystery” in the New Testament* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968] 69), but Harvey concludes that some carry the Hellenistic sense in addition to the Semitic, such as in the purpose of parables passage. Harvey’s distinction in meaning is perhaps too subtle to be particularly useful. Brown may well be right in his conclusion “that, considering the variety and currency of the concept of divine mysteries in Jewish thought, Paul and the New Testament writers could have written everything they did about mysterion whether or not they ever encountered the pagan mystery religions. ‘Mystery’ was part of the native theological equipment of the Jews who came to Christ.” (*Mystery* 69).

⁸² Carson, *Matthew* 307.

would expect a term appropriate to intellectual understanding. But if he intended the broader sense of understanding accompanied by actual experience of the kingdom, then *δίδομι* is eminently suited. A mystery, in the NT sense, is sometimes something that may be experienced, whether consciously or not, such as Christ's presence in the believer, Gentile inclusion, and salvation through the gospel (see e.g. 1 Cor 2:6–10; 15:51–52; Eph 1:9–10; 3:1–9; 5:25–32; 6:19; Col 1:25–27; 2:1–7; 4:2–4). It would not have been entirely sensible for Jesus to say that an experience is revealed, but it is sensible to say that an experience is given. One may object that Matthew and Luke add *γινώσκω*, which lends a cognitive sense to the concept. E. D. Schmitz, however, observes that in classical, LXX, and NT usage, experience is fundamental to the sense of *γινώσκω*, even when the knowledge referred to is theoretical.⁸³ He states, "In the OT, as with common Gk. attitude, knowledge is derived through the senses; the thing to be known must present itself to the senses and so let itself be known The concepts of knowing in Gk. and Heb. thought largely coincide, and for both experience through the senses is fundamental."⁸⁴ Furthermore, theoretical knowledge may be gained through non-sensory experience.⁸⁵ He concludes that apart from cases where there is anti-*proto-Gnostic* polemic, the NT concept is drawn from the OT.⁸⁶ Indeed, there is probably no better word in NT Greek for the verbal idea "to experience." With these things in mind, it is natural for Matthew and Luke to "clarify" Mark by inserting "to know." Mark asserts tersely that the disciples have been given (*δίδομι*) their experiential presence in and knowledge of (*μυστήριον*) the kingdom of God. Matthew and Luke expand the statement, explicating the concept of experience with the sense resident in the word *γινώσκω*.⁸⁷ If all of this is close to correct, then the phrases, "given the secret of the kingdom," and "given to know the secrets of the kingdom," mean essentially the same thing, with the plural emphasizing the multi-faceted nature of kingdom experience.

Next, Jesus contrasts the experience of the disciples with others. Mark reads, "but to those outside everything is in parables"; Matthew has, "but to them it has not been given"; and Luke, "to the rest [?] in parables" (my translations). My proposal is that we should *generally* construe the contrast between insiders and outsiders along the lines of exile, given the rich exile theology in the immediate and broad contexts provided by each Gospel, given Jesus' interest in exile theology, and given the prominent kingdom theme (the kingdom being that which you enter when you leave exile) in the purpose

⁸³ E. D. Schmitz, "Knowledge (*γινώσκω*)," *NIDNTT* 2.392–406.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 395. Schmitz notes the purpose of parables passages as among the extremely rare instances of apparently theoretical knowledge implied by *γινώσκω*. He lists three others (Col 1:26; 2:2; and Rom 6:6), but explains how experience is implied in these through the concepts of relationship and obedience (p. 401). He neglects to observe that the concept of experience rests comfortably in the purpose of parables passages as well.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 392–93.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 398–401.

⁸⁷ Carson, emphasizing the giving (revelation) of the *content* of the secret / mystery, nevertheless does note the *experiential* nature of the kingdom's presence (*Matthew* 307).

of parables passages. The disciples, who are a group of individuals who have been given the experience of the kingdom (i.e. essentially all members of this group are no longer in exile, Judas excepted), are distinguished from those "outside" the group of disciples, "the rest," "them." The distinction is not between those who are in the kingdom and those who are not, because there would certainly be those in the crowd who were true followers of Jesus. Rather, the distinction is between a group of individuals who are indeed in the kingdom (the disciples) and a mixed group representative of the broader, exiled Jewish community (the crowd).⁸⁸

