

**What Isaiah Means for Christian Worship:
Reading Scripture after Robert Wilken's *The Church's Bible Series***

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Although the Christian interpretation of Isaiah began with the New Testament, it was only as Christians lived with the book, heard it read in public worship, sang its “canticles” (e.g., 12:1-6), pondered its words and images, and debated difficult passages, that its fuller meaning was uncovered. *The actual text of Isaiah is the beginning of what Isaiah means for Christians, not the ending.*

—Robert Wilken¹

With those words from the introduction to his hefty commentary on Isaiah, in which he compiles the interpretations of early church through medieval theologians, Robert Wilken beckoned me to a study of the earliest church and her worship through the lens of a prophet who wrote long before the birth of Christ. Wilken's invitation was irresistible because (1) I've been a worship planner and choir director for traditional, blended, and contemporary worship; (2) my studies have targeted the earliest church and her worship patterns in order to decipher guidelines for worship planning in the church today; and (3) I knew of Isaiah's influence on our third and fourth century eucharistic liturgies, but Wilken revealed a gaping hole in my knowledge base—how Isaiah's influence shaped worship during the era of the house church. I then began a re-examination of documents I'd read before, but this time with a focus on, as Wilken deftly argued, how pondering, singing, and reading Isaiah influenced the earliest Christians' corporate worship practices.

A Question Arises

Twentieth century research has mined the details of third and fourth century liturgies, but these rites pattern Constantine's court with meetings in Roman basilicas, processions with acolytes, candles and censers, and vestments mimicking those of empire officials.² We know that Isaiah's sixth chapter, with its Trisagion,³ was central not only to worship scenes in John's Revelation, but was written into the eucharistic liturgies of the Constantinian era also. Expanding the reference to include Isaiah's “unclean lips” and “burning coal”⁴ would give to fourth century entrance rites their opening praise, confession, and absolution cycles and to eucharistic prayers their images conveying Christ's real presence in the sacrament.

¹ Robert Louis Wilken, *Isaiah: Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2007), xxi. Italics added.

² See Anscar J. Chupungco, *Worship: Progress and Tradition* (Beltsville, MD: Pastoral Press, 1995), 30-34.

³ “Trisagion” is the designation for the “holy, holy, holy” in Isaiah 6:3.

⁴ Isaiah 6:5-6.

But what about worship that predates Constantine? Can we find Isaiah's influence in the worship of people who gathered in Roman-style villas—not basilicas—around everyday dining room tables rather than before high and lofty altars?⁵ Wilken's invitation beckoned, and thus began my search into Isaiah's influence on worship in the first two centuries by studying three of the earliest and probably most widely read writings of that era: *1 Clement* (Rome, 96 CE), the *Epistle of Barnabas* (Alexandria? 70-135 CE), and *2 Clement* (Rome, mid-second century). I have chosen these three documents because of their importance within the early church itself, evidenced by their early inclusion “as part of the sacred Scriptures”⁶ in Codices Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, and Hierosolymitanus, as well as in the *Apostolic Constitutions*.⁷

We know from the New Testament that the first believers combed through the Septuagint to come to an understanding of their times and of the Christ. Luke praises the Bereans for examining “the Scriptures daily to see whether these things [the story of Jesus] were so.”⁸ The next generation of Christians would do likewise. Barnabas writes, “For through the prophets, the Master has made known to us what has happened and what now is.”⁹ Clement of Rome¹⁰ writes similarly to the Corinthians: “For you know the sacred Scriptures, loved ones—and know them quite well—and you have gazed into the sayings of God. And so we write these things simply as a reminder.”¹¹

The ancient Scriptures—in the Torah, the wisdom tradition, the psalms, and the prophets—proposed two paths,¹² beginning with Moses' words to the people: “You shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live and that it may be well with you.”¹³ Isaiah uses the way/path imagery at least sixteen times, reminding Israel of their God who “leads you in the way you should go.”¹⁴ The earliest Christians used the same image in

⁵ Joan Petersen locates this period in Rome “when Christians worshipped in ordinary private houses and when the official ecclesiastical organization of Rome had not yet been set up” in the mid-first through early third centuries (“House Churches in Rome,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 23, no. 4 [December 1969]: 264-272, accessed at www.jstor.org/stable/1583243).

⁶ See Bart Ehrman, “General Introduction” in *The Apostolic Fathers*, vol. I (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 3.

⁷ Codices Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, and Hierosolymitanus include *Barnabas*, *1 Clement*, and *2 Clement*; *Apostolic Constitutions* includes both Clements.

⁸ Acts 17:11.

⁹ *Barnabas* 1:7.

¹⁰ Scholars continue to debate the authorship of *1 Clement*, despite early attribution to a leader in the first century church in Rome. Origen claims he was Paul's associate (Philippians 4:3), Tertullian writes that he was Rome's second bishop (*Prescription* 32), while Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 3.31) and Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.4.21) name him third. Ehrman deems the letter's title, *First Letter of Clement*, “a misnomer, as no other letter from the author survives: *Second Clement*, which is not a letter, comes from a different hand” (Ehrman, vol. I, 18).

¹¹ *1 Clement* 53:1. All quotations from these three writings, including the Scriptures cited within, are from the Ehrman translation.

¹² For example: Job 23:11 (“my foot has held fast to his path”); Psalm 1:1 (“nor stand in the path of sinners”); Proverbs 1:15 (“keep your feet from their path”); 2:20 (“keep to the paths of the righteous”); Isaiah 2:3 (“that we may walk in his paths”); 3:12 (“Those who guide you lead you astray and confuse the direction of your paths”); and 59:8 (“They do not know the way of peace, and there is no justice in their tracks; they have made their paths crooked, whoever treads on them does not know peace.” See also Deuteronomy 10:12; 30:16 and Isaiah 42:16, 24.

¹³ Deuteronomy 5:33, NAS.

¹⁴ Isaiah 48:17.

designating themselves followers of the “Way,”¹⁵ and the *Didache*¹⁶ continues the image by framing its teachings as “two paths, one of life and one of death.”¹⁷ Our three writers warn of having “two minds” or straying from one path to another: Barnabas delineates them as “two paths of teaching and authority, the path of light and the path of darkness;”¹⁸ likewise, Clement of Rome (*1 Clement*) and the anonymous Clement (*2 Clement*) exhort their listeners not to be “of two minds.”¹⁹ If these communities were, indeed, listening to successive readings of Isaiah (along with the other prophets, the law, and the psalms), then the themes and the images used would have come alive for them as they listened also to *Barnabas*, *1 Clement* and *2 Clement*.

