



Matt Reier, *Jesus Heals a Lame Man on the Sabbath*, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

The Lord's responses to the stranger and disabled continue to provide solace and respite for those who feel like they don't fit the correct mold.

## “The Lord God Which Gathereth the Outcasts” (Isaiah 56:3–8)

DANIEL BELNAP

Daniel Belnap ([dan\\_belnap@byu.edu](mailto:dan_belnap@byu.edu)) is an associate professor of ancient scripture at BYU.

During the last week of his ministry, Christ was asked what the great commandment was, and in his answer he suggested two, the last being “love thy neighbor as thyself” (Mark 12:31). Though not stated by Christ, this commandment, found in Leviticus 19:18, is then followed by a similar commandment to love the stranger “as thyself” (19:34). These two principles reflected one of the great principles of the law—the care for the marginalized outsider.<sup>1</sup> Yet the plight of the marginalized was not only realized in the law, it was also found in the writings of the prophets. One such place is Isaiah 56, which gives voice to these marginalized groups as well as reveals the beautiful promises God proclaimed for all his children.

### Israel and the Stranger

Israel's relationship to the stranger was a complicated one. Instruction concerning that relationship appears throughout all three of the biblical law codes outlining the responsibilities, privileges, and restrictions that governed both groups.<sup>2</sup> Complicating the issue is the fact that three different Hebrew

words—*gêr*, *zâr*, *nokri/ben nekâr*—are translated as “stranger.”<sup>3</sup> The terms are not interchangeable but reflect different aspects or situations in which strangers may find themselves in relation to Israel. By far the most common use is the stranger as *gêr*, one who appears to live among the Israelites in their communities and neighborhoods. Though neighbors, the distinction between the Israelite and the *gêr* was apparently clear. In fact, the chief instruction given to Israel regarding the *gêr* was not to vex or oppress the stranger (Exodus 22:21), suggesting that the stranger was a marginalized minority who could easily be taken advantage of like other marginalized social cohorts, such as the poor, the widowed, and the fatherless.

Legally, this meant that the stranger was to be accorded the same legal rights as Israel. For instance, Deuteronomy 1:16–17, which consists of instruction given to judges, emphasized that the judge was to “judge righteously between every man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him. Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great.” Later, in Deuteronomy 24:17, Israel was commanded to “not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless”; similarly, in Leviticus 24:22, following a passage concerning the principle of just compensation for willful wrongdoing, the Lord declared: “Ye shall have one manner of law, as well for the stranger, as for one of your own country.” The same language is used in those texts regarding cultic practice—that is, temple worship. In Numbers 15:14, the stranger sojourning among the greater Israelite community may offer “an offering made by fire; . . . as ye do, so he shall do.” The next instruction follows: “One ordinance shall be both for you of the congregation, and also for the stranger that sojourneth with you. . . . One law and one manner shall be for you, and for the stranger that sojourneth with you” (15:15–16). This directive is repeated a few verses later regarding sin offerings for ignorant acts, while those who perform premeditated acts, either a natural Israelite or a stranger, receive the same penalty.

It even appears that the stranger was allowed to participate in important communal rites. Numbers 19 describes the process by which Israel obtained the “water of separation,” an item necessary to purify those who had touched or handled the dead. The process included the slaughter of a red heifer and burning the carcass outside the tabernacle. Following its consumption by fire, the ashes were gathered and stored in order to be mixed with water. This mixture was the water of separation, which was then sprinkled on the one handling the dead or on anything that came into contact with the dead. This

ordinance was important, for “whosoever toucheth the dead body of any man that is dead, and purifieth not himself, defileth the tabernacle of the Lord, and that soul shall be cut off from Israel; because the water of separation was not sprinkled upon him” (19:13). While a priest was required for the performance of the slaughter, at least two others were mentioned: (1) “he that burneth,” or actually places the carcass on the fire (19:8), and (2) the one who gathers up the ashes (19:9). All three individuals were to be unclean for the remainder of the day following the performance of the slaughter. That a stranger could be one of the other two appears to be the case as noted in verse 10: “And he that gathereth the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the even: and it shall be unto the children of Israel, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among them, for a statute for ever.” Thus, not only was a stranger to be held to the same standard of purification, it was also possible that they could participate directly in an ordinance that benefited the entire community.

This last example suggests that Israel’s relationship with the stranger was expected to be more than simply tolerance. In fact, Israel was not to oppress the stranger because “ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.” These allusions to Israel’s own history of marginalization meant that their own experience was to guide their interaction with the stranger, for “ye know the heart of a stranger” (Exodus 23:9). This empathy was expected to engender love, as the Israelite was told to love the stranger “as thyself” (Leviticus 19:34). Such empathy could be expressed during those times of the year that coincided with the feasts and festivals ancient Israel kept. Deuteronomy 16 describes the manner in which Israel was to celebrate the Feast of the Weeks and the Feast of the Tabernacles, respectively: “And thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite that is within thy gates, and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow” (19:11).

