

## ***Wild Beasts in the Prophecy of Isaiah: The Loss of Dominion and Its Renewal through Israel as the New Humanity***

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*Abstract* — This article argues that the best framework for understanding the Isaianic portrayal of wild beasts having dominion over the land is the “creation mandate” of Gen 1:28. The judgment of YHWH is designed to make it clear that humanity has failed to exercise dominion. This judgment is overturned in the age to come when both animals and humanity are renewed. When YHWH restores Israel, this will begin a renewal of humanity and animals so that this dominion can be successfully carried out.

*Key Words* — *animals, beasts, Isaiah, dominion, creation mandate, new humanity*

Animals and wild beasts play a prominent role throughout the canonical text of Isaiah. YHWH himself is portrayed as a lion (Isa 31:4) and as hovering birds (Isa 31:5). Assyria is also portrayed as a roaring lion growling over its prey (Isa 6:29). Most of the references to animals and wild beasts have to do with woe oracles against both Israel and the nations. For example, the woe oracles against Babylon in Isa 13 proclaim that the land of Babylon will be overthrown by God (Isa 13:19). The result of this is explained in Isa 13:20–22:

It [Babylon] will never be inhabited  
or lived in for all generations;  
no Arab will pitch his tent there;  
no shepherds will make their flocks lie down there.  
But wild animals will lie down there,  
and their houses will be full of howling creatures;  
there ostriches will dwell,  
and there wild goats will dance.  
Hyenas will cry in its towers,  
and jackals in the pleasant palaces;  
its time is close at hand  
and its days will not be prolonged.



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This passage is representative of many other woe oracles in Isaiah (see table 1). The table also indicates that the removal of the dominion of beasts is also a feature in some blessing oracles. Here in Isa 13:20–22, wild beasts command at least a large literary presence.<sup>1</sup> The presence of animals in Isa 13 has been observed as having literary connections to Isa 34 and beyond.<sup>2</sup> But the exact function of the larger motif continues to lack clarity. N. T. Wright argues that Isaiah provides evidence that the nations are contrasted with Israel so that Israel is depicted as “the true Adam” and the nations are “animals” themselves.<sup>3</sup> Although I am in agreement with the assessment that Israel is portrayed as “the true Adam” or the true humanity, my contention is that Wright’s proposal does not cover a crucial part of the relationship between the nations and the wild animal motif in Isaiah. The beginning of Isaiah does indeed support the conclusion that Israel and the nations become animals themselves. Israel herself becomes like an animal that is more senseless than an ox and more stubborn than a donkey (Isa 1:3). What is missing from Wright’s proposal is the fact that Isaiah also portrays Israel and the nations as *inhabited by* wild animals. Walter Houston’s technical study of animals in the OT observes that they were sometimes “symbols of destruction and doom” as well as “unclean.”<sup>4</sup> This observation is helpful but this description does not account for *how* and *why* Isaiah uses animals as “symbols” of doom.<sup>5</sup> This study also complements Terence E. Fretheim’s study of creation and his broad examination of nonhumans (including animals) as instruments of judgment in the prophets.<sup>6</sup>

1. J. Alec Motyer (*The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993], 141), Walter Brueggemann (*Isaiah 1–39* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1998], 122), and Terry R. Briley (*Isaiah* [vol. 1; Joplin, MO: College Press, 2000], 178) suggest that the wild goats and desert creatures should be understood as goat-demons and related heathen superstitions for the sake of rhetorical affect. This is plausible but it is unlikely that so many animals mentioned in this pericope were meant to be understood as demonic or spiritual beings. Perhaps it would be better to view this particular instance as a mix of wild animals and demons.

2. Walter Houston, *Purity and Monotheism: Clean and Unclean Animals in Biblical Law* (JSOTSup 140; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 196.