Despite their diversity across eras and areas, worship gatherings, like all rituals, shape the identity of the people both individually and as a community. Gaining insight from Victor Turner and Mary Margaret Kelleher, I have written elsewhere that “in rites of passage, separation, incorporation, and aggregation, worshipers begin to understand life from a new perspective and interpret life through a biblical lens; as they are restored to relationship with God through forgiveness of sins, they take on (or renew) their new identity as his body here on earth.”²⁰ Let us, then, look briefly at what the three documents (*Barnabas* and *1* and *2 Clement*) reveal about Isaiah’s influence on the content, form, and outcome of early church worship.

The Content of Worship

For the Christian church, worship’s content is decidedly the gospel, the good news God’s people have heard since he called Moses out of Egypt: “I will be your God and you will be my people.” Through each of the units of a classic, four-fold Christian liturgy (Gathering, Word, Table, Sending), the truth that God has come to dwell with his people and has sent his son to bring reconciliation to people who had once been his “enemies”²¹ is proclaimed, enacted, and received.

We readily uncover Isaiah’s influence on the content of earliest Christian worship from New Testament sources.²² Matthew’s use of the prophet to define Jesus as “God with us”²³ begins the Isaiah-dig; Paul’s imaging of Jesus as the “stumbling stone” and the “root of Jesse”²⁴ carries on

¹⁵ Paul sought for any “belonging to the Way” (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14).

¹⁶ Late first to early second century document.

¹⁷ *Didache* 1:1.

¹⁸ *Barnabas* 18:1.

¹⁹ See *1 Clement* 11.2; 23.2 and *2 Clement* 11.5; 19.2.

²⁰ Claire Partlow, “A Pilot Project on Worship Contextualization in Diverse, Urban Churches of the New Jersey District of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod,” (doctoral thesis, Robert E. Webber Institute of Worship Studies, 2011), 51. See Victor Turner, “Ritual, Tribal and Catholic,” *Worship Jubilee* 50, no. 6 (November 1976): 504-526 and Turner, “Liminality and Communitas,” in *Foundations in Ritual Studies: A Reader for Students of Christian Worship*, ed. Paul F. Bradshaw and John Melloh (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 74; Margaret Mary Kelleher, “Liturgical Theology: A Task and A Method,” in *Ibid.*, 206.

²¹ Romans 5:10.

²² Isaiah’s authority during this era is also evidenced by the predominance of manuscripts and commentary on the prophet found at Qumran. See Eileen M. Schuller, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: What Have We Learned?* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 38.

²³ Isaiah 7:14.

²⁴ Romans 9:32-33, See also Isaiah 28:16 and Romans 15:12, See also Isaiah 11:10.

the use of Isaiah as the “fifth gospel.”²⁵ The gospels and Paul’s writings continually recall Isaiah to such an extent that, as Craig Evans concludes, “Jesus’ gospel is essentially Isaiah’s gospel.”²⁶ In earliest church worship, three key facets of the gospel’s content were clearly linked to Isaiah: (1) Jesus is portrayed as savior; (2) he is lauded as Lord; and (3) baptism is declared to bring forgiveness of sins.

Jesus as Savior

In the *Apostolic Fathers*, Jesus’ image as the savior who brings reconciliation with God is linked to Isaiah’s portrayal of the suffering servant.²⁷ Barnabas, whose letter was considered “spurious” by Eusebius²⁸ but “treated as Scripture by church fathers as early as Clement of Alexandria,”²⁹ writes:

This is why the Lord allowed his flesh to be given over to corruption, that we might be made holy through the forgiveness of sins, which comes in the sprinkling of his blood. For some of the things written about him concern Israel; others concern us. And so it says: “He was wounded because of our lawless acts and weakened because of our sins. By his bruising we were healed. He was led like a sheep going to slaughter; and like a lamb, silent before the one who shears it.”³⁰

Clearly, Barnabas views Jesus’ death on the cross as a sacrifice for sin. Clement of Rome, too, would urge the Corinthians to “gaze intently on the blood of Christ and realize how precious it is to his Father; for when it was poured out³¹ for our salvation, it brought the gracious gift of repentance to the entire world.”³² Jesus’ blood, which the Christians poured at their eucharistic meals, pointed to Jesus not only as savior but also as Lord, equating him with the Creator/Redeemer God of Israel.

²⁵ J. F. A. Sawyer, *The Fifth Gospel: Isaiah in the History of Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

²⁶ C. A. Evans, “From Gospel to Gospel: The Function of Isaiah in the New Testament,” in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition*, vol. 2, ed. C. C. Broyles and C. A. Evans, (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 671, quoted in Peter Mallen, *The Reading and Transformation of Isaiah in Luke-Acts* (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 1.

²⁷ Christians identify Jesus as the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, whereas Jewish scholars have variously considered the servant to be either a messianic individual or the nation as a whole. See note on Isaiah 52:13-53:12 in Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible: Jewish Publication Society Tanakh Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 890-891.

²⁸ *Ecclesiastical History*, 3:25. See Paul L. Maier, *Eusebius, the Church History: A New Translation with Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999), 115.

²⁹ Ehrman, “Introduction” to *Barnabas*, vol. II, 3.

³⁰ *Barnabas* 5:1-2. Cf. Isaiah 53:5, 7.

³¹ The term “poured out” comes from Isaiah 53:12 and is used in the gospel accounts of the cup at the Last Supper in Matthew 26:28, Mark 14:24, and Luke 22:20.

³² *1 Clement* 7:4. See Edmund W. Fisher, “‘Let Us look upon the Blood-of-Christ’ (1 Clement 7:4),” *Vigiliae Christianae* 34, no. 3 (September 1980): 218-236, accessed at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1583641>.

Jesus as Lord

In this Roman era when mandated libations were poured out to the emperor Caesar Augustus,³³ whose birth was proclaimed to be “good news for the world because of him,”³⁴ the actions of a eucharistic meal, where Jesus’ blood was poured out and shared with all who had been baptized, declare that Jesus—not Caesar—was the one who would bring the gift of reconciliation through his sacrificial death and resurrection. In this act, Jesus is declared to be both savior and Lord. However, Christian worship not only proclaims Jesus to be ruler over Caesar, but it also equates him with the God of the Old Testament. Three times, Barnabas appropriates Isaiah’s term “the beloved,”³⁵ declaring that Israel’s “covenant was smashed—that the covenant of his beloved, Jesus, might be sealed in our hearts, in the hope brought by faith in him.”³⁶ In Isaiah’s vision, the “beloved” (alternatively, “lover”) plants a vineyard that yields only wild grapes, a clear indictment of Israel in this “poem of rebuke.”³⁷ Barnabas’ use of this term for Jesus indicates that Jesus is not merely one who is anointed by God (a “christ”), but is God himself.

