Verbum Vitae

"Holy Seed" in Isaiah 6:13: Echo of an Exclusive Concept of Israel's Identity

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Abstract: The last phrase in Isa 6:1–13, in which critical exegesis sees an element of a post-exilic supplement to an existing text, communicates the thought of surviving the announced destruction of the little remainder referred to as the "holy seed." The problem considered in the presented study is the meaning of the term "holy seed" in Isa 6:13bβ, the possible context and the historical motive for inserting this phrase into the text of Isa 6, as well as the place of this complementary interference in the historical process of formation of Isa 6. The article presents literary and historical-critical analyses of the terms "seed" and "holy people" relating to the people of God and Israel, especially the expression "holy seed," which in the Old Testament, apart from Isa 6:13bβ, occurs only in Ezra 9:2, while it appears more often in the Book of Jubilees and in the Aramaic Levi Document. The results of the research lead to the thesis that the supplement in Isa 6:13bβ is a testimony to the last interferences in the composition of Isaiah, behind which stood literati from the Zadokite circles of the Hasmonean period. The prophetic statement in Isa 6:13bβ redefines Israel as God's people, separate from other nations. For this people there is hope for survival in a small remnant that remains aware of its election and holiness, and faithful to the covenant. This remnant of the people will prove to be the holy seed.

Keywords: holy seed, Isaiah, Zadokites, identity, exclusivism

Twice in the Old Testament the term "holy seed" appears in metaphorical use to designate human descendants, namely in Ezra 9:2 and Isa 6:13. In Ezra 9:2, the "holy seed" (זרע הקדש) are the people of Israel who were accused of mixing with the peoples of Canaan. According to the biblical text, the chiefs presented the problem to Ezra, who had just arrived in his homeland with a group of compatriots from the Babylonian exile. The term "holy seed" in this text indicates the distinctly exclusive character of the Israelite ethnos. This view was held by zealous returnees who considered themselves true Israelites and heirs to God's promises. The expression "holy seed" (זרע קדש) in Isa 6:13 characterizes the very few of God's people who will survive the destruction foretold by God to Isaiah. Historical-critical exegesis sees in Isa 6:13 a later addition to the text, in which the destruction appears to be complete, embracing all the people (העם הזה), because they have ceased to listen to the voice of God. The term "holy seed" seems to serve there to express hope for the survival of God's people in the holy remnant. But what is the exact meaning of the expression "holy seed" in Isa 6:13? Does it differ from the meaning attributed to the term in Ezra 9:2? The last phrase of Isa 6:13 with the descriptor "holy seed" (w. 13bβ) is not found in the Septuagint but is instead present in the Qumran manuscript (1QIsaᵃ).

What, then, may this term say about the historical formation of Isa 6? Attempting to answer these questions is the main goal of this study.

1. Isa 6:13 in the Content Composition and Formation History of Isa 6

The text of Isa 6:1–13 presents itself as the words of the prophet about seeing YHWH in the temple and being called to carry out the mission of announcing God's judgment to the Israelites. The boundaries of the pericope are determined by the time indications in Isa 6:1 and 7:1. Its first essential part is the description of the vision, at the centre of which is the testimony of the experience of the prophet of the immeasurable greatness and holiness of YHWH (vv. 1–4), followed by a remark about the cleansing of the prophet (vv. 6–7), who felt terrified and overwhelmed by the vision (v. 5). The second part consists of words about the mission entrusted to Isaiah (vv. 8–10), his response expressed by the question about the time of this mission (v. 11a) and God's answer (v. 11b) with an extended description of destruction (vv. 12–13).[1]

The text of Isa 6:1–13 has the characteristics of a text describing a prophetic calling, but it is most likely that it is not about the inaugural call of Isaiah, the call to a prophetic ministry, but about Isaiah's commissioning for a mission related to a specific task and time. An argument for this perception of Isa 6 may be the similarity of this text to the presentation of Micah's vision in 1 Kgs 22:19–21, which is not a narrative about an inaugural call of a prophet, but about entrusting a temporarily limited task to a person who voluntarily undertakes it. Moreover, the position of this vision narrative in the book (chapter 6) suggests that at least its last editors understood the text as having this character.[2]

According to the current text, the prophet, after experiencing the sight of God's majesty and the "cleansing" of his lips (vv. 1–7), expressed his readiness to undertake the God-given task (v. 8) before he heard what the task was, that it was not to call the people to conversion, but to harden their heart, by numbing their ears and blinding their eyes, "lest they understand with their heart, … and turn again, and be healed" (vv. 9–10). In response to the question about the duration of the hardening (עד מתי – "how long?" [v. 11a]), he heard from God that the end would be destruction involving the depopulation of cities and houses and the transformation of fields into

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[1]   On the literary structure of Isa 6:1–13 cf. and see e.g. Sweeney, *Isaiah*, 132–134; Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 112–113; Berges, *The Book of Isaiah*, 80; Williamson, *Isaiah*, 36–38.

[2]   Cf. e.g. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah*, 223; Watts, *Isaiah*, 104; Grogan, "Isaiah," 504–505; Eck, "Bilden," 57–65. For more on this topic, including dissenting views, see e.g. Wildberger, *Jesaja*, 234–239; Kaiser, *Isaiah*, 121–123; Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 171–172; Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 114; Berges, *The Book of Isaiah*, 80; Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 91–91; Williamson, *Isaiah*, 38–40.

wastelands (v. 11b). In vv. 12–13, however, there is already an element of hope in the "holy seed" motif.