As the verse suggests, these festivals were meant to be joyful occasions in which the entire household rested from daily work and remembered the inclusive relationship between themselves and God, often highlighting those events when God himself interacted on their behalf. The feasts also coincided with the agricultural calendar, meaning they often represented periods of plenty and harvest. The instruction to include the marginalized in the celebrations meant more than merely taking care of their physical needs, but their

social needs as well. Thus, hospitality was to be a trademark of the Israelite's relationship with the stranger.<sup>4</sup>

The empathy could also be reflected in Israel's concern over the stranger's general welfare. As noted earlier, the stranger was often grouped with other marginalized socialities who appear not to have had land of their own upon which they could acquire sustenance. In light of this plight, Israel was commanded in a number of instances to make sure that when they reaped their harvest they leave sections of it unharvested and that they not glean a field again once the harvest was completed; instead what remained behind "thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger" (Leviticus 19:10; cf. 23:22). Deuteronomy 24:19–22 is even more encompassing as it incorporates the harvest of olives and grapes as well, stating that the produce left after the initial harvest was "for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow" (24:19). In similar fashion, the third-year tithe was specifically designated for "the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that may eat within thy gates, and be filled" (Deuteronomy 26:12). Other instruction in Deuteronomy 24 continues the concern over the economic well-being of the stranger as Israel is commanded to not oppress the hired hand, whether they are Israelite or stranger, by making sure that they are paid their rightful day wages.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, for all the inclusionary instruction, the stranger was still understood to be an outsider. While Israel was expected to relate to the stranger, the manner of the relationship was one-sided; Israel was to support the stranger, not the other way around, and in so doing the differences between the two are emphasized. In other words, while the instruction noted Israel's responsibilities to include the stranger, it did so by highlighting the "otherness" of the stranger. Israel's positive relationship to the stranger was because the stranger was outside, a status that Israelites could relate to because of their past, though it was no longer their experience.

Moreover, there were certain situations in which the stranger (*gêr*) was not an equal on par with an Israelite. In Deuteronomy 14, Israel is told they are not to eat any animal that had not been slaughtered first. Thus, an animal that died on its own was not to be consumed by an Israelite, but it could be given to a stranger. Though a seemingly innocuous regulation, it nevertheless highlights the fact that a stranger was not held to the same standard as Israel was. No matter how much alike they were, the two were indeed different. Another situation is the instruction concerning the Passover, the defining

feast of Israel, and the stranger. Exodus 12 reveals that while the stranger (*gêr*) was expected to follow the injunction concerning the eating of unleavened bread, they were not required to sacrifice the paschal lamb. In fact, in verse 43, the general instruction concerning the stranger and the Passover is: "There shall no stranger eat thereof." The term for stranger here is *ben nekar*, which will be discussed in greater detail later. Here it is enough to note that this is the general instruction. This directive is followed by the circumstances in which the stranger as *gêr* could participate in the Passover, but that appears to be the exception to the rule, especially since the exclusion of the stranger from the Passover appears again in Deuteronomy 16. There, while the stranger is explicitly invited to participate in the celebrations of the Feast of the Weeks and the Feast of the Tabernacles, the instruction says nothing about including the stranger in the third primary festival, the Passover. Thus, in the one feast that was performed explicitly at home, the stranger is not present.<sup>6</sup>

Even more difficult to reconcile was the implicit threat the stranger represented. In Deuteronomy 28, though the stranger may have been among Israel from Nebo, the Lord warns that if Israel does not "hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes" (28:15) then "the stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low. He shall lend to thee and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail" (28:43–44).<sup>7</sup> Thus, even as one is to include the stranger into one's household, the threat that this same individual could potentially rise up and seize one's property would be present.<sup>8</sup>

The other terms used to describe the stranger demonstrate further the ambivalence Israel had toward the stranger. Unlike the *gêr*, which is the primary term used for the stranger who lives among Israel, the designation *zâr* seems to refer to the stranger, or outsider, who is distanced from Israel's worship and perhaps lifestyle. In light of this, the *zâr* may have his own worship and social practices. Thus in a stranger's household, it is entirely possible to have some members who were *gêr* and some who were *zâr*, both interacting directly with Israel. It is even possible that in some instances the *zâr*-stranger was Israelite. For instance, in Leviticus 22, a stranger (*zâr*) is not to eat any food designated for priestly use. In fact, according to Numbers 18, the priest was not to interact with the *zâr* at all: "a stranger shall not come nigh unto you"; if they did, then "the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death" (18:4, 7). Similarly, in Numbers 1, the stranger that comes near the tabernacle

“shall be put to death” (1:51). In these cases, it is unclear whether the designation of stranger refers to a non-Israelite or to an Israelite who is deliberately in the wrong place doing things they should not be doing, which would reflect the definition of *zār* presented above.<sup>9</sup> If it is the latter, then it is a matter of an Israelite acting like a stranger, or outsider, would, as the term is clearly used to refer to non-Israelites elsewhere. Thus, regardless of exact meaning, the status of *zār* is one that is not complimentary and reflects the stranger as a potential troublemaker.