In a similar vein, the writer of *2 Clement*, a document which may be the “earliest instance of a Christian homily from outside the canon of the New Testament,”³⁸ fully equates Jesus with the divine judge of the Old Testament, opening with the attestation that “we must think about Jesus Christ as we think about God, as about the judge of the living and the dead.”³⁹ Naming Jesus as divine judge echoes Isaiah’s repeated references to the Lord in that role:

And He will judge between the nations,
And will render decisions for many people. (2:4)

The Lord arises to contend;
And stands to judge peoples. (3:13)

And He will delight in the fear of the Lord,
And He will not judge by what His eyes see,
Nor make a decision by what His ears hear;
But with righteousness He will judge the poor,

³³ Craig A. Evans, “Mark’s Incipit and the Priene Gospel Inscription: From Jewish Gospel to Greco-Roman Gospel,” *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism*, 1 (2000): 68–69.

³⁴ Augustus, in the Priene Inscription (9 BCE, in what is now Turkey) proclaimed himself divine and his birth a celebration of the gospel (good news). Gordon Lathrop, with Frederick Danker, believes the cursory opening to Mark’s gospel deliberately counters such a claim by Rome. See Gordon W. Lathrop, *The Four Gospels on Sunday: The New Testament and the Reform of Christian Worship* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), fn. 80, 31.

³⁵ Isaiah 5:1.

³⁶ *Barnabas* 4:8. Also see 3:6 and 4:3. Hurtado writes that “the favorite designation of Jesus [in *The Ascension of Isaiah*, also a second century document] was ‘the beloved,’ echoing Paul’s use of the term in Ephesians 1:6” (Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005], 596).

³⁷ Jewish Publication Society Tanakh note on Isaiah 5:1–30 in Berlin and Brettler, 792.

³⁸ Ehrman, vol. I, 154. Authorship remains unknown, though *Apostolic Constitutions* considers it canonical. See Ehrman, vol. I, 157.

³⁹ *2 Clement* 1:1.

And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth;
 And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,
 And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. (11:3-4)⁴⁰

The anonymous writer of *2 Clement* would continue this theme of the supremacy of Jesus, declaring that “unbelievers will see his glory and power and be shocked when they see that the rulership of this world has been given to Jesus.”⁴¹

Clement of Rome (*1 Clement*)⁴² may actually be alluding to “liturgical” practice when he echoes Isaiah in attributing to Jesus adoration that the sacred Scriptures ascribe only to God. Ten times, Clement includes doxologies of praise to and through Christ⁴³ in words reminiscent of the letters of Paul and later liturgies. For example, *1 Clement* 20:12 states, “To him be the glory (*doxa*) and the majesty forever and ever.” Larry Hurtado explains the significance of such an attribution in his comments on the “mind-boggling Johannine statement in 12:41 that Isaiah 6:1-5 was a vision of Jesus:”⁴⁴

[The] Johannine appropriation of “glory” from Isaiah fits with the christological adaptation of the “I am” expression that is also used so prominently in Isaiah, providing (along with other terms and motifs used in GJohn) further indication of how GJohn reflects a vigorous mining of passages in Isaiah in particular for resources to understand and declare Jesus’ significance.⁴⁵

Clement also adopts the Old Testament name for God, “holy one,” when referring to Jesus: “In truth, his plan will come to completion quickly and suddenly, as even the Scripture testifies, when it says, ‘He will come quickly and not delay. And suddenly the Lord will come to his temple—he who is holy, the one you await.’”⁴⁶ The Roberts-Donaldson and Keith translations are even more explicit: “The Lord shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Holy One, for whom you look.”⁴⁷ Though the immediate translation here is from Malachi, Isaiah is the prophet who uses the term “Holy One” or “Holy One of Israel” most often—twenty-nine times in his book.⁴⁸ Though God

⁴⁰ These quotations are from the New American Standard version. The Jewish Publication Society Tanakh note on Isaiah 11:4 identifies this judge as a coming, messianic king who “will always render accurate and fair judgments” (Berlin and Brettler, 807).

⁴¹ *2 Clement* 17:5.

⁴² Despite its frequent mention in the early church, the letter’s authorship remains in doubt. Was he Paul’s companion or first bishop of Rome? For a review of recent scholarship on this issue, see Ehrman’s introduction to *1 Clement*, vol. I, 18-33 and Andrew Gregory, “*1 Clement: An Introduction*,” *SAGE Publications* 117, no. 6 (2006): 223-230, accessed at <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.saintleo.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=12&sid=dfda492f-7f38-41a8-8418-80149aa43eed%40sessionmgr4007&hid=4101>.

⁴³ *1 Clement* 20:12; 32:4; 38:4; 43:6; 45:7; 50:7; 58:2; 61:3; 64; and 65:2.

⁴⁴ Hurtado, 379.

⁴⁵ Hurtado, 379.

⁴⁶ Malachi 3:1. Ehrman footnotes the LXX version of Isaiah 13:22 here also.

⁴⁷ Roberts-Donaldson, available online at <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/1clement-roberts.html>. The John Keith translation is included in Allan Menzies, ed., *The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325: Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 9 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2004), 236.

⁴⁸ Jeremiah, Hosea, and Habakkuk use “Holy One” only twice; Ezekiel uses it only once.

had insisted that He would not “share [his] glory with another,”⁴⁹ the early church in its writings would attribute to Jesus the glory due only to the divine judge, the Lord, the Holy One of Israel.

Baptism for Forgiveness of Sins

These early writings also reveal that worship’s content proclaimed that baptism for the forgiveness of sins was rooted in Isaiah. Barnabas writes: “But we should look closely to see if the Lord was concerned to reveal anything in advance about the water and the cross.”⁵⁰ In a rant against Israel’s lack of obedience, Barnabas refers to “the baptism that gives forgiveness of sins” and then discloses the answer to his query by blending passages from the Psalms, Jeremiah, and Isaiah to link the wisdom of old to the church’s practice of baptism:

But we should look closely to see if the Lord was concerned to reveal anything in advance about the **water** and the **cross**....For the prophet says, “Be astounded, O heaven, and shudder even more at this, O earth. For this people has done two wicked things: they have deserted me, the **fountain** of life, and dug for themselves a pit of death...And, “You will dwell in a high cave, built of solid rock, and its **water** will not fail. You will see a king with glory and your soul will meditate on the reverential fear of the Lord.” Again in another prophet he says, “The one who does these things will be like a **tree** planted beside springs of **water**; it will produce its fruit in its season, and its leaf will not fall, and everything it does will prosper....Notice how he describes the **water** and the **cross** in the same place. He means this: how fortunate are those who went down into the **water** hoping in the **cross**.⁵¹

Clement of Rome links “the gracious gift of God” (baptism) to Isaiah’s plea to “wash and become clean.”⁵² The anonymous writer of *2 Clement* also warned his listeners that “those who do not keep the seal of their baptism”⁵³ will suffer the fate Isaiah had prophesied for those who violate God’s commands: “Their worm will not die nor their fire be extinguished; and they will be a spectacle for all to see.”⁵⁴ Each of these writers argue that Isaiah had offered insight into their baptismal practice centuries before it was put into practice. To summarize: throughout their writings, these three authors give us an indication of the content of early church worship as it was interpreted through the prophet Isaiah. In their gatherings, through words and through actions, (1) Jesus was proclaimed as savior; (2) Jesus was honored as Lord; and (3) baptism was portrayed as offering forgiveness of sins.