Karl Budde, in a study published in 1928, presented his thesis about the "memoir" (*Denkschrift*) of Isaiah, which would include the material of Isa 6:1–9:6 and constitute a closed composition, drawn up by the prophet shortly after the Syro-Ephraim war (734–732 BC).[3] Some exegetes have rejected this hypothesis,[4] others have taken it up, making modifications that correspond to the conclusions of their own analyses and reflections. The vast majority of scholars believe that the Isaiah-Memoir can only be spoken of in terms of a collection that was gradually expanded and edited, and may have received its final form even in Persian times.[5]

The text of Isa 6:1–13, as an important part of this "memoir," has also received various diachronic identifications. One justifies the opinion that the basic material of the pericope, dated to the early post-Isaian period in the 7th century BC, is the passus Isa 6:1–11.[6] However, it can be assumed as correct thesis that it was only passus 6:1–8, to which, during or immediately after the exile, 6:9–11 was added with a Deuteronomistic interpretation of the catastrophe of 587 BC.[7] The tradents of the Isaiah material introduced the Deuteronomistic-shaded hardening motif in 6:9–11[8] not to indicate the endpoint of the catastrophe, but to show a way of its new understanding. It was the hardening decreed by YHWH which was the reason for the exile.[9] The text of Isa 6:12–13 presents a testimony to other post-exilic stages of the formation and expansion of Isa 6, providing a complementary commentary to what was given earlier in Isa 6:11. The first later insertion was probably the statement in Isa 6:12 which differs from the preceding one (v. 11) in style. There is a clear reference to the deportation of the people.[10] The v. 13abα can be considered slightly later. In this statement, we can see the words of the editor, who thought it appropriate to remind the survivors that a new divine judgment awaits them, which will decimate them in numbers, if they do not show repentance. The phrase Isa 6:13bβ, with the term "holy seed," would be yet another and final late-post-exilic addition to the pericope.[11]

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[3]   Budde, *Jesaja's Erleben*.

[4]   E.g. Reventlow, "Das Ende der sog. 'Denkschrift,'" 62–67; Irvine, "The Isaianic Denkschrift," 216–231.

[5]   E.g. Kaiser, *Isaiah*, 114–218; Werner, "Vom Prophetenwort," 1–30; Sweeney, *Isaiah*, 118–119, 127; Williamson, "The Isaiah Memoir"; Berges, *The Book of Isaiah*, 73–80; Balogh, "Historicising Interpolation," 519–538. The hypothesis of the origin of Isa 6:1–9:6 from a single author in the early post-exilic period was proposed by Alexander V. Prokhorov (*The Isaianic "Denkschrift"*) but it was met with substantive criticism (see, for example, reviews: Hays, 103–104; Abernethy, 564–565).

[6]   So e.g. Wildberger, *Jesaja*, 241–242; Wagner, "Jesaja-Denkschrift."

[7]   So e.g. Berges, *The Book of Isaiah*, 80–87. Isa 6:1–8 could have its original continuation in 7:3 (Vermeylen, *Du prophète*, 246) or in 8:1–4 (Becker, *Jesaja*, 94–102); cf. Kaiser, *Isaiah*, 119–120, 130–131.

[8]   Cf. Deut 32:15; 1 Sam 6:6; Zech 7:11–14.

[9]   Cf. Berges, *The Book of Isaiah*, 85–87.

[10] Compare the use of רחק (hif.) in reference to deportation in Jer 27:10; Ezek 11:16; Joel 4:6.

[11] Cf. Wildberger, *Jesaja*, 241; Kaiser, *Isaiah*, 133; Becker, *Jesaja*, 64–65; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah*, 223; Berges, *The Book of Isaiah*, 80, 87–89.

2. "Seed" (זרע) as the Offspring Promised by God

The term זרע ("seed"), which in Isa 6:13 occurs in conjunction with קֹדֶשׁ ("holy"), in addition to its material sense, associated with the realm of agriculture or fertility (*semen virile*), very often has a metaphorical meaning in Hebrew Bible. From the theological point of view, the most important thing is the application of זרע to the offspring that is the object of God's promise. As a technical term for the expression of an important aspect of the promise doctrine, זרע is regularly used in the singular but as a collective noun. Thus the word may designate the whole line of descendants as a unit, as well as one man of promise.[12]

זרע as the object of God's promise first appears in Gen 3:15, in the so-called proto-evangelium. There is a divine proclamation in it that the offspring (זרע) of the first woman will overcome the offspring of the serpent. Later the promise זרע is made to the descendants of Abraham (Gen 13:15–16; 16:10), Isaac (Gen 17:19; Exod 32:13) and Jacob (Gen 26:4; 48:4), as well as David (2 Sam 7:12). The descendants of the patriarchs are not only promised a blessing, but also receive this promise, expressed especially in the gift of the land (e.g. Gen 26:3; Exod 33:1; Deut 1:8). Furthermore, God's promise of offspring to the patriarchs is also linked to the announcement that through the offspring of the patriarchs God's blessing will be received by all the nations of the earth (Gen 26:4; 28:14).