3. N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 267.

4. Houston, *Purity and Monotheism*, 196.

5. For a nontechnical and largely dated discussion of animal symbolism and ANE cultures, see Maurice H. Farbridge, *Studies in Biblical and Semitic Symbolism* (New York: Ktav, 1970), 58–59.

6. Terence E. Fretheim’s theological interpretation of creation of the OT seeks to address the lack of connection between creation and redemption. I differ with Fretheim, who identifies the OT as creation history rather than salvation history: “The objective of God’s redemptive activity is to transform the creation as it moves toward its eschatological goal. God’s goal is a new creation, not a new redemption” (*God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* [Nashville: Abingdon, 2005], 12).

Table 1. The Curse of the Dominion of Wild Beasts in Isaiah

Text	Object	Woe or Blessing	Animals (ESV)
Isa 2:20	Israel / whole world	woe	moles, bats
Isa 13:21	Babylon	woe	wild animals, howling creatures, ostriches, wild goats
Isa 13:22	Babylon	woe	hyenas, jackals
Isa 17:2	Damascus	woe	flocks
Isa 18:6	Cush	woe	birds of prey, beasts of the earth
Isa 23:13	Tyre and Sidon	woe	wild beasts
Isa 27:10	Israel / whole world	blessing	calf
Isa 30:6	Israel	woe	lioness, lion, adder, flying fiery serpent
Isa 32:14	Israel	woe	wild donkeys, flocks
Isa 34:11	Edom	woe	hawk, porcupine, owl, raven
Isa 34:13	Edom	woe	jackals, ostriches
Isa 34:14	Edom	woe	wild animals, hyenas, wild goat, night bird
Isa 34:15	Israel	blessing	owl, hawks
Isa 35:7	Israel	blessing	jackals
Isa 35:9	Israel	blessing	lion, ravenous beast
Isa 43:20	Israel	blessing	wild beasts, jackals, ostriches
Isa 56:9	Israel	woe	beasts of the field, beasts of the forest

In this short study of the wild beast motif in Isaiah, I will establish a two-part proposition that will address this problem. First, the presence of wild beasts indicates that the nations have failed in their task to have dominion over all the wild animals. Where people should rule, animals have taken over. Second, God's restoration of Israel will inaugurate blessings that will allow Israel and the nations to fulfill God's charge to have dominion over all the earth as indicated by Gen 1:28. This proposal is similar to, but more integrated than, Calvin's suggestion that the vignette of Isa 65 fulfills the dominion "given to man (Gen 1:28) over animals of every kind."<sup>7</sup>

7. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah* (trans. William Pringle; 4 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 4:405. For a summary of the "creation mandate" of Gen 1:28 as it relates to Isaiah, see Bryan E. Beyer, *Encountering the Book of Isaiah: A Historical and*

Methodologically, I focus on literary criticism to examine patterns, key-word repetition, and intertextuality as it relates to the canonical form of Isaiah.<sup>8</sup> Thus, I do not distinguish between certain well-known partitions in Isaiah, and I treat the text as a whole literary unit. My canonical reading of Isaiah does not rest on the identification of any “original reader.” Rather, I examine the relationship between the canonical form of Isaiah as it related to the canonical form of Genesis—and the creation mandate of Gen 1:28 in particular.<sup>9</sup> In sum, Israel’s restoration brings about a reversal that will enable both her and the nations to fulfill the creation mandate to have dominion over all animals and over all the earth.

### THE WILD BEAST MOTIF AND LOSS OF DOMINION

The wild beast motif is present in the Isaianic woes through lexical repetition (key words) and conceptual repetition.<sup>10</sup> The wild beast motif uses repetition of the word *wild* to describe both groups of animals and individual types of animals. Some animals such as “wild oxen” (אֵיִל) and “wild donkeys” (אֵיִמָּוֶה) are given labels that are pragmatic, reflecting the nomadic culture and the interest in presenting them as undomesticated. There are also all-inclusive generic references to “wild animals” (אֵיִל) (Isa 13:21). The individual types of animals include “wild donkeys” (Isa 32:14) and “wild oxen” (34:7). Although the exact identity of some of these animals is unknown,<sup>11</sup> it is clear that these animals are untamed or undomesticated. The conceptual presence of wild animals is also present in some woe oracles that do not use the word or terms that mean *wild*. The concept of wild animals in Isaiah is created in two ways. The concept of wild animals is established through the reversal of domestication so that tame animals such as horses are contrasted with naturally wild animals such as bats and moles. The concept of wild animals is also established even where clear reversal is not pres-