The third term used to describe the stranger is *nokri/ben nekār*. This term is used for the stranger as true outsider.<sup>10</sup> These individuals, while living among the Israelites, may have had their own gods and their own worship practices.<sup>11</sup> As such, like the *zār*, only more so, the *nokri/ben nekār*-stranger was a threat to Israel’s righteousness as it was the *nokri/ben nekār* who worshipped “strange” gods. In similar fashion, the “strange” woman in Proverbs symbolized the temptations that pulled Israel away from their God,<sup>12</sup> while throughout Ezekiel and Jeremiah, the metaphor of Israel as a harlot among foreigners is used to denote Israel’s apostasy.<sup>13</sup> Legally, Israel was to have limited interaction with the *nokri/ben nekār*. Above and beyond the restrictions placed upon the *zār*, according to Leviticus 22:25, Israel was not to buy livestock or other items used for sacrifice from this type of stranger. While Israel was not allowed to charge loan interest to another Israelite, they could charge interest for loans to the *nokri/ben nekār*. The same applies for loan forgiveness during the jubilee. While Israel was to forget the loans of other Israelites: “Of a foreigner thou mayest exact” (Deuteronomy 15:3). Yet for all this, the *nokri/ben nekār* was still a part of Israel’s community and had been from the beginning. In Deuteronomy 29, the *nokri*, who appear to work as manual labor with the camp, are included among those who were to enter the promised land. And as such, it would appear that at least some *nokri* saw value in being a part of the greater Israelite community. Significantly, it is the *ben nekār* referenced in Isaiah 56, proclaiming concern about not being a part of God’s people.

The three aspects of “strangeness” demonstrate the complicated and ambivalent nature of the relationship between the stranger and Israel. On the one hand, the stranger as *gēr* could participate to a large degree with their neighbors both socially and religiously. The stranger as *zār* though, reflected the implicit wrongness, and potential threat, that the strange or foreign represented, while the stranger as *nokri/ben nekār* realized the unique peril that

Israel succumbed to again and again—forsaking God and following after other gods. As such, their presence was to be tolerated, but interaction minimized. Moreover, as the regulations concerning the Passover demonstrate, though the stranger as *gēr* may participate in that most familial of feasts (at least according to Exodus 12), this is the exception. It is generally understood that the stranger (noted as *ben nekār*) was not to do so. Thus, it appears that when confronted with a stranger, one began with the assumption that they were *nokri/ben nekār*, not *gēr*. Moreover, while it appears that all strangers were *gēr* when requiring legal aid and welfare, equal to other marginalized members of the community, when lending money or eating the carcass of an animal that died of natural causes, the stranger, whether *gēr* or *nokri/ben nekār*, was clearly understood as different. For all Israel’s empathy to the plight of the stranger, the stranger was always a threat to the well-being of Israel, whether as *nokri/ben nekār* with their dangerous native lifestyle or as *gēr*, who could rise up against Israel. Thus strangers belonged and did not belong, and were sometimes treated well by their Israelite neighbors but were reminded in many ways that they were not Israelite, that they did not belong.<sup>14</sup> It is this tension, this uncertainty as to their place in the world, that resonates from the stranger’s cry in Isaiah 56:3—“The Lord hath utterly separated me from his people.”

### Israel and the Eunuch

The second individual crying to God in Isaiah 56 is the eunuch. Like the stranger, the eunuch represents a marginalized segment of society seeking solace in the Lord. Eunuchs played intriguing roles in the ancient world. They were often associated with the ruling class and performed vital, important roles as advisors and guardians.<sup>15</sup> Yet eunuchs held these positions of trust precisely because of their defect. As such it was believed that they did not represent a threat to the ruler in question.<sup>16</sup> Thus, like the stranger, the eunuch was an ambiguous, marginalized individual. As for the cause of the marginalization, physical defects or disabilities impeded one from normal social interaction.

There is much less instruction concerning Israel and the disabled or defective than there is concerning Israel and the stranger; nevertheless, what is found is instructive. Of course, there is instruction concerning the care of the disabled. Leviticus 19:14, for instance, warns Israel not to “curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind.” Similarly, Deuteronomy 27:18

advises that “cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way.” Moreover, the instruction in Leviticus 13–14 concerning the condition of those stricken with visible skin ailments may be understood as beneficial since the intended purpose is to rid the individual of the ailment. Yet, this very instruction highlighted the division between the defective and greater Israel while central to the mandate was the quarantine and isolation of the afflicted.

Other texts speak to the social marginalization of the disabled. On an aesthetic level, two of the primary qualities of beauty were physical symmetry and a lack of defects, beauty itself being associated with social and divine approval. Thus, the individual who was disabled or defective suffered not only from being ugly but also from the stigma of perceived divine disapproval.<sup>17</sup> Economically, while such individuals could—depending on the type of the disability—care for themselves, often they were limited and thus reliant on the welfare of others, as noted above.

While the disabled or defective experienced social challenges, it was particularly their interaction with the temple and the priests that demonstrates the marginalization of the disabled. Among the directions in Leviticus 22, Israel was told that there should be no blemish or defect in any of the animals offered for sacrifice: “it shall be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no blemish therein. Blind, or broken, or maimed, or having a wen, or scurvy, or scabbed, ye shall not offer these to the Lord” (22:21–22). The principle behind this instruction appears to reflect the understanding that the divine realm was one of completeness and wholeness—thus that which was offered to the Lord was expected to be the best quality in terms of beauty.