We are now ready to examine Jesus' comment on the role of parables in the distinction he has just drawn. Notice that the contrast Jesus draws between the two groups is not strictly along the lines of who understands the parables, unless Jesus and/or the evangelists are carelessly mistaken. It is often observed that in the Synoptics disciples and non-disciples grasp the parables to varying degrees, from little to near fully. Furthermore, Jesus does not define the distinction between the groups in terms of whether he speaks parables to them or not. In all three Synoptics Jesus relates parables to disciples and non-disciples alike. We should not read Jesus as saying in Mark, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God; but those who are outside get everything in parables (end of sentence)," as though the disciples do not get parables. Jesus says, "those who are outside get everything in parables *so that . . .*" The quotation from Isaiah that follows declares the crowd, representative of the Jewish nation, to be in a state of exile. The contrast Jesus envisages is primarily in the state of the two groups, and consequently the manner in which he speaks to them.⁸⁹ The disciples are in the kingdom, and the crowd as a generic entity is exiled, and parables are most appropriate for their state. (We will say more on the appropriateness of parables shortly.) In terms of the parable of the sower, the disciples are not soils that need sowing, but the crowd is just that. Matthew seems to confirm this emphasis on the state of people in his insertion of 13:12 before the Isaiah quotation, "For whoever has, to him shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him." In this saying, action is taken based on the state of the person, not vice versa. The same is true of Matthew's addition at

⁸⁸ The Matthean wording in 13:11 allows this distinction but more seems to ignore the presence of saved people in the crowd, creating a more radicalized difference between the two groups. Employing this distinction also resolves the tensions in Mark's account that Michael D. Goulder both notes and unsuccessfully attempts to resolve by different means while still positing that Mark was muddled ("Those Outside [Mk. 4:10–12]," *NouT* 33 [1991] 289–302).

François Bovon comes close to this by suggesting that the distinction is between Christians and Israel. This, however, does not account for the mixed nature of "the others," to whom Jesus speaks in parable, some of whom would be followers of Jesus (*Luke* 1 311–13).

⁸⁹ If one objects that the word *μυστήριον* in the context predisposes the reader to think mainly in terms of the manner of Jesus' communication, a mysterious manner, R. E. Brown's observation about the structure of Mark 4:10–12 is relevant. He notes that *μυστήριον* is not parallel to *παραβολαῖς*, and after a brief analysis concludes "that the *μυστήριον* has no intrinsic connection with the parabolic form of teaching" (*Mystery* 34).

13:13, “Therefore (διὰ τοῦτο) I speak to them in parables; because (ὅτι) while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.”⁹⁰ Jesus uses parables because of the state of the people. Immediately, Matthew further confirms their exiled state in Jesus’ statement that Isa 6:9–10 is fulfilled in them (Matt 13:14–15).

If the state of the people in the two groups is Jesus’ focus in the purpose of parables section, and if Jesus bases his communication with people on their state, then the quotation of Isa 6:9–10 would primarily define the Jewish crowd as exiled and, based on that, would explain why Jesus spoke in parables to the crowd. The fact that he used parables with the disciples is not a significant issue, because he also explained parables to them and taught them without parables. Indeed, the disciples do not question why he used parables with them. Consistent with our discussion of the OT quotations above, Jesus here considers Isaiah’s exile-worthy audience literally to extend to his own time and legitimately applies the passage directly to the Jews of his day.

Now the question arises of why parables are the chosen form of communication. This question has received much scholarly attention, but we will not review the proposals. Rather, we will show what our discussion above recommends. Craig Blomberg argues rightly that the evangelists portray the crowds as understanding Jesus’ parables. His contention is that parables subtly bring people to a decision on sensitive matters and more effectively so than direct speech. Contrary to the view of some scholars, he sees the parables not as primarily obscuring, but as clarifying.⁹¹ This fits the picture of Isaiah’s ministry where the clarity of his message was to harden the hearts of the people even further, far enough to maintain their exile for the duration that God had determined.⁹² It is reasonable to note, as many do, that most people failed to understand the parables *fully* due to lack of faith. Even the disciples needed further explanation (Mark 4:34), though they generally understood (Matt 13:51). This partial understanding also resulted from Isaiah’s ministry. But Jesus does indeed make his teaching on the kingdom accessible to his audiences. If we take ἀκούειν, “to hear” (Mark 4:33) in the Semitic sense of comprehension (and perhaps personal engagement),⁹³

⁹⁰ In the NT, in διὰ τοῦτο . . . ὅτι constructions where the ὅτι clause does not supply the content of speech, it provides the ground of the διὰ τοῦτο clause.

⁹¹ Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* 53–55. The few parables that are particularly confusing to most modern readers (e.g. Luke 16:1–13) were probably more clear to the original audience/readers (see Luke 16:14) because they were more culturally attuned to the concepts and terminology than we are.

⁹² N. T. Wright correctly identifies the exilic theological context and content of the purpose of parables pericopes and the correspondence between Jesus’ ministry and Isaiah’s; but he unfortunately misses the correspondence between the clarity of Isaiah’s communication and Jesus’. Rather, he takes Jesus’ quotation of Isa 6:9–10 to mean that Jesus wishes to obscure his teaching that the Jews are still in exile in order to avoid conflict with his opponents, in line with Wright’s view on the Messianic Secret (*Victory of God* 236–39).