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*Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 265; Richard J. Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching in: Isaiah and the New Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 35. Despite these references, the “creation mandate” remains largely unintegrated with the theology of Isaiah.

8. I assume the unity of Isaiah and often refer to the author as “Isaiah.” For an influential perspective on the authority and importance of the canonical text with criticisms of Motyer et al., see Brevard Childs, *Isaiah* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 31.

9. For a similar method, see Peter D. Miscall, who finds that “letters, words and themes” from Genesis are “dispersed throughout Isaiah” (“Isaiah: New Heavens, New Earth, New Book,” in *Reading between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* [ed. Danna Nolan Fewell; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1992], 48).

10. Susan Niditch provides a detailed discussion about repetition and orality in Israelite texts and traditions in *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 13–14.

11. See the esv footnote on the “nightbird” in Isa 34:14.

ent so that merely the presence of certain animals implies and connects to the larger motif of wild animals.

It is significant that both Israel and the nations fall under the same type of judgment: what was formerly inhabited and domesticated becomes ruled by wild animals. The woes in Isaiah can be divided into four groupings: (1) against Israel as a whole, (2) against Israel and Judah as distinct entities, (3) against the nations as a whole, and (4) against nations as distinct entities. However, one of the first woes against “Jacob” (Isa 2:6) quickly turns against “all that is proud and lofty” (2:12) and thus to all of the “earth” (2:19) or “humankind” (Isa 2:20). This woe creates a sense of reversal by first describing the land of the house of Jacob as being “filled with horses” (2:7). But this success of dominion as domestication is the product of pride and creating idols from the work of their hands (2:8). Next, the “house of Jacob” merges with all the prideful nations in following pericopae. The judgment is that people shall be forced to enter “caves of the rocks and holes of the ground” (2:19, 21), which is then repeated. This creates a sense of irony as the idols of moles and bats literally inhabit the places in which they are forced to live as they flee from the wrath of God.<sup>12</sup> While giving room for hyperbole and poetic language, it is clear that Israel as well as other nations come to the same fate and judgment with respect to being overrun by wild animals.<sup>13</sup> In this instance, it is the people who move into the domain mastered by the beasts rather than the beasts moving into their land, but the effect is the same.<sup>14</sup> An examination of the judgment of wild beasts in this early woe oracle establishes that Isaiah has no intention of reserving this type of judgment just for Israel or the nations. Thus, while we must still be sensitive to each instance of judgment by wild beasts, there are also universal implications for the motif as a whole.

The loss of dominion over land extends beyond naturally wild animals to even domesticated animals. The “fortified city” can become a place where the “calf” (עֵזֶן) grazes (Isa 27:10). For example, Isaiah’s warning to Ahaz creates a reversal scene in which a land of a “thousand vines” becomes worthless and full of “briers and thorns” (7:23). This reversal overturns the hills that were once hoed into places where “cattle are let loose and where

12. Bats are identified as a cultic unclean animals according to Lev 11:9. The same word for “bats” (עֵזֶן) is used in Isa 2:20 and Lev 11:19. It is not being disputed that cultic concerns are present. However, the context places an emphasis on the caves, which is the domain in which the bat rules or has dominion (Isa 2:19, 21). Thus, pragmatic concerns are foregrounded.

13. With respect to Isa 13, Brueggemann agrees with this concept of “occupation” of the ruins by the beasts. However, he does not seem to understand this occupation as a failure to exercise dominion (*Isaiah* 1–39, 122).