In similar fashion, Leviticus 21, one chapter earlier, describes the qualities of the priest who could serve in the temple: “Whosoever he be of thy [Aaron’s] seed in their generations that hath any blemish, let him not approach to offer the bread of his God. For whatsoever man he be that hath a blemish, he shall not approach: a blind man, or a lame, or that hath a flat nose, or any thing superfluous, Or a man that is brokenfooted, or brokenhanded, or crookbackt [hunchback], or a dwarf, or that hath a blemish in his eye, or be scurvy, or scabbed, or hath his stones broken. No man that hath a blemish of the seed of Aaron the priest shall come nigh to offer the offerings of the Lord” (21:17–21). Like the animal to be offered, the priest was to represent the ideal of the physical form when functioning in the temple. Any disability disqualified such an individual from service. Verse 23 further restricts such

individuals, declaring that they cannot come nigh to the veil or the altar lest they “profane” the sanctuary. The threat of profane contagion that results from their very presence suggests an even more isolating element to the disabled/defective since they appeared to impede the continual attempts by Israel to be holy.<sup>18</sup> Yet the disabled priest was still a priest and therefore could



Michael Deas, *Rebekah at the Well*, Courtesy of Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

Israel’s own history of marginalization meant that their own experience was to guide their interaction with the stranger, for “ye know the heart of a stranger.” This empathy was expected to engender love, as the Israelite was told to love the stranger “as thyself.”

partake of food designated for the priest. Again, as with the stranger, the limited privileges actually accentuate the disparity as the disabled/defective priest could participate in some ways, particularly in those ways in which he received aid, while being restricted from performing the sacred priestly duties, or in other words, providing spiritual aid for others. He could stand in the company of the priesthood, but he couldn't stand in the sanctuary.

While the above reflects limitations of the disabled priest, these restrictions appear to apply to the Israelite disabled generally. Second Samuel 5:8 declares that the lame and the blind are not allowed to enter the sanctuary. No reason is given, but the likely rationale is the same as that of the disabled priest. Even more limiting is the injunction found in Deuteronomy 23:1 in which the male Israelite who lacks the male sex organs "shall not enter the congregation of the Lord." Again, no reason is given, but in this case, not only is the individual disabled/defective physically, but the specific loss endangers the individual's ability to have children. While much has been written about the role of childbearing in the social identity of Israelite women, it appears that as much social stigma surrounded the Israelite man who could not produce children. Indeed, it is possible that one of the primary ideals of Israelite manliness was his virility.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the male who lacks the reproductive organs is not only physically disabled, but socially as well, unable to experience the covenant blessings accorded to Israel.

As with the stranger's cry, the eunuch's cry in Isaiah 56, "Behold, I am a dry tree," reflects the voice of a marginalized group, who, like the stranger, was both part and not part of the Israelite community.<sup>20</sup> Both groups were accorded legal rights and were expected to be treated humanely by their neighbors. Both could participate in the community's events, yet both groups were also limited in what they could do. Their participation, while reflected in Israel's responsibilities, highlighted their separation from the larger community, and while Israel is severely condemned, both in the law and the prophets, for mistreatment of the marginalized, the limitations would have impacted the marginalized and their sense of belonging, even if persecution was not experienced. And it is that voice that we find expressed in Isaiah 56.

### Isaiah 56 and the Pleas of the Marginalized

Considered to be a part of Third Isaiah, chapter 56 may be placed in a larger context of promises and prophecies concerning Israel's restoration.<sup>21</sup> These follow Isaiah's earlier message of judgment, which Israel was to suffer for

forsaking God. Having experienced God's judgment, Israel was now promised a return, a restoration, even a transformation back to the lost relationship with God. In light of this overarching theme, the pleas of Isaiah 56 are striking as they represent groups that appear to have been left behind or unable to experience the promised blessings. Unlike the precepts of the law, which outline Israel's relationship to the marginalized, emphasizing the particular challenges and responsibilities of such, Isaiah 56 provides the voice of those selfsame marginalized and God's response to those pleas.<sup>22</sup>

The selection of the stranger and the eunuch to represent the marginalized may not be coincidental as both share certain unique characteristics. As noted earlier, both the stranger and the eunuch of Isaiah 56 are familiar with God and his works. As part of the larger community, they have watched God's interaction with Israel and desired to have their own relationship. The stranger, for instance, is described as one who "hath joined himself to the Lord" (56:3). Moreover, the Lord's response is for those eunuchs who "keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant" (56:4). Yet for all their desire, as outlined above, full participation has been denied these individuals. Metaphorically, the stranger and the eunuch can look through the window, recognizing the feast spread out on the table, even celebrating with the household the gathering of the bounty, but are not allowed to enter and partake. This unique perspective made possible through partial interaction makes the exclusion even more painful. Also significant in the selection of the stranger and eunuch is that they appear to represent marginalization at both ends of the social spectrum. Again, as noted above, the stranger was often paralleled with the poor and other economically challenged groups, while the eunuch was often found in the upper echelons of social society. Thus the stranger and eunuch were unique voices that could represent all who felt marginalized within the greater Israelite community.

As one would expect, the individual pleas reflect the distinctive fears of the particular marginalized. The voice of the stranger, for instance, cries out that "the Lord hath utterly separated me from his people" (Isaiah 56:3). Having always been at least partially isolated from the Israelites, the stranger now fears that, with the fulfillment of the promises and the glorious restoration of Israel, this partial isolation will now be a complete separation. One can recognize the sense of abandonment and loneliness that the marginalized may feel. Similarly, the eunuch's exclamation, "Behold, I am a dry tree," reflects the eunuch's anxiety that there is no place for them, no posterity who

can enjoy the promised blessings. Highlighted in both pleas is the horrific awareness of both knowing what they are missing out on and their powerlessness to do anything about it. This makes the Lord's answers to both all the more poignant as they specifically address these fears. Speaking to the eunuch first, the Lord promises "even unto them I will give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off" (56:5). As noted earlier, the eunuch, by virtue of his disability, was not allowed to participate fully in Israel's worship at the temple.

