

NOTES ON ISAIAH
64:5 (MT 64:4)

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The initial seven Hebrew words in Isaiah 64:5 (MT 64:4) are [^]Wkzyl [^]ykr'dBiqdc, hf([>ff'-ta, T'[gP', and these seven words have been readily understood and easily translated as:

- sunanthsetai gar toij poioušin to. dikaion kai. twh odwh sou mnhsqhšontai. (LXX)
- For *these blessings* shall happen to them that work righteousness, and they shall remember thy ways. (Brenton's translation of the LXX)
- *Oocurristi laetanti et facienti iustitiam in viis tuis recordabuntur tui.* (Vulgate)
- Thou hast met him that rejoiceth, and doth justice: in thy ways they shall remember thee. (DRA)
- Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, *those that* remember thee in thy ways. (KJV)
- You meet him who rejoices and does righteousness, *Who* remembers You in Your ways. (NKJ)
- Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember thee in thy ways. (ASV)
- You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways. (NIV)
- You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways. (NIB)
- You meet him who rejoices in doing righteousness, Who remembers You in Your ways. (NAU).
- Thou meetest him that joyfully works righteousness, those that remember thee in thy way. (RSV)
- You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways. (NRS)

- Thou meetest him that rejoiceth, and worketh righteousness, {those that} remember thee in thy ways. (WEB)
- Would that you might meet us doing right, that we were mindful of you in our ways. (NAB)
- You come to meet those who are happy to act uprightly; keeping your ways reminds them of you. (NJB)
- You welcome those who cheerfully do good, who follow godly ways. (NLT)

But the closing seven Hebrew words in Isaiah 64:5 (MT 64:4), [v~~ו~~ו~~ו~~ו~~ו~~ > ~I A[~hb' aj x~~ל~~ל~~ל~~ Tpcq' hT~~א~~א; !he are quite problematic. The Septuagint translated these words as *idou. su. wrgisqhj kai. hmeij hmartomen dia. touto epla-nhqhme*, “behold, you were angry and we have sinned; therefore we have erred.” It has nothing for the last word, [v~~ו~~ו~~ו~~ו~~ו~~ > “that we be saved.” It appears that the Hebrew *Vorlage* here had ~~wl w[~hb~~, with the ~ of ~hb being read as an enclitic ~ and the hb of the ~hb having the same demonstrative force as the hb in Gen 24:14, [daeHbW “and by this I will know” (which became in the Septuagint *kai.en toutw|gnwsomai* “and in this I will know”). Moreover, the ~ of the MT ~I w[was misread as the first person plural verbal suffix ~~wl~~ “we” affixed to the verb ~~I w[’~~ “to act wrongfully.”

The NRS followed the Septuagint here by having nothing for the closing word [v~~ו~~ו~~ו~~ו~~ו~~ > “that we be saved.” The NRS also has nothing for the problematic ~I A[~hb’ “in them eternal,” but has a doublet for the MT ~~aj x~~ל~~ל~~ל~~ Tpcq~~, reading “But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself we transgressed.” Surprisingly the NAB has nothing for the MT [v~~ו~~ו~~ו~~ו~~ו~~ > ~I A[~hb’ at the end of 64:5b— which at first glance

is a senseless phrase meaning “in them eternal and we will be saved.”

The first four words of 64:5b, $\text{aj } \chi\text{llk} \text{ Tpcq' hTa;!he}$ were easily translated as:

- behold, thou art wroth; for we have sinned (/KJV)
- behold, thou wast wroth, and we sinned (ASV)
- Behold, Thou wast angry, for we sinned (NAS)
- Behold, thou wast angry, and we sinned (RSV)
- But you were angry, and we sinned (NRS)
- You are indeed angry, for we have sinned (NKJ)
- behold thou art angry, and we have sinned (DRA)
- Behold, you are angry, and we are sinful (NAB)
- Yes, you have been angry and we have been sinners (NJB).

By contrast the words $\sim\text{IA}[\sim\text{h}\beta'$, “in/with them eternal,” when read as the adverbial modifier of the $\text{aj } \chi\text{llk}$ “and we sinned” in 64:5b has been very problematic, resulting in such translations as:

- in those is continuance (KJV, WEB)
- *We continued* in them a long time (NAS, NAU)
- in them *have we been* of long time (ASV)
- in our sins we have been a long time (RSV)
- In these ways we continue (NKJ)
- now we persist in your ways (NJB)

The pronoun “them/those/these” in these translations refers to the sins which are referenced in the verb $\text{aj } \chi\text{llk}$ “we sinned.” The noun “sins” rather than a pronoun “them” even appears in the RSV. By way of contrast the NJB interpreted the $\sim\text{h}$, pronoun suffix of $\sim\text{h}\beta'$ to refer to the ^ykrdi “your ways”

(i.e., God’s ways) mentioned in 65:5a (MT 65:4a).

A number of the translations read the closing verb [v~~h~~h>] “and we will be saved” as interrogative—even though the interrogative particle **h** is lacking. Noteworthy are the following:

- And shall we be saved? (NAS)
- and shall we be saved? (ASV)
- How then can we be saved? (NIV, NIB)
- And shall we be saved? (NAU)
- and shall we be saved? (RSV)
- How can people like us be saved? (NLT).

A much better interpretation of Isaiah 64:5b (MT 64:4b), [v~~h~~h>~lA[~hb' aj x~~h~~h: Tpcq' hT'a;!he comes by recognizing that these seven words contain three phrases in which several words became mistakenly inverted, namely:

- Phrase A: Tpcq' hT'a;!he “Lo you! You became angry”;
- Phrase B: ~hb' aj x~~h~~h: “But we sinned in spite of them”;
- Phrase C: [v~~h~~h>~lA[“and would that we be saved eternally!”

Phrase B needs to be read before Phrase A. The antecedent of the pronoun “them” in Phrase B is the noun [^]ykr'd> “your ways” in 64:5a (MT 64:4a).¹ The preposition **b** of the ~hb means “in spite of,” a meaning found in Neh 10:1, Jer 3:10, and Psa 78:32 (tazθl kb. “in spite of all this”) and also in Psa 27:3 (tazθ. “in spite of this). The imperfect verb [v~~h~~h> “we be save” in Phrase C is a subjunctive expressing a wish. The two words [v~~h~~h>~lA[“ need to be inverted so the adverb “eternal” fol-

lows the verb “we be saved.” This phrase ~IA [[V~~W~~] needs to be moved to the end of verse 64:9, “. . . we are all your people, *and would that we be saved forever.*”

With the above observations and interpretations in focus Isaiah 64:5 and 64:9 can be restored and translated as follows (with the new interpretations highlighted in italics):

64:5 (MT 64:4)

You met the one rejoicing
and the one doing righteousness.
They remember you in your ways.¹
*But we sinned in spite of them.*²
Behold you became angry.

64:9

Be not exceedingly angry, O LORD,
and remember not iniquity for ever.
Behold, consider, we are all thy people.
and would that we be saved forever.”

NOTES

1. For the many references where ⁰rD_i “way” refers to moral actions and duties commanded by God, see item 6 in the right hand column of page 203 in F. Brown, and S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, editors, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1891; 2nd ed. 1906; reprint 1962, Oxford: Clarendon Press).

2. Here the meaning has to be “But we sinned *in spite of your ways.*” As noted above on page 3 the NJB rightly interpreted the ~h_i suffix of ~hB' to refer to the [^]ykrdi “your ways,” (i.e., God’s ways) mentioned in 65:5a (MT 65:4a).