14. The caves and crevices are significant because they are domains and places where wild animals rule, and not simply a last-ditch place to hide that related well to ancient earthquakes—contra Webb, *Message of Isaiah*, 47.

sheep tread" (7:25). Here, cattle and sheep are not necessarily wild, but their presence is one of grazing on unhoed and unsettled land.<sup>15</sup> Even the presence of animals such as sheep and cattle can be used to bring about the judgment that is equivalent to loss of dominion over the land.

The loss of dominion over land to "wild beasts" can refer to literal animals as well as the surrounding nations. The use of "wild beasts" is likely metaphorical in the woe oracle against Israel in Isa 56:9–12. This is particularly likely because Egypt is defined as a source or land of beasts such as snakes (see 30:6). The leaders of Israel are like "shepherds" who have no understanding, "watchmen" who are blind, or "dogs" who do not bark when danger approaches. The danger to which they are silent and blind are "beasts of the field," which is poetically paralleled with "beasts in the forest" (56:9). Isaiah literally invites the beasts to come for a feast.<sup>16</sup> The failure of Israel's leaders means that those who should not exercise dominion are doing so by dining where they do not belong. Like the use of "Babylon" in Isaiah, animals can function simultaneously as concrete historical realities and metaphors.<sup>17</sup>

The concept of dominion is stressed by the places that the animals inhabit. For example, the woe oracle against Israel depicts wild donkeys and flocks making their home in the place of the palace, the city, the hill, and the watchtower (Isa 32:14). The concept associated with the reign of wild beasts is one of *possession*. For example, the woe oracles against Edom state that the hawk and porcupine "shall possess" the land (34:11–15). The poetic nature of 34:11 creates a parallelism between *possessing* (יָרַשׁ) and *dwelling* (שָׁכַן). Obviously, the wild beasts do not exercise their own dominion in the same manner as people. However, they are able to take over and essentially control the land, including what was formally the place where princes and royalty would reign.

The objection could be raised that the primary lens through which the wild beasts should be considered is the clean/unclean schema such as the lists of animals found in Lev 11. There are three reasons why the judgment of wild beasts should not be considered a judgment of uncleanness. First, the Gentile nations do not partake in the Mosaic covenant and therefore cannot become unclean. They *already* are unclean in their totality. The

15. In the judgment oracle on Babylon, sheep who have none to gather them are used to picture the various peoples under Babylon's control who try to flee from God's wrath (Isa 13:14). This supports the conclusion that even domesticated animals can become "wild" when they have no one to control them or exercise dominion over them.

16. The Qal imperative to "come devour" is addressed to the "beasts of the field" in Isa 56:9. See Motyer, *Prophecy of Isaiah*, 468. For a similar construction addressed to wild beasts, see Jer 12:9.

17. Barry G. Webb, *The Message of Isaiah* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 190.

presence of unclean animals in Gentile lands would not change their status before YHWH and it would not be viewed by the nations as anything negative. Even when Israelite land is taken over by unclean animals (for example, jackals), it is the pragmatic function of dominion that takes precedence. The uncleanness of the animals compounds the problem of their control over the land, not vice versa. Second, the exact referent of some of the animals cannot be determined precisely.<sup>18</sup> It cannot always be known what animals are referred to. In addition, the repetition of certain terms for animals that communicate their status as “wild” (13:21) and the use of “beast” (35:9; 43:20) supports the conclusion that it is loss of dominion and control that is the focus of Isaiah’s motif. A third closely related point is that some references to animals having dominion are obviously intentionally vague. The woe oracle against Cush refers to groups of animals such as “birds of prey” and “beasts of the earth” (18:6). These are not meant to be identified with specific animals as is demanded by the cultic concerns of Leviticus.