⁴⁹ Isaiah 42:8; 48:1.

⁵⁰ *Barnabas* 11:1.

⁵¹ *Barnabas* 11:1, 2, 5-6, 8. See also Psalm 1:1-3; Jeremiah 2:12-13; Isaiah 16:1-2; 45:2-3. Emphases added.

⁵² *1 Clement* 8:1, 4; See also Isaiah 1:16.

⁵³ *2 Clement* 7:6.

⁵⁴ Isaiah 66:24, Ehrman translation of *2 Clement* 7:6.

The Form of Worship

The second facet of worship is its form or practice—what the people actually do while gathering. While Constantinian-era worship would bequeath to us liturgies, sacramentaries, and martyrologies describing (or prescribing?) their practices, which twentieth-century scholars have explored deeply,⁵⁵ details from the first two centuries are much more difficult to ascertain. Edward Foley explains that worship in the domestic church was “a largely improvised and auditory event, similar to the worship of the synagogue.”⁵⁶ Thus, we find little in the way of rubrics concerning early practice; in *1 Clement*, we find scattered references to prayer posture—cruciform, arms raised, “necks [bowed] in submission”⁵⁷—but neither specific nor alluded references to Isaiah’s influence. Surprisingly, the Trisagion (Triple Sanctus), which would become standard in later liturgies and was most likely used in the Qumran community,⁵⁸ is found only in *1 Clement*. In urging the Corinthians to “be submissive to His will,” Clement hints at its possible use in both Rome and Corinth:

We should consider how the entire multitude of his angels stands beside him, administering his will. For the Scripture says, “Myriads upon myriads stood before him, and thousands upon thousands were ministering to him; and they cried out, ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord Sabaoth, all of creation is full of his glory;’”⁵⁹ So too we should gather together in harmony, conscientiously, as we fervently cry out to him with one voice, that we may have a share in his great and glorious promises.⁶⁰

Sadly, among our three authors, this is the only reference to a hymn that might have been sung in the earliest communities.⁶¹

The book of Acts lists four chief activities of these early house churches—fellowship, teaching, breaking of bread (eucharist), and prayer—and reports that the community shared their resources “with all, as anyone might have need.”⁶² Within several decades, Justin Martyr’s *First*

⁵⁵ See various works from these highly regarded liturgical scholars: Paul F. Bradshaw, Gregory Dix, Edward Foley, Larry W. Hurtado, Gordon W. Lathrop, Frank J. Matera, Andrew Brian McGowan, James McKinnon, Wayne A. Meeks, Frank C. Senn, Robert F. Taft, and Thomas J. Talley.

⁵⁶ Edward Foley, *From Age to Age: How Christians Have Celebrated the Eucharist* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 33.

⁵⁷ *1 Clement* 2:3; 29:1; 63:1.

⁵⁸ Eileen M. Schuller writes of Jewish liturgical scholarship: “Among liturgical scholars there has been a long-standing dispute as to whether the use of this *Qedushah* (the triple Holy) was an early or a late (perhaps even medieval) development and whether it may have begun with Sabbath prayer and was only subsequently extended to weekdays, perhaps under the influence of mystical, kabbalistic circles. These were very difficult questions to answer when the only evidence we had were medieval prayer books from the tenth century and later. Now 4Q503 shows us that praying with the angels was a very early motif that was already part of prayer before the destruction of the temple—and on weekdays, not just on the Sabbath” (Schuller, 65-66).

⁵⁹ Isaiah 6:3.

⁶⁰ *1 Clement* 34:6.

⁶¹ *The Odes of Solomon* offers an astounding look, however, at songs from this era. See James H. Charlesworth, *The First Christian Hymnbook: The Odes of Solomon* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009).

⁶² Acts 2:42-45. See also the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts. 5:1-11.

Apology describes a similar basic format of mid-second century house church gatherings. After designating the gathering day as Sunday, Justin describes the people listening to “the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets” followed by a time of *ex corde* prayer by the leader, then *eucharistia*, and finally an offering of gifts for the poor among them.⁶³

In both *Barnabas* and *2 Clement*, we find echoes of Isaiah in their brief mention of worship practices similar to Luke and Justin Martyr. First, Barnabas cites Isaiah and the Psalms to justify the Christians’ choice of Sunday, rather than the Jewish Sabbath, as the proper day of worship. He is the first of many⁶⁴ who argues that our world would exist in its present state for only six thousand years:

“See, a day of the Lord will be like a thousand years.”⁶⁵ And so, children, all things will be completed in six days—that is to say in six thousand years. “And he rested on the seventh day.”⁶⁶ This means that when his Son comes he will put an end to the age of the lawless one, judge the impious, and alter the sun, moon, and stars; then he will indeed rest on the seventh day...And so you see that at that time, when we are given a good rest, we will make it holy—being able to do so because we ourselves have been made upright and have received the promise, when lawlessness is no more and all things have been made new by the Lord.⁶⁷

Barnabas continues this eschatological theme, quoting from Isaiah 1:13:

Moreover he says to them, “I cannot stand your new moons and Sabbaths.” You see what he means; It is not the Sabbaths of the present time that are acceptable to me, but the one I have made, in which I will give rest to all things and make a beginning of an eighth day, which is the beginning of another world. Therefore also we celebrate the eighth day with gladness, for on it Jesus arose from the dead, and appeared, and ascended into heaven.⁶⁸

For Barnabas, Jesus’ resurrection ushered in a new era, one celebrated by moving from the seventh day to the eighth, fulfilling Isaiah’s ancient promise of a new beginning for God’s people.

Second, we notice in Luke and in Justin that house church worship differs significantly from Temple worship, where sacrifices on altars are the primary activity. Barnabas is most vehement in his insistence that, for Christians, sacrifices are no longer necessary. We will, for present purposes,

⁶³ Justin Martyr, “Weekly Worship of Christians,” *First Apology*, LXVII in C. Cleveland Coxe, ed., *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1: The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 186.

⁶⁴ For more information on the development of this idea, see Hurtado on Julius Africanus, 350-351 and Richard Landes, “Lest the Millennium Be Fulfilled: Apocalyptic Expectations and the Pattern of Western Chronography 100-800 C.E.,” in W. Verbeke, C. Verhelst, and A. Welkenhuysen, eds., *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1988), 137-209, referenced by Hurtado, *Lord, Jesus, Christ*, fn. 32, 336.

⁶⁵ Psalm 90:4; 2 Peter 3:8.

⁶⁶ Genesis 2:2.

⁶⁷ *Barnabas* 15:4, 5, 7.