For Israel, the temple was more than merely a place of worship—it represented a sense of permanence, of place, of belonging. Thus God's promise meant that the disabled had a place and that place was not just at the temple, but within the walls, in the house itself. This promise of place was paralleled by the promise of placement within the family. The new name or designation is not provided, but the claim that it was even better than son or daughter indicates that it would demonstrate the true inclusion of the eunuch into the household of God.<sup>23</sup> It may even allude to a future in which the eunuch could "bear fruit"—that is, sons and daughters—just as with the promises made to normative Israel. Thus, to the marginalized eunuch who believed that the covenant blessings had no application to him, the Lord promised an eternal identity and belonging equal to that of his chosen people.<sup>24</sup>

In similar fashion, the promises to the stranger respond directly to their fears by reconciling their inability to attend the temple: "Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people" (Isaiah 56:7). One of the primary restrictions of the stranger, as noted in the law, is participation at the temple, thus enhancing the importance of the Lord's promise that they would be able to have the same temple experience as that of Israel. There they were to experience joy as their offerings were accepted by God. Importantly, the text suggests that it would be God himself who brings the stranger into the temple. The particular verbal form of "to bring" is one often associated with the bringing of offerings into the temple and is commonly used to describe what mankind brings to the temple.<sup>25</sup> In this case, the stranger is not only brought by God but may in fact be his sacrifice, his offering, which is a status associated in the law with the priest or the firstborn<sup>26</sup>—thus reversing the stranger's status from outsider to priest. Finally, it is through the stranger

that the true significance of the temple is revealed as it is to be understood as a house of prayer for all. In this then the stranger finds a necessary, vital identity in the plan of God.

In Isaiah's prophetic message of comfort, one can note a manner by which the law and the prophets engaged one another. Whereas the law's primary focus is on Israel's responsibilities, not only to the marginalized, but also to their own spiritual integrity, the prophets allow for the marginalized voices to be expressed.<sup>27</sup> Importantly, neither perspective is wrong, yet the true picture is incomplete without both. Like two sides of the same coin, the perspective of the law and the perspective of the prophets together reveal the true extent of God's work to all mankind through the medium of his chosen people Israel. Not surprisingly, the binding element to these perspectives—that which makes the two texts complementary—is the temple.<sup>28</sup>

While the temple or tabernacle plays a vital, easily discernable role in the formation of Israel's identity in the three law codes (and throughout their recorded history, for that matter), it is striking how much the temple also plays a role in Isaiah 56 in alleviating the fears of the marginalized. For both the stranger and eunuch, their lack of identity and sense of belonging led to a sense of futility and abandonment, but it was to be in the temple that their relationship with God would be realized. It was in the Lord's house that the eunuch would receive a better name than son and daughter; it was in the holy mountain that the stranger would be brought and made joyful. Perhaps as significant as the new identity was the understanding that this identity was appreciated, even valued, by God himself. For Israel, the temple was the place where this value was reaffirmed each time they performed the sacrifices and offerings. For the marginalized who could not participate to the same degree, the promise was that *God* would "give" them an everlasting name, the emphasis being that God himself would be the one doing so. Similarly, it was the *Lord* who would "bring" the stranger in and "make" them joyful. Thus, the temple was not only the place by which identity was received, but also the place where a personal, individual relationship could be experienced.<sup>29</sup>

## Conclusion

The harmony of the law and the prophets via the temple can be understood as more than an academic exercise, for the two perspectives often reflect challenges that we in this modern era also struggle with. Feelings of being isolated, alone, abandoned, of not belonging, or of being marginalized are all

real experiences that still exist. Israel's responsibility to be empathetic to the plight of stranger, as outlined in the law, while not losing one's own relationship with God in the larger world is as valid today as it was in Moses's day. The Lord's responses to the stranger and disabled continue to provide solace and respite for those who feel like they don't fit the correct mold. Identity and true belonging are still essential to our well-being, and the centrality of the temple in the formation of these traits is as true today as it was back then. The power of the law is fully exercised only through the divine compassion revealed by the words of the prophet, and the combination of the two in the temple experience, a revelation given to us through the prophet Isaiah, becomes a means by which we can truly understand the human experience, and more important, the manner by which God reveals his supernal understanding of who we really are. **RE**

## Notes

1. Though it appears that Christ is alluding specifically to Leviticus 19:18–19 and the injunction to love the Israelite who is in the community, in Leviticus 19:34 one finds the instruction to “love the stranger, as thyself” which, in the context of Christ's teachings elsewhere, appears to be included in his understanding of one's neighbor. See Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28: A Commentary*, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 83–84. See also R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 846: “While there was a clearly limited sense to ‘neighbor’ both in the original text and in later Jewish understanding of it, Jesus makes it clear in 5:42–47 and in the parable of the Good Samaritan that for his disciples no such limitation was acceptable. The neighbor is everyone, and the nature of the ‘love’ which God expects is equally unlimited: ‘as you love yourself.’” Again, the fact that the conditioning clause “as thyself” appears twice in Leviticus 19 to define Israel's love toward both the neighbor and the stranger suggests that both groups may be understood in the commandment.