Others have established the principle behind Isaiah’s first use of the wild beast motif: one becomes what one worships.<sup>19</sup> Thus, Israel became like (or worse than) an ox or a donkey. But this does not explain why Israel and the nations were overrun and overtaken by wild beasts. The universal nature of this type of judgment may be best understood by classifying the dominion of wild beasts over the land of people as a creation judgment or judgment against humanity.

#### THE WILD BEAST MOTIF AND UNIVERSAL JUDGMENT

This universal judgment of wild beasts ruling over people or ruling the place of their inhabitation is best understood in light of Isaiah’s recurrent concern for all humanity. Specifically, the judgment of wild beasts overturns the mandate given by God in his blessing upon humanity immediately after creating humankind: “And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth’” (Gen 1:28). This creation mandate to multiply, fill, and subdue the earth reflects God’s design for

18. For example, the identity of the “flying fiery serpents” in Isa 30:6 could be mythological evil creatures or animals. See D. J. Wiseman, “Flying Serpents?” *TynBul* 23 (1972): 108–10. This occurs near the reference to “Rahab” in Isa 30:7, which is likely a metaphorical reference to Egypt, according to John Day, *God’s Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 90–91.

19. For notes on Gen 2–3 as paradigmatic for idolatry, see Gregory Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 132.



humanity: humankind is designed to reign on the earth.<sup>20</sup> This universal design applies equally to Israel and the nations.<sup>21</sup>

The result of reading Isaiah in light of this dominion mandate for all humanity has three implications. First, all of humanity has failed to achieve that for which God created people. Second, when “wild goats” (שְׁעִירִי) dance on the foundations of cities (Isa 13:21) and hyenas cry in its towers (13:22), the pride and failure of godless determination is mocked. Third, the failure of Israel and the nations to provide acceptable dominion of wild beasts anticipates the need for a new humanity that will fulfill God’s design(s).

Evidence for justifying this reading of Isaiah in light of the creation mandate in Gen 1:28 can be adduced from the woe oracle against Judah and Jerusalem in Isa 3:1–8. Isaiah is clearly interested in overturning prevailing concepts of dominion. The judgment of God will establish “boys over princes” (3:4) and “the youth will be insolent to the elder” (3:5). Even those who survive God’s judgment will resist the conclusion that “you have a cloak . . . you shall be our leader” (3:6). The failure of Israel’s leadership has brought about judgment that targets leadership and dominion.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, the pride of the nations makes their leadership ripe for judgment. It is clear from the woe oracle against Judah that Isaiah’s prophecy seeks to describe YHWH’s judgment as revealing Judah’s lack of ability to rule itself. The only control and dominion it has is shameful and embarrassing. It is within this framework of sin that the failure of humanity to have dominion over the animals and wild beasts is established.

Another piece of evidence that lays a broad foundation for the significance of Gen 1:28 is the reference to the Garden of Eden in the comfort oracle to Israel in Isa 51:3:

For the LORD comforts Zion;  
he comforts all her waste places

20. John H. Walton (*Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006], 124–25) and Daniel J. Treier (*Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008], 121) suggest that Gen 1 portrays the whole earth as a “cosmic temple.” This intriguing thesis may provide further evidence for the significance of animals having dominion in Isaiah. It may imply that animal dominion makes the “cosmic temple” unclean and sets the animals and people at odds with the intended purpose of its creation. The dominion of animals would have repercussions for the people of God as well as Gentiles. In my estimation, this thesis regarding the “cosmic temple” may be a fruitful avenue for further inquiry and theological interpretation of Isaiah.

21. Nanette Stahl also concludes that the creation mandate in Gen 1:28 is for all people: “God delegates to humans an aspect of his life-giving powers and a portion of his sovereignty” (*Law and Liminality in the Bible* [JSOTSup 202; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995], 31).

22. Christopher R. Seitz also concludes that the judgments against the leadership in Isa 3 are a general indictment against Israel’s leadership (*Isaiah 1–39* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1993], 36, 40).



and makes her wilderness like Eden,  
 her desert like the garden of the LORD;  
 joy and gladness will be found in her,  
 thanksgiving and the voice of song.