3. Israel as a "holy people" (עם קדוש)

The term "holy" (קֹדֶשׁ) defines what is set apart and separated from something else – what is unholy and common. In the Old Testament, it primarily refers to YHWH, who is characterised by absolute holiness, "otherness" from creation, transcendence, and majesty (cf. Isa 6:3). With regard to the creation, that is to man and to various objects, holiness means separation, being set apart for YHWH as a holy God.[13] In texts identified as priestly (P) and their updating (*Fortschreibung*) (Pˢ), holiness was linked to the sanctuary as the place where God appeared holy in his glory and by his presence sanctified the sanctuary, its objects and cultic personnel (e.g. Exod 29:42–46). However, there is no mention of "holy people."[14] In the statements considered to be the fruit of the post-priestly (post-P) redaction of the Law of Holiness (Lev 17–26), sanctification no longer extended only to the priests, descendants of Aaron, but also to the people (e.g. Lev 20:22–26). In this way, the priestly concept of holiness was

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12   E.g. Kaiser, "זרע (*zeraʿ*)," 252–253; Hamilton, "זרע (*zāraʿ*)," 1127–1128.
13   E.g. McComiskey, "קדשׁ (*qādash*)," 787–788; Müller, "קדשׁ (*qdš* heilig)," 589–593; Otto, *Deuteronomium 1–11*, 865.
14   Durham, *Exodus*, 396–397; Dohmen, *Exodus*, 273–274.

broadened. Holiness became the duty of the people and the consequence of the work of the holy (קדוש) God, who "for himself" separated (בדל) this people from the other nations (Lev 20:26). An even later reworking attested in Lev 11:24–46, which presupposes the post-P redaction of the Law of Holiness and the related transformation of the concept of holiness, extends the priestly casuistry by also applying it to the daily life of the Israelites.[15]

There are several places in the Hebrew Bible where the term "holy people/nation" (גוי/עם קדוש) appears, referring unambiguously to Israel (Exod 19:6 [גוי קדוש]; Deut 7:6; 14:2, 21; 26:19; 28:9 [עם קדוש]; Isa 55:5 [קדוש ישׂראל]; cf. Isa 62:12 [עם הקדש]; Isa 63:18 [עם קדשׁך]). The term "holy" (קדוש) defines Israel's attitude toward YHWH, indicating its exceptional closeness. Israel is a holy people "for" YHWH (ליהוה [Deut 7:6; 14:2, 21; 26:19]; לו [Deut 28:9]; לי [Exod 19:6]).

In Deuteronomy, the motif of the "holy people" is attested only in passages identified as the fruit of the post-exilic update (*Fortschreibung*) of the book,[16] linked to the times of Ezra at the end of the 5th or beginning of the 4th century BC. Holiness in these statements is an important internal aspect and determinant of Israel's relationship to YHWH. Israel's holiness, however, does not derive from his nature, but is founded on the act of YHWH's choosing (בחר) it from among all the nations (מכל העמים) and making it the "personal property" (סגלה) of YHWH (Deut 7:6; 14:2). Both motifs – "holy people" and "personal property" – served in the characterization of Israel's relationship to YHWH as a covenant relationship (Deut 26:16–19).[17] We also read about Israel as a "holy people" at the beginning of the post-priestly (post-P) Sinai pericope in the Book of Exodus (Exod 19–24). According to Exod 19:5–6, it was Israel's duty to be what God YHWH wants him to be and that, by listening to YHWH's voice and guarding his covenant, Israel can experience the nearness of his God (cf. Num 15:40). The sanctification of Israel belonged to the conditions of YHWH's theophany and his action for the good of Israel (cf. Josh 3:5). This perspective of perception of Israel's sanctification, marked by a look to the future, is confirmed in Deut 28:9, where the establishment of Israel as a holy people is mentioned as the fulfilment of God's promise but conditioned by keeping the commandments of YHWH and walking in His ways.[18]

Israel is also referred to as a "holy people" in the post-exilic Isaiah texts (Isa 62:12; 63:18). The reference in Isa 63:18 does so in the context of words about the Israelites'

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15   Reinhard Achenabach and Eckart Otto speak in this case of a so-called "theocratic reworking" (*Theokratische Bearbeitung*), which would assume an already formed Pentateuch (Achenbach, *Die Vollendung*, 499–528; Otto, *Deuteronomium 12–34*, I, 1293–1294). See also e.g. Meyer, "Leviticus," 87–88; Hieke, "Die Heiligkeit," 204; Hieke, "Ihr sollt," 354–356.

16   Otto, *Deuteronomium 1–11*, 866.

17   Otto, *Deuteronomium 1–11*, 865–866; Otto, *Deuteronomium 12–34*, II, 1991.

18   Dohmen, *Exodus*, 63–64; see also Römer, "Provisorische Überlegungen," 132–136, 151; Ska, *The Exegesis*, 139–164.

distancing from God's ways, the numbness and hardness of their hearts (Isa 63:17), which may point to some relation to Isa 6:9–13.[19] In turn, in the text of Isa 55:5, which is identified as a post-exilic redactional addition, Israel is referred to as holy (קדוש ישראל) in the context of its task of calling for the conversion of other nations and mediating their salvation. This may be evidence of a somewhat different tendency coming to the fore in the post-exilic community of Judah.[20]

In the conception of Israel as a "holy people" attested in the utterances mentioned and discussed above, holiness is a decisive marker of the identity and status of God's people. On the one hand, it is God's gift to Israel, but on the other hand, it is a task. The attribution of the descriptor "holy people" to Israel communicates the idea of Israel's national-religious exclusivism as God's people and also its specific task. The diachrony of the utterances with the term "holy people" applied to Israel allows a reflection to be seen in them of the post-exilic debate related to the problem of the identity of God's people and the definition of their status.[21]