2. While we tend to think of the law of Moses as one text, the precepts that governed Israel are found in three texts: the Covenant Code, comprising Exodus 20–23 (though the material concerning the construction of the tabernacle may be included in this instruction), the Holiness Code, which consists primarily of the book of Leviticus, and the Deuteronomic Code, which, by definition, is represented in Deuteronomy.

3. While there are four references here, the last two are essentially the same as *nokri* is from the same root as *nekār*.

4. See T. R. Hobbs, “Hospitality in the First Testament and the ‘Teleological Fallacy,’” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 95 (2001): 3–30, who notes the importance of hospitality in the cultural world of the Hebrew Bible, though he does distinguish between forms of strangers. According to Hobbs, the *gēr* is extended full hospitality, while hospitality to the *nokhri* is limited, if even offered. This distinction, however, appears to arise primarily from explicit use of the term *gēr* in conjunction with offered hospitality, rather than an explicit injunction against the *nokri*.

5. Interestingly, these responsibilities are found not only in the Bible, but also in an extrabiblical ostraca discovered at Khirbet Qeiyafa. The text, which is five lines long, includes the following instruction: “you shall not do [it], but worship the [Lord]. Judge the sla[ve] and the wid[ow]/Judge the orph[an] [and] the stranger. [P]lead for the infant/plead for the po[or and] the widow. Rehabilitate [the poor] at the hands of the king. Protect the po[or and] the slave / [sup]ort the stranger (*gēr*).” Translation by G. Galil, “The Hebrew Inscription from Khirbet Qeiyafa/Neta'im: Script, Language, Literature and History,” *Ugarit Forschungen* 41 (2009), 193–242. For more on this text, see Reinhard Achenbach, “The Protection of the *Personae miserae* in Ancient Israelite Law and Wisdom and in the Ostrakon from Khirbet Qeiyafa,” *Semitica* 54 (2012): 93–125.

6. Erhard S. Gerstenberger, “Sensitivities towards Outsiders in Old Testament Theologies,” in *Sensitivity towards Outsiders: Exploring the Dynamic Relationship between Mission and Ethics in the New Testament and Early Christianity*, ed. Jacobus Kok, Tobias Nicklas, Dieter T. Roth, and Christopher M. Hays (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 27–40: “Guests, even if totally unknown, were protected by high standards of hospitality which demanded personal sacrifices, if necessary. Still, neither slaves nor guests could become true members of the family. . . . Solidarity did not extend to every situation; a member of the family could be made an outsider. Real strangers, on the other hand, had to be considered as potentially hostile, increasingly so with larger social and spatial distances” (29).

7. While the curse is noting the reversal of fortune, it also denotes perhaps a common understanding of the economic status of the stranger, namely that in normal circumstances they are the ones who require lending. The Israelite lends; the stranger receives. From this, it suggests that the stranger was also poor. Their economic situation, one in which they were less well off than their Israelite neighbors, represented their need for the loan. The negative nature of this status is reflected in the curse; when this economic situation is reversed, then one knows that Israel is experiencing divine opprobrium.

8. M. Daniel Carroll Jr., “Welcoming the Stranger: Toward a Theology of Immigration in Deuteronomy,” in *For Our Good Always: Studies on the Message and Influence of Deuteronomy in Honor of Daniel I. Block*, ed. Jason S. DeRouchie, Jason Gile, and Kenneth J. Turner (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 453: “This curse is a reversal of the blessing found in 28:12–13, so perhaps the intent is to communicate that in judgment the usual social order would be turned on its head. Deut. 29:11 describes the *ger* as one who cuts firewood and draws water, which may reflect their dependency on the Israelites. This verse portrays this as their duty ‘in the midst of the camp,’ conceivably before the settlement in the land. Whatever the intent or the context, the expectation of these passages is that the sojourners occupied a lower station.”

9. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (hereafter *TDOT*), “*zār/zār*,” 4:52–28: “In these [texts] *zār* designates a person outside the sacred group, for whom a specific area is forbidden territory or who is not allowed to perform certain precisely defined acts. Such an outsider is a non-priest, someone who does not belong to a priest's house, or the tribe of Levities. If, as an outsider, he were to attempt to perform these functions, he would represent a danger to the community. In such a case, he or the community may expect catastrophe” (55–56). See also Hans-Georg Wuench, “The Stranger in God's Land—Foreigner, Stranger, Guest: What Can We Learn from Israel's Attitude towards Strangers?,” *Old Testament Essays* 27, no. 3 (2014): 1129–54: “[Zar] can denote Israelites living in an area where they do not belong, layman as opposed to Levites and Priests, foreigners from other countries and even



dangerous peoples and foreign gods. But there is always a common undertone. As Snijders puts it: the emphasis is always on the distance" (1138–39).

10. Wuench, "Stranger in God's Land," 1139: "נכר is always used for something which is alien to Israel or the Israelites; . . . in most cases it denotes something which is so strange and different that it can become a danger for Israel."