The presence of water makes it possible to exercise pastoral dominion over the revitalized land. Some commentators connect “Eden” in Isa 51:3 closely with Gen 3:18.<sup>23</sup> The reference to Eden establishes that at least the canonical form of Isaiah draws on the narrative or tradition of the Garden of Eden in Genesis.<sup>24</sup> The history of the text and traditions of both Isaiah and Genesis make this historical relationship very difficult to assess. However, the possibility of some type of intertextual relationship between Isaiah and the narrative of the Garden of Eden strengthens our canonical reading of Isaiah and Gen 1:28. The reference to the Garden of Eden is a distinct piece of evidence for the argument that the mandate to have dominion over the animals in Gen 1:28 is part of the framework for God’s judgment on all of humanity.

Again, the central argument here is that the presence of wild beasts in Isaiah is a vital part of his depiction of the downfall and establishment of a new humanity that will come through Israel to have dominion over all the earth. The greatest challenge to this argument is that Isaiah does not explicitly refer to this creation mandate. It is my contention that this mandate lies in the background as part of a presupposed antecedent theological framework.<sup>25</sup> In support of this, I demonstrated that Isaiah portrays judgment of Israel and the nations as affecting dominion. The creation mandate to humanity in Genesis provides the best explanatory framework for understanding the universal judgment of wild beasts in Isaiah.

23. Motyer, *Prophecy of Isaiah*, 404; Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 40–66* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 390. Joseph Blenkinsopp states that the reference to the “Garden of Eden . . . creates a significant though not insuperable problem for the many commentators who assume, generally without argument, a diasporic, Babylonian background for these [Isa 40–66] chapters” (*Isaiah 40–55: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB 19A; New York: Doubleday, 2002], 182). For our purposes, a canonical reading of Isaiah in light of Gen 1:28 does not require that we assess the merits of the various positions.

24. Eden in Isa 37:12 does not refer to the Eden of Gen 2 and 3 but to one of the Chaldean tribes. See John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 648; Herbert M. Wolf, *Interpreting Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 175.

25. Seitz (*Isaiah 1–39*, 237) and John Goldingay (*Isaiah* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001], 195) argue for an intertextual relationship between Isaiah and Genesis. Seitz proposes that the reference to pairs of animals living in Edom in Isa 34 reflects the state of the earth after the flood in Gen 6:19–7:3. Seitz’s argument for an intertextual relationship presupposes that the narrative or theology of Genesis was normative for the writing of Isaiah. Risto Nurmeela concludes that some of Isaiah is dependent on the text of Genesis (*The Mouth of the Lord Has Spoken: Inner-Biblical Allusions in Second and Third Isaiah* [New York: University Press of America, 2006], 60).

## THE WILD BEAST MOTIF AND THE AGE TO COME

Isaiah envisions an age to come in which the wild beasts who now overrun the land of Israel and the nations will become tame and subservient. The age to come allows Israel and the nations to exercise dominion because the very nature of the animals is renewed.

One of the strongest connections between the new age and the new dominion over the wild beasts is in the passage elaborating the New Exodus or Second Exodus. The introduction of the book of Exodus emphasizes Israel's strength and multiplication so that Israel's first exodus is a microcosm of God's activity of creation and blessing.<sup>26</sup> The Isaianic Second Exodus develops and transforms this picture by imaging how creation and redemption are related. The oracle in Isa 43:19–21 speaks for YHWH:

I will make a way in the wilderness  
and rivers in the desert.  
The wild beasts will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches,  
for I give water in the wilderness,  
rivers in the desert,  
to give drink to my chosen people,  
the people whom I formed for myself  
that they might declare my praise.