4. "Holy seed" (זרע הקדש) in Ezra 9:2

In Ezra 9:2, the expression "holy seed" (זרע הקדש) metaphorically defines the Israelite ethnos. It conveys the ideal of the community of God's people, which, according to the biblical text, the "princes /chiefs" (שרים) had, when they presented to Ezra the problem of the faithlessness (מעל) of the people. That faithlessness was expressed in the fact that the people of Israel (העם ישראל), including the priests and Levites, did not separate themselves (לא נבדלו) from the peoples of the lands (עמי הארצות) and their abominations (תועבתיהם), but mixed (התערבו) with these peoples by way of intermarriage (Ezra 9:1–2). Those accused of unfaithfulness were recruited from among those who had previously returned from exile, together with those who, though not having been in exile, had joined their fate with the repatriates.[22] In turn, those peoples of the lands were the non-Jewish inhabitants of the province of Judah and their near neighbours, including the Samaritans,[23] but also the Judeans who did not go into exile and who may have posed a threat to the returnees in their attempts to purify Israel from foreign influences.[24]

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[19] Watts, *Isaiah*, 903–904; Grogan, "Isaiah," 851; Ska, *The Exegesis*, 145.
[20] More see e.g. Berges – Beuken, *Das Buch Jesaja*, 193–194; Zawadzki, "Nowe tłumaczenie," 78–79, 82.
[21] Testimonies of the post-exilic debate about the identity of God's people can also be seen in other prophetic texts, e.g. in Mal 3:1–5 (cf. Zawadzki, "Mesjaństwo," 391–396). A broader discussion of this issue, however, goes beyond the scope of this study.
[22] Williamson, *Ezra*, 130.
[23] Williamson, *Ezra*, 46, 50, 130; Min, *The Levitical Authorship*, 121–122; Yamauchi, "Ezra," 448.
[24] E.g. Cataldo, "The Other," 13; De Villiers, "Foreigner," 6.

The idea of holiness invoked in Ezra 9:1–2 in the context of the problem of intermarriage and the separation of Israel from other nations suggests a perception of the statements in Ezra 9:2 in relation to Lev 20:22–26 and Deut 7:3–6.[25] Thus, we would have a fragment of the late-post-exilic story of Ezra and the fruit of the post-priestly (post-P) redaction of the Law of Holiness and postexilic updating (*Fortschreibung*) of Deuteronomy: three records written in about the same place and time (the 4ᵗʰ century BC), providing testimony to understanding the identity and uniqueness of Israel as God's people. Only in Ezra 9:2, however, is the term "holy seed" found. The author of the utterance used it to adequately describe this small community of Judeans who had returned from exile (*golah* community). In this characteristic, one can see a reflection of a new group consciousness, based on the Deuteronomic idea of otherness and separation and born out of the experience of exile. This consciousness set the ideal that the exiled Judeans were to put into practice. The descriptor "holy seed" in Ezra 9:2, however, has very exclusive connotations. As such, it can convey the spirit of a lively, post-exilic debate about Jewish identity.

5. "Holy seed" in Jubilees and Aramaic Levi

The term "holy seed" occurs several times in the apocryphal Book of Jubilees, the origin of which is dated between 170 and 150 BC.[26] The analysed expression communicates in this work the idea of Israel's difference from other nations. For Israel belongs to a holy God (*Jub.* 16:17–18.26; 22:27; cf. 25:3, 12.18; 30:7–7). In this regard, the author of Jubilees takes up the line of the tradition expressed in the Law of Holiness, in Deuteronomy and Ezra. However, he lays greater emphasis on this holiness-based separation of the seed of Israel from the seed of the Gentiles (e.g. *Jub.* 30:7–15). Hence, according to Jubilees, the mixing of these seeds by intermarriage profanes and also defiles the holy seed of Israel, God's holy name, and is a threat to the entire community.[27]

Another writing in which the term "holy seed" is used to express the uniqueness of Jacob's offspring is the Aramaic Levi Document (ALD). However, whereas in Jubilees "holy seed" refers to all the patriarchs and their descendants, in the Aramaic Levi Document the use of the term is restricted to Levi and his descendants,

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[25]   While the reference of Ezra 9:1–2 to Deut 7:3–6 should be considered probable, in the relation to Lev 20:22–26 we have a rather independent, parallel adaptation and updating of the available material. For more see e.g. Pakkala, *Ezra*, 108–110; Grätz, "Zuwanderung," 304–305; Bautch, "Holy Seed," 530–539; Hensel, "Ethnic Fiction," 141.

[26]   VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees*, VI; Kugel, "The Compositional History," 520.

[27]   Hayes, "Intermarriage," 25; Hayes, *Gentile Impurities*, 80; Sivertsev, *Households*, 64–65; Frevel, "Separate Yourself," 226, 243–247.

the Levitical priests. The holiness of Levi and his descendants is founded on the proximity of a holy God and hence for the author of the document this 'holy seed' is like the holy place (ALD 17–18). Scholars place the origin of the Aramaic Levi most often in the 3th or early 2nd century BC.[28]

In terms of the use and understanding of the term "holy seed," the two documents must certainly be seen in a reciprocal relationship. It is likely that in this respect it is not Aramaic Levi that refers to and depends on Jubilees, but rather the opposite. The epithet "holy seed," which the author of Aramaic Levi referred to Levi and his priestly offspring – holy as holy is the temple, the place of the presence of the holy God – was used by the author of Jubilees to define the Israelite ethnos in its distinction from other nations.[29] Jubilees, using the term "holy seed," emphasises the religious-ethnic aspect, betraying a nationalised and exclusive approach. Such use of the term "holy seed" may have been historically conditioned. "Holy seed" was supposed to adequately define the Israelites as God's people who had to stand and faithfully persist in confronting radical Hellenisation.