11. See also Reinhard Achenbach, "gēr-nākhri-tōshav-zār: Legal and Sacral Distinctions regarding Foreigners in the Pentateuch," in *The Foreigner and the Law: Perspectives from the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, ed. Reinhard Achenbach, Rainer Albertz, and Jakob Wöhrle, BZAR 16 (Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011), 29–51: "The nākhri is exempt from the local law and does not even share the privileges of the gerim. If somebody enjoys familial protection in another society, he is considered for a limited time as a ger, even if ethnically and geographically this person belongs to another people or nation. But the nākhri-person usually does not intend to reside or stay permanently in the area where he or she may enjoy hospitality for a certain time. They understand themselves as persons who originally belong under the guidance of another distinct legal system; . . . he is a person from outside the scope of the Israelite law" (44).

12. See Proverbs 5:3–21; 7:4–23; see also Wuench, "Stranger in God's Land," 1141–42.

13. See Jeremiah 3:6–11; Ezekiel 16 and 23.

14. For the role this marginalized, ambiguous nature played in other biblical narratives, see Saul Olyan, "Stigmatizing Associations: The Alien, Things Alien, and Practices Associated with Aliens in Biblical Classification Schemas," in *Foreigner and the Law*, 17–28.

15. Omar N'Shea, "Royal Eunuchs and Elite Masculinity in the Neo-Assyrian Empire," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 79, no. 3 (2016): 214–21. See also Ilan Peled, "Men in Question: Parallel Aspects of Ambiguous Masculinities in Mesopotamian and Biblical Sources," *Maarav* 21, nos. 1–2 (2014): 127–48.

16. *TDOT*, s.v. "sārīs," 10:347: "Society viewed the condition of the eunuch the same way it did other physical anomalies: as a sign of inferiority and as a disgrace; . . . nonetheless, eunuchs gradually came to be valued. The castrated slave, who could establish no family of his own and had to accommodate himself to living as an alien, was utterly dependent on his master as well as devoted and dependable. Eunuchs were suitable as overseers in harems and often became confidants of the ruler." See also Jacob L. Wright and Michael J. Chan, "King and Eunuch: Isaiah 56:1–8 in Light of Honorific Royal Burial Practices," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 2, no. 131 (2012): 99–119: "By employing eunuchs, however, one could prevent the more serious threat posed by what one might call the *transgenerational accumulation of power*. Such power was generated and sustained when an official bequeathed to his descendants the authority and prestige he had amassed for himself during his lifetime, establishing thereby a dynasty that could potentially compete with the throne. But since a eunuch (usually) did not establish a family of his own, any power he accumulated during his lifetime returned to the throne upon his death. Such genealogical isolation permitted eunuchs to rise to the highest ranks of government and the military" (106). Interestingly, while this may have been the presumption, in at least one instance, a eunuch was found to be a threat to the reign of the Mesopotamian king, Esarhaddon. See N'Shea, "Royal Eunuchs," 219.

17. Saul Olyan, *Disability in the Hebrew Bible: Interpreting Mental and Physical Differences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 25: "The most striking aspect of the biblical vocabulary of beauty and ugliness is the use of common terms for good and bad, with a specialized meaning of beautiful and ugly. Thus the beautiful is indirectly associated with what is good, happy, right, appropriate, and desirable, and the ugly is indirectly

associated with what is bad, unhappy, wrong, inappropriate, evil, and undesirable. . . . Yhwh's favoring of the beautiful in the dominant stream of the biblical tradition also serves to bring into relief beauty's privileging." See also Rebecca Raphael, *Biblical Corpora: Representations of Disability in Hebrew Biblical Literature*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 445 (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 38–39: "If blemish is the opposite of wholeness, and the most obvious blemishes are the ones listed, then wholeness means a body with a smooth, symmetrical, unruptured surface on a frame of the right species, gender, and size. . . . These elements of beauty, symmetry, and unruptured boundaries (skin) are represented as holy, or holier."

18. Olyan, *Disability*, 31.

19. Olyan, *Disability*, 33. See also Peled, "Men in Question," 148: "Eunuchs were unable to beget. . . . Men in Mesopotamian and ancient Israelite societies, however, were expected to do just that: to beget children. The importance of having offspring stemmed from various reasons: progeny maintained and perpetuated the family name, kept economic assets within the familial circle, and, on the ideological level, upheld the veneration of the dead. The Mesopotamian composition 'Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Netherworld' exemplifies this view perfectly. In one of the episodes described therein, we learn that men were regarded to be more fortunate the more children they had. In contrast, men who lacked descendants were destined to an ominous fate. . . . Not surprisingly, this approach is notable in the Bible as well. . . . We may mention in this regard God's commandment following the completion of the act of creation: 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it!'" See also Laura Betzig, "Sex and Politics: In Insects, Crustaceans, Birds, Mammals, the Ancient Near East and the Bible," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 23, no. 2 (2009): 208–32, for a review of the hyperprocreation associated with the highest ideal of masculinity, that of kingship, in the ancient Near East.

20. Saul Olyan, *Social Inequality in the World of the Text: The Significance of Ritual and Social Distinctions in the Hebrew Bible* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 145: "Like foreignness, falseness, or the power to pollute 'morally,' physical disability is a characteristic understood by the text to be generally objectionable, and therefore stigmatizing. Physical disabilities such as blindness, lameness, deafness, and muteness are frequently denigrated in biblical and cognate literatures. The blind, lame, deaf and mute are often associated with devalued qualities such as weakness, dependency, helplessness, ineffectuality, and ignorance; . . . and with social marginality."