⁹³ On the Semitic sense of the word found in NT usage, see W. Mundle, “Hear, Obey (ἀκούω),” *NIDNTT* 2.173–78.

Mark appears to affirm that the crowds understood to some degree when he summarizes, "And with many such parables He was speaking the word to them, so far as they were able to hear it" (καθὼς ἠδύναντο ἀκούειν), "hearing" having the Semitic sense of understanding. If Jesus sees himself as continuing Isaiah's proclamation of God's mind to a people who are generally still rebellious, still nationally in exile, and he does so with the same intent of maintaining their general hardness and consequent exile, then the parabolic form of speech must particularly serve this function. (We need not infer that Jesus desired unanimous hardness.) Isaiah 28:9–13 informs us that the people complained that the prophet's message lacked complexity and sophistication, that it seemed like teaching for children; but actually it was the very word of God, more sophisticated and complex than at first sight.⁹⁴ Isaiah 30:8–11 further shows that Israel rejected Isaiah's message because they wanted pleasant teaching without the "Holy One of Israel" confronting them. In the parabolic genre, Jesus chooses a form of communication that has remarkably deceptive complexity and sophistication while being the very word of God. Parables sound like teaching for children. Their message, far from being pleasant, often declares the majority of his audience to be yet outside the kingdom (e.g. the parable of the sower) and/or under divine judgment. Jesus may well have chosen the parabolic genre and the content of his message to bear the same function and yield the same results as Isaiah's proclamation.⁹⁵ It was to harden the hard but call the responsive to return to God, in a sense creating/clarifying the faithful remnant.⁹⁶ Accordingly, parables, with their special capacity to bring people to the point of decision where the person must either harden or soften, are the perfect mode of teaching for a crowd mixed with respect to its responsiveness to God (parable of the sower). They are less essential, but still very appropriate, as a mode of teaching for those who have already responded favorably, as with the disciples. This distinction in appropriateness matches the distinction drawn in Mark 4:11–12.

It is essential to note that in our proposal the portion of Isa 6:10 that speaks of God's desire not to heal/forgive does not refer to individual salvation.⁹⁷ God's intent according to Jesus is to maintain the *corporate* exile of the Jews through continued hardening in response to Jesus' teaching. Isaiah 1 speaks of the reason for Israel's punishment in broad terms of rebellion. According to Isa 1:19–20, general obedience would bring healing.

⁹⁴ Motyer, *Isaiah* 231–32.

⁹⁵ Indeed, Isaiah employs many parables, usually non-narrative. Some of Jesus' recorded parables are probably founded directly on Isaiah's imagery (e.g. Mark 12:1–12 par. on Isa 5:1–7; Matt 12:29 on Isa 49:24; Matt 25:35–36 on Isa 58:7). It is possible that he even took the idea of preaching in parables from his reading of Isaiah.

⁹⁶ For a thorough study, see Gerhard F. Hasel, *The Remnant: The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea from Genesis to Isaiah* (Andrews University Monographs; Studies in Religion 5; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1974) 216–348, but especially 394–403. Hasel sees the preaching of Isaiah as playing a role in the formation of the holy/faithful remnant. He also understands the remnant to be fundamentally eschatological in Isaiah.

⁹⁷ Mark, Matthew, and *Tg. Isa.* have "forgive," the MT has "heal," and Luke omits that portion of the verse.

Were the Jews, anytime from Isaiah to Jesus, to repent corporately, God would in his merciful character have to terminate the exile (which was contingent on their continuing rebellion) before its predetermined duration and bring restoration (healing/forgiveness) to them corporately. To do so would perpetuate the failed old covenant order (see Jer 31:32), postpone the advent of the Messiah, and delay the prophesied inclusion of the Gentiles in the messianic period, among other adverse consequences. Under Jesus' ministry, a corporate response of behavioral purity, rallied in the people by a Jesus who fit their messianic expectations, might remove the rebellion that caused the exilic punishment, but it would not be the faith response to the Messiah that God had determined was necessary for salvation under the new covenant. This makes sense of how Jesus could say through quoting Isa 6:10, taking ἵνα (Mark 4:12) and μήποτε (Mark 4:12; Matt 13:15) with their full final force, that he spoke in parables with the intent that those outside be hardened, "lest" (aversion) they be forgiven corporately. Taking the corporate line above, consistent with the Isaianic sense, means that Jesus was simply not talking about individual salvation when referring to healing/forgiveness; but individual salvation is indeed involved in the context. Jesus considers the disciples individually out of exile, part of the faithful remnant, in the kingdom. The only means of creating this distinction in Jesus' theology is by individually becoming his follower. (Note the individuality of gathering from exile in Isa 27:12–13; Jer 3:14; and 51:6.) Therefore, the individual is restored from the continuing exile, which began centuries ago, through following Jesus. In the consummated kingdom, when the entire remnant intended by God is gathered and restored, both Jews and Gentiles, all the yet unfulfilled aspects of God's restoration promises will be fully realized, physically, politico-economically, and spiritually.