The promise of renewal for Israel is directly connected to YHWH's promise to remove the plague of wild beasts. What is also significant about Isa 43:19–21 is that the context places the emphasis on dominion or pragmatic concerns rather than the cultic concerns of clean/unclean.<sup>27</sup> Jerusalem will once again be "inhabited" and under control by humans (44:26). This parallels the same use of the motif earlier in the promise of return from exile in Isa 35. That section also promises a path or "way of holiness" as a New Exodus (35:8). There will be a renewal of the land with water in the place that was a "haunt of jackals" (35:7), lions (35:9), and ravenous beasts (35:9).

The promise of renewal in the age to come entails a substantial change in the relationship between animals and between animals and people. Wild beasts such as wolves will dwell with lambs and leopards will lie down peacefully with young goats (Isa 11:6). Wild beasts will no longer attack and destroy gentle domesticated animals. Although Israel and the nations suffer the same judgment of loss of dominion, Israel is given the privilege

26. Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament*, 112.

27. Paul D. Hanson places an emphasis on reversal from chaos to "beauty and wholeness" (*shalom*) rather than restored domestication and dominion over the animals (*Isaiah 40–66* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995], 75). These are not mutually exclusive positions and Hanson's emphasis supports the conclusion that cultic categories of clean/unclean are not in the foreground.

of being first.<sup>28</sup> The renewal that entails a change in the nature of wild beasts will first come to Israel (11:6–9; 65:25). Once again, the metaphorical use of animals to represent nations opposed to Israel does not undermine their referential use. The new age will change both nations and animals.

Both occasions for describing the promise of a new age that entails a change in the nature of wild beasts are given the qualification “in all my holy mountain” (Isa 11:9; 65:25). This is both geographical and theological. This reference to Mount Zion ensures that the reversal of the wild beasts will come through Israel. There are universal implications for the new age but these come through God’s presence on his “holy mountain.” Israel will be a blessing to the nations because she will be the means by which the wild beasts are finally tamed and the creation mandate can be carried out by all of humanity.

The promised new age of renewal will fundamentally change the nature of wild beasts. This is evident in the promise of the reign of the righteous branch in Isa 11. The nature of wild beasts will be so substantially changed that they will not be able to “hurt” or “destroy” (11:9). In addition, these animals will be subject to pastoral care and dominion: “a little child shall lead them” (11:6). Exercising lordship and dominion over these animals will be so easy that the least among Israel will be able to accomplish what was previously impossible. The change in the nature of wild beasts in the age to come enables humankind to fulfill its charge to have dominion over the animals.

#### THE WILD BEAST MOTIF AND THE NEW HUMANITY

Thus far, we have clearly established that both Israel and the nations fall under YHWH’s judgment. Part of this judgment is being overrun by wild beasts so that it is easily demonstrable that humanity cannot exercise dominion. This problem is universal. Because the task of dominion over the animals was given to all humanity, the solution must bring about a renewal of the animals in the age to come as described above.<sup>29</sup> The solution also

28. David W. Pao argues that the book of Acts uses quotations and allusions from the septuagintal Isa 40 to establish the early church as the restored people of God (*Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus* [WUNT 2/130; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994], 90). For our purposes, it is significant that Pao argues that this Isaianic New Exodus begins in Jerusalem. The reference to Jerusalem is not merely a geographical term. Rather, it reflects the privilege of Israel in God’s program of salvation history in Luke–Acts.

29. This is particularly important for the ANE context because it establishes Gen 1 as an ideological text that challenged other Mesopotamian world views about the role of humanity (J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* [Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005], 148). My position is similar to Middleton’s, who argues that the *imago dei* consists of the “exercise of power on God’s behalf in creation” (p. 88). This is conceptually identical to my use of the word *dominion*. Treier’s critique suggests that Middleton’s thesis about the kingship of God in Gen 1 needs further development (*Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, 123–24).

requires a new humanity.<sup>30</sup>

An important but often overlooked aspect of Isaiah's vision of the age to come is that wild beasts will no longer overrun the cities of Israel and the nations. The age to come will bring about renewal that will enable humanity to fulfill God's charge to have dominion over the animals. Although the judgment of wild beasts comes on all humanity, the solution comes first through Israel.<sup>31</sup>