6. "The seed blessed by YHWH" in Trito-Isaiah

In Trito-Isaiah, the "blessed seed" theme occurs twice, namely in Isa 61:9 (זרע ברך יהוה – "the seed which Yahweh has blessed") and 65:23 (זרע ברוכי יהוה – "the seed of the blessed of YHWH"). In the first case, it is an element of the prophetic announcement of a complete change of situation of those who grieve in Zion (Isa 61:3) and of giving them comfort and consolation. God's view of the future resulting from God's faithfulness to covenant obligations is expressed there. The "blessed seed" is described as a covenant partner with YHWH (Isa 61:8–9). The reviving power of YHWH's blessing will be recognised in the lives of the descendants of those who mourn in Zion. Other nations will see this and "acknowledge that they are the seed which YHWH has blessed" (Isa 61:9). The unique status of Abraham's descendants will thus be recognised (cf. Gen 12:1–3).[30]

In Isa 65:23 "the seed of the blessed of Yahweh" are the addressees of the saving promise, somewhat earlier mentioned as the descendants of Jacob, YHWH's chosen

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[28] E.g. Greenfield – Stone – Eshel, *The Aramaic Levi*, 19–22; Tervanotko, "Members," 160. Henryk Drawnel (*An Aramaic Wisdom*, 71; "Priestly Education," 548) concludes that the composition of the *Document* can be dated even to the end of the 4th or to the early years of the 3rd century BC. On the other hand, James Kugel ("How Old," 312) even points to the end of the 2nd century BC as the time when the ALD received its present form, however the source material would have come from an earlier period.

[29] An analogy can be seen here with the previously mentioned, temporally earlier expansion of the priestly concept of holiness in the passages attributed to the post-P redaction of the Law of Holiness.

[30] Childs, *Isaiah*, 506; Zapff, *Jesaja*, 394; Grogan, "Isaiah," 840–841; Bautch, "Holy Seed," 535.

and servants (Isa 65:9). They will experience God's reign in a transformed Jerusalem when God creates a new heaven and a new earth (Isa 65:17–18). The blessing, however, will be only for those descendants of Jacob who have not stained themselves with idolatry and have not done what is evil in God's sight (Isa 65:6–7.12). The "blessed seed" will be the renewed community of God's faithful people (Isa 65:21–24).[31]

The blessing of the seed of God's people referred to by the prophetic utterances in Isa 61:9 and 65:23 is linked to God's faithfulness, keeping covenant with his people. The expression "the seed blessed by YHWH" communicates the idea of Israel's permanence and uniqueness, founded on God's choice, love and truth (Isa 61:8–9; 65:9, 22). The remarks about the confrontation of the "blessed seed" with strangers (זרים; בני נכר), nations and peoples (גוים; עמים), present in the prophetic announcement in Isa 61:9 and in its context (Isa 61:5–6), indicate the attribution of a connotation of national-religious exclusivism to this descriptor. However, in the second text under discussion (Isa 65:23), the "blessing of offspring," as the context indicates, is conditioned not only by ethnicity but above all by loyalty to YHWH, expressed in doing his will. This observation harmonizes with the opinion of some scholars that the prophetic statements in Isa 60–64 reflect a negative attitude toward foreigners (e.g. Isa 63:1–6) and in Isa 56–59 and 65–66 the idea of conditional openness to strangers and their acceptance in the community is expressed.[32] The different perceptions of the community of God's people, noticed in the prophetic statements of Trito-Isaiah, in terms of possible membership, result from the history of the formation of this part of Isaiah and its historical conditioning, especially the discussion on the identity of this community. Thus, on the one hand, we have a reflection of the trend towards exclusivism and an intranational identity perspective, on the other hand, an expression of a concept of international identity, according to which strangers can also participate in the community of God's people. It is plausible, then, that the editor of Trito-Isaiah, motivated by the need of the times as expressed in the post-exilic debate over the identity of God's people, added statements to the prophetic text that shifted somewhat the boundaries of that community – from an exclusive nature to a more inclusive one.[33] The words about "the seed of the blessed of YHWH" in Isa 65:23 can therefore be considered part of a younger stratum in Trito-Isaiah, also identified, for example, in Isa 59:12 or 66:18–22, where the term "seed" (זרע) referring to a community experiencing God's blessing, has an inclusive sense. In addition to the Judeans, converted Gentiles may also belong to this community (cf. Isa 56:1–7).

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[31]   Childs, *Isaiah*, 537–538; Zapff, *Jesaja*, 428–429.
[32]   Middlemas, "Trito-Isaiah's," 107–108; De Villiers, "Foreigner," 3.
[33]   Cf. e.g. Nihan, "Ethnicity," 73–77; Middlemas, "Trito-Isaiah's," 106–115; Blenkinsopp, "Judeans," 467; De Villiers, "Foreigner," 3–6.