21. Because of these differing themes, many scholars have suggested that the book of Isaiah was written by multiple authors at different times; see Klaus Koch, *The Prophets: The Babylonian and Persian Periods* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982). Recently, however, there is greater interest in treating the book of Isaiah as a unified whole. For Latter-day Saints, the multiple themes of the book, and the specific prophecies regarding future events, do not pose the same problem of authorship, and therefore single authorship is generally accepted.

22. Some scholars believe that Isaiah 56:1–8 is an explicit response to issues of exclusiveness as reflected in the law; see Wright and Chan, "King and Eunuch," 99–119, esp. notes 3–5, for a thorough bibliography of the literature. Shawn Flynn sees this theme as one that is prominent throughout Third, or Trito-Isaiah, "A House of Prayer for All Peoples': The Unique Place of the Foreigner in the Temple Theology of Trito-Isaiah," *Theoforum* 37 (2006): 5–24.

23. A number of scholars understand the promise to allude to a permanently installed memorial within the temple precincts (for instance, see Wright and Chan, "King and

Eunuch”), yet there is not universal agreement concerning this interpretation (see Flynn, “House of Prayer,” 9). Regardless of the exact meaning, Flynn notes that, “whatever its meaning, it is evident that TI [Trito-Isaiah] opens with welcoming the foreigner into the earthly Temple and thus into community worship. The welcoming of the eunuch and the foreigner shows that the theme of inclusion in worship is central for the author/redactor; . . . he imagines their role as one of full participation in the earthly Temple as long as proper worship takes place” (Flynn, “House of Prayer,” 8).

24. Andreas Schuele, “Between Text and Sermon, Isaiah 56:1–8,” *Interpretation* 65, no. 3 (2011): 288: “While the example of the eunuch might be somewhat limited, the theological point is more far-reaching: God is the one who remembers those who, for a variety of reasons, fell through the cracks of communal or cultural memory—because their voice was not heard, because they were considered unimportant or unworthy, or because of hardships that kept their lives from flourishing.”

25. *TDOT*, s.v. “bō’,” 2:27: “The hiphil of *bō’* also occurs frequently as a fixed term in cult terminology, and is used to denote the bringing of sacrifices, firstfruits, etc., by men in general and the bringing of sacrifices by priests.” The use of this verb is found repeatedly throughout Trito-Isaiah and is associated with the return of exiled Israel (they would to be brought back) and thus ties the promises given to the stranger to God’s ultimate deliverance and restoration of Israel.

26. Schuele, “Between Text and Sermon,” 287, notes an interesting wordplay in Isaiah 56:3—the Hebrew term translated as “joined,” describing the stranger who has “joined” themselves to the greater Israelite community, derives from the same root as the name “Levi,” the tribe of the priests. “This suggests that foreigners were not only to be tolerated in the temple but also allowed to officiate in the role of a Levitic priest.”

27. Raymond de Hoop, “The Interpretation of Isaiah 56:1–9: Comfort or Criticism?” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127, no. 4 (2008): 679: “The message of the prophet is quite obvious with regard to YHWH’s attitude toward the foreigner and the eunuch, despite certain laws; . . . the Israelite community should be an open community.”

28. This is significant since much of the scholarly literature assumes that Isaiah 56 was written as a direct repudiation of the legal principles concerning these marginalized groups (for instance, see Wright and Chan, “King and Eunuch,” 101: “Often commentators identify the passage as a form of ‘prophetic Torah’ that responds to and revises pentateuchal law”), yet the text does not explicitly speak against the law, nor does it condemn Israelites for their treatment of the marginalized, as it does elsewhere (Amos 2:6–16; Micah 3:1–4, for example), nor are the marginalized complaining of unfair treatment but merely the separation that exists because of their conditions. This suggests that the text in question is not a repudiation as much as fulfillment, thus complementary.

29. Flynn, “House of Prayer,” 11: “While being inclusive, TI [Trito-Isaiah] presents clear rules and boundaries for such inclusion. He demands that all those outside of the community submit themselves to the service of YHWH, love YHWH’s name and recognize YHWH’s holy mountain. Thus, TI’s inclusivism is not a simple welcoming without responsibility; it is a thoughtful welcoming that seeks to incorporate the foreigner into the Yahwism that TI supported. . . . TI actively seeks a way to incorporate the foreigner and those formerly excluded into the worship of a developing community.” For more on the temple in Third Isaiah, see Jill Middlemass, “Divine Reversal and the Role of the Temple in Trito-Isaiah,” in *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel*, ed. John Day (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 173–74: “The sanctuary is used a second way within the contexts in which regulations for entry into

the Temple precincts and thereby the community are reinterpreted. In particular, the issue of the types of behavior that make access to the Temple available become the main focus in 56.5, 7; 57.13; 65.11. While at the same time showing a remarkable degree of openness in terms of potentially who makes up the community, . . . in a startlingly inclusive text, it becomes clear that two disenfranchised groups of people, foreigners and eunuch, garner equal status with the people of Israel. . . . So long as the eunuchs and foreigners adhere to the commands of Yahweh and observe the Sabbath their place in the Temple is secure.”