⁶⁸ *Barnabas* 15:8, 9.

ignore his anti-Jewish polemics (including his insistence that Israel lost her right to worship after the incident of Aaron's golden calf!) and look instead for his reliance on numerous Isaianic references to early church devotional and corporate worship practices. James Carleton Paget says of Barnabas' reliance on Torah and Prophets:

Almost more than any of the other Apostolic Fathers, with the possible exception of *I Clement*, *Barnabas* attributes ultimate importance to this body of texts. Even if his interpretative take on these texts is singular, his dependence upon them is very typical of early Christian writers of the second century.⁶⁹

As we have seen in Barnabas' use of Isaiah 53,⁷⁰ the early believers' focus of faith shifted from priestly sacrifices in the Temple to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Looking past Barnabas' supercessionism, we are able to glean a few insights into early worship patterns. Although Barnabas claimed that all the prophets had thus spoken, he began his argument citing Isaiah to shape their worship life:

For through all the prophets he has shown us that he has no need of sacrifices, whole burnt offerings, or regular offerings. For he says in one place, "What is the multitude of your sacrifices to me? says the Lord. I am sated with whole burnt offerings, and I have no desire for the fat of lambs, the blood of bulls and goats—not even if you should come to appear before me. For who sought these things from your hands? Trample my court no longer. If you bring fine flour, it is futile; incense is loathsome to me. I cannot stand your new moons and Sabbaths." And so he nullified these things that the new law of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is without the yoke of compulsion, should provide an offering not made by hands.⁷¹

Then, paraphrasing three different passages in Isaiah, Barnabas argued that instead of sacrifices in the Temple, God's people were themselves spiritual temples:

I will also speak to you about the Temple, since those wretches were misguided in hoping in the building rather than in their God who made them, as if the Temple were actually the house of God. For they consecrated him the Temple almost like the Gentiles do. But consider what the Lord says in order to invalidate it: "Who has measured the sky with span of his hand or the earth with his outstretched fingers? Is it not I, says the Lord? The sky is my throne and the earth is the footstool for my feet. What sort of house will you build me, or where is the place I can rest?"⁷² You knew that their hope was in vain! Moreover he says again, "See, those who have destroyed this temple will themselves build it."⁷³

⁶⁹ James Carleton Paget, "The Epistle of Barnabas," *Expository Times* 117, no. 11: 445. Accessed at <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.saintleo.edu/ehost>

⁷⁰ Above, "The Content of Worship."

⁷¹ *Barnabas* 2:4 with Isaiah 11:11-13, Ehrman translation.

⁷² See also Isaiah 40:12; 66:1.

⁷³ See also Isaiah 49:17; *Barnabas* 16:1-3.

Barnabas, drawing on other prophets for insight into Isaiah, concluded that though Rome had destroyed the Temple—and with it Israel’s sacrificial system—a new spiritual house was being built within the lives of the people: “God truly resides within our place of dwelling—within us....This is a spiritual temple built for the Lord.”⁷⁴

The writer of *2 Clement* likewise argues from Isaiah against any need for further Temple sacrifices: “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far removed from me.”⁷⁵ He thus argues that their worship should not be sacrificial, but instead confessional, proclaiming their faith in the Christ: “What then is the knowledge that is directed toward him? Is it not refusing to deny the one through whom we have come to know him?”⁷⁶ In each of our three authors, the arguments against sacrifice come directly from Isaiah.

Third, while we know that early church gatherings centered around body and blood at a table—not around shewbread and lambs on an altar—Clement’s words “to gaze intently on the [sacrificial] blood of Christ”⁷⁷ offer insight into their prayers. What had previously been practiced at the Temple—its sacrifices and its praise—found new holy ground much closer to home. In his concluding remarks on prayer in the early church, Hurtado links this “blood of Christ” reference to Clement’s doxologies and, thus, also to Isaiah:

Remembering that “the blood of Christ” was “poured out for our salvation,” and indeed “won for the whole world the grace of repentance” (7.4), the Christians of *1 Clement* offer their prayer to God through Jesus, their priestly intercessor and redeemer. Note also that in the numerous doxologies of *1 Clement* God is, either unambiguously or arguably, the one to whom glory is ascribed, with Jesus named uniquely in several of them as the one *through whom* glory is given to God. These doxologies are directly indicative of the devotional stance and practice of the Roman Christian circle from whom *1 Clement* came, and these liturgical expressions also likely preserve a very traditional pattern that perhaps stemmed from early Jewish Christian circles.⁷⁸

Fisher, in his studious article on this phrase, also opines that Clement’s repeated doxologies are linked with gazing “upon the blood of Christ” and offer a “striking example of the influence of the church’s liturgy upon the epistle’s language.”⁷⁹ While we dare not extrapolate such an idea into an image of printed orders of service, we can assume that in each locale—including Rome and Corinth—traditions around their dining room tables grew out of the texts that they read together. Isaiah’s influence upon those traditions appears to be quite significant.

Finally, in these writings, we find references to various prayer postures (bowing, prostration, kneeling, arms outstretched),⁸⁰ to confessional prayer,⁸¹ and even to “liturgical rites...according to

⁷⁴ *Barnabas* 16:8, 10.

⁷⁵ Isaiah 29:13, Ehrman translation in *2 Clement*.

⁷⁶ *2 Clement* 3:1.

⁷⁷ *1 Clement* 7:4.

⁷⁸ Hurtado, 615.

⁷⁹ Fisher, citing O. Knoch, 228.

⁸⁰ *1 Clement* 2:3; 29:1; 48:1; 57:1.

⁸¹ *1 Clement* 48:1-2; 51:1, 3.

set times and hours.”⁸² None of these descriptions, however, are linked to Isaiah. Andrew McGowan offers insight into this apparent lack of focus on the form of worship in early church writings:

[What] these Christians confessed and contested when they wrote about “going to church” is not just about what might now be called “worship,” but involved their deepest beliefs and aspirations, and their embodied practice as well as their inner faith... “[W]orship” refers not only to specific ritual performances but also to a wider reality they create and represent. *That wider reality, or “worship” is obedience or service, not gatherings, nor beliefs, nor song, nor ritual, except within that wider whole.* Prayer and communal ritual nevertheless served, along with personal and physical acts of bodily “worship,” to create and express that obedience and service. For the ancients, therefore, such language was not specifically about liturgy any more than it was about music, and it had *as much to do with what we would call politics and ethics as what we call worship.*⁸³

My search for Isaiah in *Barnabas* and *1* and *2 Clement* fully supports McGowan’s claim: Isaiah’s ideas are more readily discovered in the documents’ references to the third facet of worship—its outcome—than in any emphasis on form or practice of worship. Here, in the result of worship, we discover an emphasis on community members’ personal and communal lives reflecting the Jesus they follow.