7. "Holy seed" and the Diachrony of Isa 6:12–13

The observations made above, as well as the research conclusions of other exegetes, suggest seeing in Isa 6:12–13 a post-exilic commentary on the prophetic words in Isa 6:1–11. The final phrase in 6:13bβ – "Its stump is a holy seed" – stands out in this commentary because, after the words about destruction, there is a further statement expressing hope for the survival of a small part of the covenant people Israel. The devastation will not be total.[34] The expression "holy seed," which characterises this people, prompts us to view the phrase Isa 6:13bβ in relation to Ezra 9:2 and in the context of the passages cited and discussed above, which refer to the holy and blessed people of Israel. Through the descriptor "holy seed," the author of Isa 6:13bβ is taking up the characterisation of God's people attested in the fragments of the late-post-exilic story of Ezra, the post-priestly (post-P) redaction of the Law of Holiness and the post-exilic *Fortschreibung* of Deuteronomy. The concept of Israel as God's people referred to in Isa 6:13bβ expresses the ideal of this community, which is characterised by holiness understood as a gift from God on the one hand and as a task on the other. In the light of this conception, Israel is a unique nation, distinct from others, and is to remain so for the sake of purity of faith and partnership with YHWH, resulting from election and covenant

A definition of the community of YHWH, in which the idea of Israel's exclusivism resounds and its identity is seen in an intranational perspective, is found in the statements of Trito-Isaiah in chapters 60–64. This is confirmed by the passages analysed and discussed above, in which the epithets "holy people" (62:12; 63:18) and "blessed seed" (61:8–9) are referred to Israel, and by those in which the foreign nations are perceived as enemies (63:1–6), or are assigned merely servile roles, also to attest divine authority (60:1–16).[35] In the text block called Trito-Isaiah, chapters 56–59 and 65–66, however, there are prophetic words marked by an international perspective on the perceived identity of YHWH's people, combined with openness to strangers. In this vision, the expansion of membership in YHWH's community, which will experience the goodness of God associated with the fulfilment of the promises, is nevertheless conditioned by a faithful and loyal relationship with YHWH, expressed through respect for the covenant law that YHWH has made with the Israelites (e.g. 56:1–7; 66:18–20). On the other hand, in the same chapters there is also mention of God's harshness towards his people who have rebelled, provoking YHWH by their idolatry, arousing his wrath and making themselves equal to pagans who have no desire to invoke YHWH's name. To this "rebellious people who walked in a way that was not good" YHWH announced repayment (פעלה) for iniquities (Isa 65:1–7). In this declaration of repaying the people in full measure in

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34   More see e.g. Grogan, "Isaiah," 510.
35   Middlemas, "Trito-Isaiah's," 108–110.

Isa 65:6–7 we also have reference to the words of repayment /= recompense (פעלה) for the pious in Isa 61:8. In the context of these observations, it is plausible and reasonable to identify the aforementioned text groups, which on the one hand promote the idea of Israel's exclusivity as the people of God (Isa 60–64), and on the other hand testify in this respect to the inclusivist trend (Isa 56–59; 65–66), as coming from two successive extensions and redactional reworkings, and thus reflecting the two historically conditioned stages of the formation of the Book of Isaiah. Diachronically, they should be attributed to the post-exilic period, whereby the passages with the idea of exclusivism, ideologically close to the post-priestly edition of the "Book of Holiness," the post-exilic reworking of Deuteronomy and the history of Ezra, preceded those with inclusivist thought. The latter appear rather as a different voice in the discussion on identity, or as a reactionary and modifying response.

If we assume that the passage in Isa 6:12–13bα is a supplementary commentary to the statement in Isa 6:11 and historically the fruit of a next stage of the literary development of Isa 6, possibly dated to the post-exilic period, then the phrase in Isa 6:13bβ with the epithet "holy seed" would be an even later addition. In the words about the mission entrusted to the prophet in Isa 6:9–10, together with God's response to the prophet's question (Isa 6:11) and this additional commentary (Isa 6:12–13bα), one can see a proximity to the Trito-Isaiah passages discussed above with a hint of inclusivism, where conditional membership in the community of God's people and YHWH's repayment for the iniquities of his people are mentioned (e.g. Isa 65:1–7; 66:18–20). In Isa 6:13bβ, by contrast, we are already dealing with rather exclusive thought. Here is the text of Isa 6:13:

13a	ועוד בה עשׂריה	And though a tenth remain in it,
	ושבה והיתה לבער	it will be burned again,
13bα	כאלה וכאלון	like a terebinth or an oak,
	אשר בשלכת מצבת בם	whose stump remains when they are felled.
13bβ	זרע קדשׁ מצבתה:	Its stump is a holy seed.

The Hebrew term מצבת (from נצב – "stand," "set up"), which occurs twice in Isa 6:13 (13bα and 13bβ), means that what is set up and stands firmly, continues standing, remains. It can be a pillar, a monument or memorial and also a tree stump. In Isa 6:13, the context of trees – terebinth and oak – that are felled suggests an understanding of מצבת precisely as "stump." In this case, it would be that small part of the tree that stands firmly, rooted in the ground, even after the tree has been burned and felled. Such a stump could also be a memorial to a tree.[36] In the phrase in v. 13bβ the term מצבת has the pronominal suffix ה- (f. sg.) referring to the עשׂריה ("a tenth")

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[36] This is the direction of the interpretation proposed by John D.W. Watts (*Isaiah*, 110), who translated the term מצבת in Isa 6:13 as "monument," which would be just a reminder of the nation that was destroyed, and of the reason for the destruction. Cf. also the reading of 1QIsaᵃ and emendation suggested by Samuel Iwry ("Maṣṣēbāh," 225–232).

of v. 13a. The מצבתה there therefore refers to the stump of that tenth part, which in the context of Isa 6:11–13 is to be understood as referring to the very small remnant of destruction foretold in the prophecy.