In summary, Jesus speaks to the crowds in a manner appropriate for exiled people who must remain in exile for God's salvation-historical plans to be fulfilled and who must be individually driven to a response by a "divisive" form of teaching. Those who return to God through heeding Jesus' call individually step out of exile and into the kingdom. Nevertheless, the remaining Jews (and, generically speaking, both kingdoms) are still in corporate exile. In this view, the "return" from exile occurs gradually until it is completed at the consummation of the kingdom when the faithful remnant is fully gathered.

VII. CONCLUSION

When the meaning of Isa 6:9–10 is understood in its OT context and that understanding brought to the quotation of the passage by Jesus in the purpose of parables pericopes, a much more satisfactory interpretation results than the standard ones. Rather than Jesus taking the passage out of context and applying it either to the concept of individual salvation (which drives many scholars to save Jesus from the idea of desiring some not to be saved), or to his supposed attempt to obscure his message from the Jewish leaders, instead he is declaring that most Jews are still *corporately* in exile. Jesus divides his audience into two groups: disciples of Jesus, who as a group are restored

from exile (at very least the spiritual component) and are in the kingdom, and the crowd, who as a group (spiritually mixed) are still fundamentally characterized by corporate exile, and his employment of parables suits this division, especially with respect to the crowd. Individual salvation only relates as the means by which the individual may be restored from exile. This position avoids the difficulties resident in other proposals (such as asserting grammatically unnatural translations), is theologically compatible with Jesus' theology and with OT theology, and appears not to introduce new difficulties. Furthermore, for the student of the Gospels it flags the importance of the "restoration from exile" theme in Jesus' teaching.

Our study has important implications for broader biblical research, and these will be traced only briefly here. The eschatological scheme espoused above, that the Assyrian/Babylonian exile continues until the consummation of the kingdom of God, with no valid or conclusive physical return yet having occurred, and that a Jew exits this exile by entering the kingdom (in a sense proleptically) through faith in the Messiah, provides a provocative framework for understanding many NT and OT eschatological passages. In line with this, the fact that the scheme is inherent in *many* of the prophets from whom Jesus and the evangelists draw (Acts 2:17–26 is particularly relevant) means that the various "Isaianic New Exodus" approaches may have only detected a subset of what is happening in the restoration theology of the respective NT books.⁹⁸ For OT scholarship, this eschatological scheme suggests that there is no need to see certain prophetic restoration texts as having two separate referents, historical restoration and eschatological, but rather one long period of restoration. Finally, with respect to our understanding of Jesus' use of the OT, there is less need to see typological fulfillment in Jesus' interpretations of OT texts, especially whenever this eschatological scheme applies (e.g. Isa 61:1–2 in Luke 4:18–19).

⁹⁸ For example, Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus and Mark*, and Pao, *Acts*. These approaches certainly demonstrate some degree of authorial awareness of the Isaianic New Exodus (INE). However, they fail to note both that the eschatological scheme espoused in this article is common in the prophetic literature, and that several themes that they designate "Isaianic" are found throughout the prophets, even in those that are quoted or alluded to in the NT books under their examination. The better theme to highlight is perhaps "the prophetic theology of restoration from exile" rather than the "Isaianic New Exodus." These INE approaches are often quite selective of their data from Isaiah and frequently see ever so subtle exodus motifs when they need them. Commentators on Isaiah are usually much more conservative in the identification of exodus allusions in Isaiah and in the estimation of their significance, even in the most important section of Isaiah for INE proponents, Isaiah 40–55 (66). See, e.g., Oswalt (*Isaiah 1–39 and Isaiah 40–66*); Motyer (*Isaiah*); and even Watts, who strongly acknowledges the Isaianic New Exodus but makes relatively little of it (*Isaiah 1–33 and Isaiah 34–66*). INE approaches often involve nudging data, emphasizing the incidental, and drawing convoluted thematic connections between Isaiah and the NT book. Additionally, there are many narratival, historical, and non-Isaianic reasons for the various phenomena that they observe, yet they do not address them. Finally, they apply very few controls that limit subjectivity and encourage confidence that their observations are authorially intended. Nevertheless, they have broken important new ground.