The Outcome of Worship

Anthropologists observe that the rites of passage in worship—rites of separation (entrance, baptism), of incorporation (singing, reciting creeds, praying), and of aggregation (kiss of peace, eucharist)—move worshipers to view life from a new perspective: in those Roman dining rooms, believers learned that they had not only received forgiveness of sins (reconciliation with God), but that their very identity as Christians (“followers of the Way”) changed all of life, evidenced by signs of reconciliation with their neighbors. Anthropologists, then, confirm what theologians know: gospel-centered liturgy transforms the worshiper. Lutheran theologian Arthur Just echoes this understanding of ritual:

Worship can be nothing less than a recognition on a Sunday morning that a dynamic presence is among us... Unless there is an awareness of the presence of Jesus Christ in that worship and a belief that an encounter with that presence will radically change a person into one of God’s very own, then worship is not everything it can, should, and *must* be.⁸⁴

⁸² *1 Clement* 49:2.

⁸³ Andrew Brian McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 2. Italics added.

⁸⁴ Arthur A. Just, “Liturgical Renewal in the Parish,” in *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, Fred L. Precht, ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), 27.

Just as Luke and Justin indicate that their new communities' priorities had changed, resulting in sharing resources with one another, Barnabas and the two Clements offer evidence of a similar focus on the outcome of worship: a community that exhibits both harmony and mercy.

The First Outcome of Worship—Harmony

The late first-century *Didache* urges fasting on Mondays and Wednesdays, and Justin records that fasting preceded baptism.⁸⁵ In our three authors, however, instructions about the piety of fasting not only ignore such rubrics, but focus instead on community unity and mutual compassion. Drawing on Isaiah's themes of harmony and mercy, they urge the people to show love to their neighbors rather than merely to proclaim their love of God. To set the stage for this part of our investigation, I include most of *Barnabas* 3 with its lengthy citation of Isaiah 58:1-10:

“Why do you fast for me, says the Lord, so that your voice is heard crying out today? This is not the fast I have chosen, says the Lord—not a person humbling his soul. Not even if you bend your neck into a circle and put on sackcloth and make for yourself a bed of ashes—not even so should you call this a proper fast.” But he says to us, “See, this is the fast I have chosen, says the Lord. Loosen every bond of injustice; unravel the strangle hold of coercive agreements; send forth in forgiveness those who are downtrodden, tear up every unfair contract. Break your bread for the hungry, and provide clothing for anyone you see naked. Bring the homeless under your roof. And if you see anyone who has been humbled, do not despise him—neither you nor anyone from your children's household. Then your light will burst forth at dawn, your garments will quickly rise up, your righteousness will go forth before you, and the glory of God will clothe you. Then you will cry out and God will hear you. While you are still speaking he will say, ‘See! Here I am!’—if that is, you remove from yourself bondage, the threatening gesture, the word of complaint, and from your heart you give your bread to the poor and show mercy to the person who has been humbled.”⁸⁶

Harmony and mercy surge through these words. With this Isaianic background, Barnabas offers an apocalyptic warning to stand firm in resisting the temptations of this world by urging his readers not to become arrogant, but to rely on one another and frequently gather together:

Do not sink into yourselves and live alone, as if you were already made upright; instead gathering together for the same purpose, seek out what is profitable for the common good. For the Scripture says, “Woe to those who have understanding in themselves and are knowledgeable before their own eyes.”⁸⁷

⁸⁵ *First Apology*, LXVI.

⁸⁶ *Barnabas* 3:1-5.

⁸⁷ *Barnabas* 4:10-11 with Isaiah 5:21, Ehrman translation.

Again, alluding to Isaiah's suffering servant, Barnabas appeals for harmony based on the ransom offered through Jesus:

This then is the path of light. Anyone who wants to travel to the place that has been appointed should be diligent in his works. Such is the knowledge given to us, that we may walk in it. Love the one who made you; stand in reverential awe of the one who formed you; glorify the one who ransomed you from death. Be simple in heart and rich in spirit. Do not mingle with those who walk along the path of death; hate everything that is not pleasing to God; hate all hypocrisy; do not abandon the commandments of the Lord. Do not exalt yourself but be humble in every way. Do not heap glory on yourself...Do not show favoritism when you reproach someone for an unlawful act. Be meek and gentle; tremble at the words you have heard. Do not hold a grudge against your brother.⁸⁸

Clement of Rome also draws on Isaiah in an appeal for harmony. When he wrote to the church in Corinth, the community was once again deeply divided⁸⁹ by an “odious and unholy breach of unity”⁹⁰ with “envy and jealousy,...strife and dissension, aggression and rioting, scuffles and kidnappings” tearing the community apart.⁹¹ More than half of his epistle is an ardent plea for a restoration of humility, peace, and unity—for mutual respect, for “being submissive rather than forcing submission.”⁹² Clement first cites Isaiah 1:16-20 with its colorful image of washing scarlet sins until they become white as wool;⁹³ then, after cataloging humble Old Testament saints from Enoch through Rahab, Clement cites Isaiah 29:13, urging devotion that is more than mere “lip service.”⁹⁴ While these passages are not directly related to corporate worship practice, they certainly set an Isaianic stage for Clement's advice concerning mutual respect for the role of the bishop and deacon within the community.⁹⁵ “For Christ belongs to those who are humble-minded, not to those who vaunt themselves over his [God's] flock.”⁹⁶ In his call to repentance for their

⁸⁸ *Barnabas* 19:1-3, 4.

⁸⁹ See Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

⁹⁰ *1 Clement* 1.

⁹¹ *1 Clement* 3.

⁹² *1 Clement* 2.

⁹³ *1 Clement* 8.

⁹⁴ *1 Clement* 15. See Isaiah 29:1.

⁹⁵ The terms “bishop” and “deacon” should not be defined backward from the era of the Constantinian church, but must be understood in the era of the *oikos* (“household”) as roles that would arise from function rather than office. Paul L. Maier argues, “Terms that Eusebius uses early in his history (e.g. the ‘bishop of Rome’ or ‘of Antioch’) are largely anachronistic and reflect later stages in the development of church hierarchy closer to Eusebius’ own day. Clement of Rome, for example, was hardly bishop in the later sense but rather a presbyter in charge of communicating concerns of the Roman church to believers in Corinth” (*Eusebius: The Church History, A New Translation With Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999], 132). For scholarship on governance structure in house church settings, see the following works: Robert J. Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in Their Cultural Setting* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009); Roger W. Gehring, *House Church and Mission: The Importance of Household Structures in Early Christianity* (Peabody MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004); Harry O. Maier, *The Social Setting of the Ministry as Reflected in the Writings of Hermas, Clement and Ignatius* (Waterloo: Canadian Corp. Studies In Religion, 2002); and Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

⁹⁶ *1 Clement* 16:1.