The expression "holy seed" used in the same phrase brings to mind Ezra 9:2, the only other place in the Hebrew Bible where this term is used. However, whereas in Ezra 9:2 "holy seed" defines the entire community of returnees from the Babylonian exile, who were to separate themselves from strangers because of their national-religious distinctiveness, in Isa 6:13bβ it can only be about a very small part of this people, about "a stump of the tenth." From a syntactic point of view, the phrase זרע קדשׁ מצבתה in v. 13bβ is a nominal clause in which מצבתה should be considered the subject of the phrase in v. 13bβ, and זרע קדשׁ the predicate. It corresponds to the translation: "Its stump (is) a holy seed." The substantive predicate (זרע קדשׁ) identifies and describes the subject (מצבתה). In such a construction, it is on the predicate that special emphasis lies.[37]

The phrase in Isa 6:13bβ, as a later addition to the existing composition of the prophecy, introduces an element of hope. Its object, however, is not that a stump will remain of the holy seed, but that a holy seed will survive in the stump. The stump, which is a memorial of destruction, is also a holy seed. This means that the people who call themselves the people of YHWH will only survive as a "holy seed," not otherwise. They will survive only as a holy people who regard their holiness as God's gift and task, as a people conscious of their distinctiveness and blessed by God. Only for such a people is there a future. The meaning of the descriptor "holy seed" in Isa 6:13bβ, compared to the sense it has in Ezra 9:2, has thus been narrowed, and even "extremised," and in this aspect has become closer to the meaning of "holy seed" in Jubilees. YHWH's people, as unique among the nations by virtue of belonging to a holy God (*Jub.* 16:17–18), as long as they maintain their holiness, will survive even when this might no longer be expected. In Isa 6:13bβ we have a kind of redefinition of the term "holy seed," characterising YHWH's people, in relation to its meaning in Ezra 9:2. The "holy seed" is and remains the YHWH people, who maintain their holiness, refrain from profaning themselves and desecrating themselves by mixing with the "seed of the Gentiles" (cf. *Jub.* 30:7–15), who are not hardened, blinded and deaf to the words of YHWH (cf. Isa 6:9–10).

The semantic proximity of the descriptor "holy seed" in Isa 6:13bβ to the meaning it received in Jubilees suggests the diachronic placement of the phrase in Isa 6:13bβ in the same period as the Jubilees record. This would have been the advanced first half of the 2nd century BC. Israel's identity as the people of YHWH was then put to a great test. The challenge was to persevere in loyalty to the traditions of the fathers, to maintain purity and distinctiveness, to reject any defilement with paganism.

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[37]   On the construction and function of nominal sentences see, e.g. Gesenius – Kautzsch, *Hebräische Grammatik*, 472–476.

Embracing these challenges with determination demonstrated an awareness of being a "holy seed," but it was also associated with the hope of perseverance and survival, and above all, a confirmation of what it meant to be a "holy seed."[38] The author responsible for the addition of Isa 6:13bβ can be seen among members of the Zadokite priestly family. Within their circle, there was an abiding awareness of holiness and its transmission from one generation to the next, and a hope for survival in confronting the aggressive Hellenisation of the Seleucids. They manifested an anti-Hasmonean attitude and were opposed to the integration of non-Israelites into the holy congregation of Israel, promoting ideas of purity and separation. It is likely that they were motivated to supplement the existing text of Isa 6 with the phrase in v. 13bβ by a desire to update and bring this Isaiah prophecy into their historical present.

An argument for dating the clause in Isa 6:13bβ in the 2nd century BC may be its absence from the Septuagint, and its presence in the Qumran manuscript – 1QIsa[a] (זרע הקודש מצבתה).[39] Scholars date the scroll to about 125 BC.[40] The Qumran notation of the analysed descriptor differs from the Masoretic one in that it has זרע הקודש (קודש with an article). Most likely the scribe applied the term הקודש to the Qumran community. This sense is suggested by statements from other Qumran manuscripts, in which the הקודש or קודש is applied to community (עדת הקודש – "holy community" [1QSa 1:12]; אנשי הקודש – "the men of holiness" [1QS 5:13; cf. 8:17, 23]; יחד קודש – "holy fellowship" [1QS 9:2]).[41] These phrases express the belief that the Qumran community is sacred and as such replaces the temple as the place of atonement (cf. 1QS 5:6; 8:5–6).[42] Thus, in the Qumran community the idea of the "holy seed" expressed in Isa 6:13bβ received an interpretation specific to this fellowship.

Still further support for the thesis submitted above is provided by the text of Ezek 36:23bβ–38. There is a prophetic announcement of the restoration of Israel as God's people. God will perform this restoration for the sake of the reputation of his name, for the sake of his holiness and covenant faithfulness (especially Ezek 36:23bβ.27–28.32). The restoration will be thorough and complete. YHWH will cleanse his people from the sins and idolatry that have defiled them, and above all he will exchange their hearts (Ezek 36:24–26). It will be a replacement of the central

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[38] Reflections and instructions related to the test that God's people had to endure at that time can be found in the Book of Sirach. There are calls to righteousness and to remain faithful to God as a guarantee of survival (cf. Piwowar, "Wierność," 99–126).

[39] Urlich, *The Biblical Qumran Scrolls*, 342.

[40] E.g. Emanuel Tov ("The Text," 493): 150–125 BC, Peter Flint ("The Book," 230, 248): 150–125 BC, but in a more recent publication ("Interpreting," 162–163): 125–100 BC. The last clause Isa 6:13 is not found in the fragments of 4QIsa[f] (= 4Q60) dated to the first half of the 1st century BC. From Isa 6 there are only a few phrases and words and v. 13 (frag. 11, 4) covers only ה[עשׂריה ושׁבה והית]ב עוד (Urlich, *The Biblical Qumran Scrolls*, 471).

[41] The text and translation: Parry – Tov, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 22–23, 32–34, 194.

[42] 1QS 8:5: בית קודש לישׂראל ... היחד – "the Yahad [shall be] … a temple for Israel" (Parry – Tov, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 32–33). Cf. Ringgren, "קדשׁ qdš," 1203–1204.

element of a person and a re-creation. This radical and great restoration will also result in prosperity, expressed in the rebuilding and repopulation of ruined cities and the fertility of desolate land. Ultimately also the nations around will know this great restoration of God's people (Ezek 36:33–38).[43] Ezek 36:23bβ–38, however, is not found in the papyrus 967, which contains the oldest Greek manuscript of Ezekiel. This papyrus is dated to the first half of the 2nd century AD, but its text is considered to be a testimony to the version of Ezekiel older than the Masoretic text and to be an older *Vorlage* of the "Old Greek" translation. It also has a different chapter order compared to the Masoretic text (12:1–36:23bα; 38–39; 37; 40–48). In the study of Ezekiel, the thesis has been put forward that the indicated changes in content and those in chapter order are the fruit of the activities of Septuagint translators in the 2nd century BC, who promoted pro-Hasmonean and anti-Zadokite tendencies, and of the representatives of Zadokite circles who reacted to these changes, who gave the final shape to the text of the book, interfering in it locally and expressing anti-Hasmonean tendencies.[44] The addition of Ezek 36:23bβ–38, where we read about the great restoration and the new creation of God's people, would have been a response to the religious-social and political turmoil of the Hasmonean era and the result of a heated debate over the identity of YHWH's community.

The "holy seed" motif in Isa 6:13bβ also communicates the idea of a great restoration of God's people, which will also be thorough. A small remnant of what is holy, and because it is holy, will survive. The "holy seed" will give rise to the reborn community of YHWH, which will rebuild the demolished cities and houses and populate the desolate land (cf. Isa 6:11b–13bα). This late supplement to the Hebrew text of Isaiah appears to correspond to the Zadokite perspective of perceiving the historical reality of the Hasmonean period of the 2nd century BC and expressing the Zadokites' concern for the purity, sanctity and distinctiveness of the community for which they felt responsible. In the historical formation process of Isaiah, the phrase Isa 6:13bβ would be a testimony to recent interventions in the prophetic text, later than the Trito-Isaiah passages, which display an international conception of the identity of God's people (Isa 56–60; 65–66).

Conclusions

The author of the phrase Isa 6:13bβ in the expression "holy seed" takes up the metaphorical meaning of the word "seed" known in the tradition on the patriarchs. The term "seed" is there referred to the community of a people who have believed

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[43]   Cf. Alexander, "Ezekiel," 844–846; Konkel, "Das Ezechielbuch," 72–74; Pikor, "Stwórcze działanie," 81–83.
[44]   E.g. Konkel, "Das Ezechielbuch," 59–78.

in God, the people of God, in the context of presenting them as the object of God's promise and its recipient, and as such the beneficiary of God's blessing and the mediator of that blessing to other nations. The designation of this seed as "holy" alludes to the conception of Israel's holiness expressed in the passages identified as testimony to the post-priestly (post-P) redaction of the Law of Holiness and the post-exilic *Fortschreibung* of Deuteronomy, and in the late-post-exilic story of Ezra. The holiness of the People of God is understood there as a gift of God, based on the act of election, and thus a task for the people to remain faithful to their relationship with God and to avoid all that is idolatrous. The epithet "holy seed" in Ezra 9:2, the only place in the Hebrew Bible where it occurs outside of Isa 6:13bβ, defines Israel's identity as God's people, indicating its uniqueness demanding separation from other nations.

The sense of the term "holy seed" in Isa 6:13bβ is close to the meaning of "blessed seed" in the statements of Trito-Isaiah, although more extreme. In this respect, the use of "holy seed" in Isa 6:13bβ shows greater similarity to the understanding of this expression in the Book of Jubilees, where it serves to emphasize the national-religious distinctiveness and exclusivity of Israel.

The phrase in Isa 6:13bβ can be seen as a reflection of the turmoil of the Hasmonean era and as a voice in the debate of the time about Israel's identity and future as God's people. Earlier opinions expressing ideas of the chosenness and uniqueness of this people, with calls for concern to preserve this status, began to be confronted with inclusive tendencies and the concept of international identity. This also found expression in the statements of Trito-Isaiah. The religious and political problems of Hasmonean times became the stimulus for evoking again the idea of national and religious exclusivism, based on the consciousness of chosenness, holiness, and continuance through faithfulness. The prophetic utterance in Isa 6:13bβ thus redefines Israel in a new historical situation, so attesting to the thesis of the relatively long and lively formative process of Isaiah.

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