disunity, Clement recalls the image of Christ—surprisingly drawn neither from gospel accounts nor Pauline epistles, but from Isaiah’s suffering servant, quoting the entire chapter of Isaiah 53. While Jewish scholars consider the suffering servant to be emblematic of Israel herself or of a “pious minority within the Jewish people,”⁹⁷ Clement clearly draws upon the image of the blood of the Christ as a sacrifice made to bring not only forgiveness of sins, but also a binding together of the people. In concluding his remarks on repentance, Clement shifts to passages from Job and the Psalms, but Isaiah sets the groundwork for the path they must pursue:

You see, beloved men, the example that he has given us. For if the Lord was humbled-minded in this way [Isaiah 53], what shall we ourselves do, who through him have assumed the yoke of his gracious favor?...Loved ones, you should take care that his many acts of kindness do not lead to judgment against all of us. For this will happen if we fail to conduct ourselves worthily of him and to *do the things that are good and pleasing before him in harmony*....We should revere the Lord Jesus Christ, whose blood was given for us; we should respect our leaders; we should honor the elderly [or the presbyters, Ehrman explains parenthetically]; we should discipline our youth in the reverential fear of God; we should set our wives along the straight paths that lead to the good...Let our children partake of the discipline that is in Christ. *Let them learn the strength of humility before God and the power of pure love before God.*⁹⁸

In Clement’s admonition to respect the bishop (or presbyter),⁹⁹ we find the prophet Isaiah framing the appeal.

Another example of an appeal for harmony is found in *I Clement* 34, where the author admonishes the Corinthians neither to “grow idle” nor “abandon our acts of love,”¹⁰⁰ but to honor God as the angels do. Quoting from Isaiah 6:3 (“Holy, holy, holy, Lord Sabaoth, the whole earth is full of your glory”), he urged that, just as the angels, “we should gather together in harmony, conscientiously, as we fervently cry out to him with one voice, that we may have a share in his great and glorious promises.”¹⁰¹ Some scholars (including Lightfoot) consider Clement’s Triple Sanctus to be evidence of a formal first century eucharistic liturgy; W. C. Van Unnik disagrees, suggesting instead that the immediate context—that “we should be submissive to his will”¹⁰²—

⁹⁷ Berlin and Brettler, 890-891, note on 52:13-53:12.

⁹⁸ *I Clement* 16:17; 21:1, 6, 8. Italics added.

⁹⁹ Ehrman writes that Clement uses the two terms interchangeably. See “Introduction” to *I Clement*, vol. 1, 22.

¹⁰⁰ *I Clement* 33:1.

¹⁰¹ *I Clement* 34:7. Clement continues eschatologically, quoting 1 Cor. 2:9: “No eye has seen nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the human heart, what the Lord has prepared for those who await him.” Hurtado supports the proposal that Clement may here be referring to Isaiah: “Given the wide distribution of versions of this saying in Christian texts of the early period,” we may be encountering a “rolling redaction” of Paul’s words. See Hurtado, n. 137, 469. Augustine, in his *Tractate on 1 John 4:4-12* (see Wilken, 503), linked this verse to Isaiah 64:4: “For from days of old they have not heard or perceived by ear, nor has seen a God besides You, Who acts in behalf of the one who waits for Him.” See W. C. Von Unnik, “1 Clement 34 and the ‘Sanctus,’” *Vigiliae Christianae* 5, no. 4 (October, 1951): 204-248, accessed at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1582501>.

¹⁰² *I Clement* 34:5.

more likely indicates “a prayer-meeting in which they cry unto the Lord for the great salvation.”¹⁰³ Van Unnik’s proposition aligns more readily with the general thrust of an epistle which seeks to restore unity to a divided community. Whether or not this Trisagion is a precursor to later liturgies,¹⁰⁴ we certainly find Isaiah’s influence on their corporate prayer life and on worship’s expected outcome: unity of heart and mind as they collectively submit to God’s will.

Let us briefly consider again—within the topic of community harmony—Clement’s invitation to the Corinthians to “gaze intently on the blood of Christ and realize how precious it is to his Father; for when it was poured out for our salvation, it brought the gracious gift of repentance to the entire world.”¹⁰⁵ His call to repentance may, of course, be a reference to the eucharistic meal shared around tables in both Rome and Corinth, but we dare not divert eager-for-liturgical-detail eyes away from Clement’s main point, upheld by Isaiah throughout—that as people redeemed by Christ’s blood (Isaiah 53), they would come together in respectful unity, be “respectful to those who have been set over us, honour our elders, and train up our young people in the fear of God.”¹⁰⁶

The Second Outcome of Worship—Mercy

Not only would the community respect one another and exhibit harmony as Paul had urged—neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female¹⁰⁷—but they were thereby called to exhibit mercy towards the poor and the outcast. Though it is laced with anti-Jewish arguments, Barnabas’ third chapter (quoted earlier) is devoted entirely to Isaiah’s definition of the “right fast” that seeks justice for the downtrodden and generosity towards the poor:

See, this is the fast I have chosen, says the Lord. Loosen every bond of injustice; unravel the strangle hold of coercive agreements; send forth in forgiveness those who are downtrodden; tear up every unfair contract. Break your bread for the hungry, and provide clothing for anyone you see naked. Bring the homeless under your roof. And if you see anyone who has been humbled, do not despise him—neither you nor anyone from your children’s household.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Van Unnik, 248.

¹⁰⁴ The triple sanctus is also found in the Prefatory Eucharistic Prayer in the “Liturgy of the Blessed Apostles, Addai and Mari,” a very early Syrian liturgy which is unusual—although not alone—because of its lack of the standard “Words of Institution.” In 2001, the Roman Catholic Church quietly affirmed this rite as “traditional” in spite of its unusual format in “The Historic Agreement on the Eucharist Between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East Promulgated 26 October 2001.” This document declares: “Finally, the words of Eucharistic Institution are indeed present in the Anaphora of Addai and Mad [sic], not in a coherent narrative way and **ad litteram**, but rather in a dispersed euchological way, that is, integrated in successive prayers of thanksgiving, praise and intercession.” See Robert F. Taft, S.J., “Mass without Consecration?: The Historic Agreement on the Eucharist Between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East Promulgated 26 October 2001,” American Catholic Press, accessed at http://www.americancatholicpress.org/Father_Taft_Mass_Without_the_Consecration.html.

¹⁰⁵ *1 Clement* 7:4. See also Edmund W. Fisher, “Let Us look upon the Blood-of-Christ (I Clement 7:4),” *Vigiliae Christianae* 34, no. 3 (September 1980): 220, accessed at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1583641>.

¹⁰⁶ *1 Clement* 21.

¹⁰⁷ Galatians 3:28.

¹⁰⁸ *Barnabas* 3:2-3. See also Isaiah 58:6-7.

Barnabas ends his letter with a remarkable appeal to the church's leaders to intentionally develop caring relationships with people of lesser means: "I ask those of you who are in high positions, if you are willing to receive advice from my good counsel: keep some people among yourselves for whom you can do good, and do not fail."¹⁰⁹ Barnabas concludes this request in Isaianic, apocalyptic terms: "The Lord is near, as is his reward."¹¹⁰ Recalling Isaiah also, the anonymous Clement likewise repeatedly urges mercy as a primary ethic:

This then is our reward, if we acknowledge the one through whom we were saved. But how do we acknowledge him? By doing the things he says, not disobeying his commandments, and not honoring him only with our lips but from our whole heart and our whole understanding. For he also says in Isaiah, "This people honors me with their lips but their heart is far removed from me."¹¹¹

An even stronger appeal for mercy follows a clear warning of judgment:

But you know that the day of judgment is already coming like a blazing furnace, and some of the heavens and all of the earth will melt like lead in the fire;¹¹² and then the hidden and secret works that people have done will be made visible. Giving to charity, therefore, is good as a repentance from sin. Fasting is better than prayer, but giving to charity is better than both....giving to charity lightens the load of sin.¹¹³

Finally, *2 Clement* sets the outcome of worship fully within the context with which the homily began—the coming day of judgment under Jesus as the divine judge:¹¹⁴

And not only should we appear to believe and pay attention now, while being admonished by the presbyters, but also when we return home we should remember the commandments of the Lord and not be dragged away by worldly desires. But by coming together for worship more frequently we should try to progress in the Lord's commandments, so that all of us, being unified in what we think, may be gathered together to inherit life. For the Lord said, "I am coming to gather all the nations, tribes, and tongues."¹¹⁵

Perhaps Clement of Rome summarizes best the Isaianic themes found in each of our three authors concerning what was most important to these overseers as they looked at the worship in their communities:

¹⁰⁹ *Barnabas* 21:2.

¹¹⁰ See also Isaiah 40:10 and Revelation. 22:12.

¹¹¹ *2 Clement* 3:4-5 with Isaiah 29:13.

¹¹² See also Isaiah 34:4.

¹¹³ *2 Clement* 16:3, 4.

¹¹⁴ "Brothers, we must think about Jesus Christ as we think about God, as about the judge of the living and the dead" (*2 Clement* 1:1).

¹¹⁵ *2 Clement* 17:3-4. See also Isaiah 66:18.

Brothers, we have written you enough about what is fitting for our worship and what is most profitable for the virtuous life, for those who want to conduct themselves in a pious and upright way. For we have touched on every aspect of faith, repentance, genuine love, self-restraint, moderation, and endurance, reminding you that you must be pleasing, in a holy way, both to the all-powerful God—by harmony, holding no grudges, living in love and peace with fervent gentleness...and to all people.¹¹⁶

The early church fathers apparently were not as interested in prescribing worship formats as in focusing on worship's content and on worship's intended outcomes of (1) harmony within the community and (2) mercy for the poor, downtrodden, and outcast. These were the themes those believers heard over and over again as they searched the scriptures¹¹⁷ for insight into the times in which they lived and into will of the One who had come into their midst.

Summary

This investigation opens a new pathway of inquiry—that of the Isaianic sacred text's formative powers in the earliest church community.¹¹⁸ As a student of the earliest church's worship, though I might wish for more detail and more clarity on what those new believers did around those dining tables, I must content myself with what the text offers: when looking specifically for Isaiah's influence on their gatherings, we find that these early writers were less concerned about *rite orders* (rubrics) than about *right order* within the total worship life of the community. Throughout the *Apostolic Fathers*, unity and social justice are of prime importance. Just as the *Didache* would urge discernment between the “two ways,” *Barnabas* and *1 Clement* urge not being of “two minds,” but instead living as God intends. That the Torah, Isaiah, the Psalms, and the other prophets were primary sources of revelation and study in the early communities should not be surprising. A prophet's call has always been back to the foundations of the faith—to loving God by serving your neighbor, demonstrating love for the divine by divine love for others and especially for those less fortunate. We have seen in *Barnabas* and *1* and *2 Clement* that Isaiah's proscription against formulaic worship practices—sacrifices and rituals—helped to shape the identity of these first and second century churches. Isaiah's fuller meaning, interpreted through the worship life of the new community in these three documents, is twofold. First, Jesus' suffering and death (viewed through Isaiah 53) is to be displayed in the harmonic life of the community as demonstrated by repentance (Isaiah 1, 2, 29), genuine love, and devotion toward one another. Second, the new communities should overflow with love and generosity toward the poor and the outcast (as in Isaiah 58's fast).

¹¹⁶ *1 Clement* 62:1, 2.

¹¹⁷ See especially Isaiah 1, 2, and 29 (sin and confession), 53 (suffering servant), and 58 (the right way to fast), all quoted and alluded to in our three writers.

¹¹⁸ Another document from this era beckons towards further research: *The Shepherd of Hermas*, a lengthy and fantastical book of visions, commandments, and parables, was “copied and read more widely in the second and third centuries than any other non-canonical book” (Erhman, vol. 2, 162). Though Ehrman insists that *Hermas* contains no Old Testament references, I consider it a treasure chest of Isaianic allusions and parallels.

My Isaiah-dig into these early church fathers confirms the view that of worship's three facets, form is of the least significance. For the fathers, content (the good news that Jesus is both savior and Lord and that baptism brings forgiveness of sins) and outcome (community harmony and mercy) were paramount. Diversity of practice was of little consequence. Liturgical studies of the past half-century highlight that ritual forms became important to church fathers only when Constantine sought to authorize Christianity by facilitating worship that looked and sounded like imperial celebrations. Twelve hundred years later, Gutenberg's press accelerated the move toward worldwide uniformity of rite. As James White says, "Liturgical standardization was a new concept, radical in its implications but made possible by the technology of the first mass-produced product, the printed book."¹¹⁹ White argues that at a time of great missionary activity (the opening of new worlds), "liturgical character was funneled" through Rome, and, of course, "it was only natural that Italian ways appealed to Italians."¹²⁰ In contrast to these two eras, the early church fathers emphasized the content of worship and its outcome in the lives of the community.

Based on his words which spurred my investigations, I'm guessing that Robert Wilken would not be surprised to find that the earliest church's focus was on the communal ethics that flowed out of early Christian worship. A story is told about another Robert—Robert E. Webber, liturgical scholar and worship renewal proponent—who, in his writings, teachings, and seminars, coined the term "ancient-future worship." Webber once answered the question, "How do you know when you've worshiped well?" with the reply, "Am I *obeying* more?" After my investigation into three church fathers' perspectives on worship in the early church, I conclude that Webber, who died in 2007, is now in good company with Barnabas, Clement of Rome, the anonymous Clement, and, of course, Isaiah.

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¹¹⁹ James F. White, *Roman Catholic Worship: Trent to Today* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 22.

¹²⁰ White, 10.