Israel's privilege of being the source of God's restoration stands behind the universal judgment of wild beasts on all nations. The wild beasts' honoring YHWH will occur when YHWH begins the age of renewal for his "chosen people" (Isa 43:20). In view of the whole canonical text of Isaiah, this text gives Israel priority as the pastors of the renewed animals. Likewise, the vision of a new heavens and a new earth (65:17–25) relates the new humanity to the new animals. The new humanity is characterized by long life that enables them to labor fruitfully. This new humanity is not antithetical to social justice and action in the present.<sup>32</sup> Yet something radically new must happen in the world, as indicated by Isa 65. The new humanity will work to pastor and tend the animals as lions and oxen eat straw together.<sup>33</sup> Again, this happens "in all my holy mountain." There is an inseparable relationship and priority given to Israel as she finally exercises dominion and cares for the new animals. This is all broadly related to her election.<sup>34</sup> Israel will save the nations from wild beasts because she has been chosen by God. This is but a part of the total picture of salvation that YHWH provides for Israel and the nations.

Israel fulfills the creation mandate by controlling animals and having dominion. When YHWH renews creation the animals honor him among

30. References to Isaiah's portrayal of a "new humanity" appear in the church fathers. Theodoret of Cyr viewed Christ as fulfilling Isaiah's prediction of a "new humanity" that would come through Israel. See Mark W. Elliott, ed., *Isaiah 40–66* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament 11; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), xxix–xxx.

31. The priority of Israel is not fundamentally unfair or even favoritism. Charles H. H. Scobie explains that the privilege connected to Yahweh's selection of Abraham (and Israel through him) was dependent "entirely on divine initiative, divine grace, and divine love" (*The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003], 471). This is distinct from Fretheim, who argues that God's actions for the world are primary and actions for Israel are secondary. It is not clear that Israel is even crucial or necessary in Fretheim's view (*God and World in the Old Testament*, 24).

32. One need not choose between political-social action and the creation of a new humanity, as suggested by J. J. M. Roberts, "The Divine King and the Human Community in Isaiah's Vision of the Future," in *The Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of George E. Mendenhall* (ed. H. B. Huffmon et al.; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 131.

33. Even if the animal imagery in Isa 65 (wolves and lambs) refers to nations or people groups, this imagery remains part of a larger pattern within Isaiah.

34. Scobie makes a much broader but similar conclusion by summarizing Israel's privilege as "election is for responsibility" (*Ways of Our God*, 472).

his “chosen people” (Isa 43:20). Here, we build on Wright’s conclusion that what happens to the Gentiles “is conditional upon, and conditioned by, what happens to Israel.”<sup>35</sup> Israel’s restoration positions it as the source of true humanity or the new humanity because it has priority in exercising dominion and fulfilling the mandate of Gen 1:28. Again, the theology of the creation narratives of Genesis comes to the forefront. Israel has priority in taking over the role of Adam who failed in this initial task because of sin. This is not due to her own actions but is a result of God’s gracious election (43:4). The goal or intention of the creation mandate was always to bless.<sup>36</sup> Even though the failure to fulfill the creation mandate resulted in cursing, it eventually accomplishes its purpose for all of humanity.

### CONCLUSION

This literary study focused on a neglected perspective on wild beasts in the canonical form of Isaiah. The argument presented here established that Israel’s restoration brings about a new age that will enable both her and the nations to fulfill the creation mandate to have dominion over all animals and over all the earth. When wild beasts come to control the land the concern is pragmatic rather than cultic. The concern about unclean animals is indeed present but it takes a background position to the pragmatic concern for dominion. Both Israel and the nations fall under God’s curse and lose dominion. Although Israel is subject to slightly different punishments under the Mosaic covenantal stipulations, she and the nations still fall under the particular curse of being overrun by wild beasts. This curse establishes that they have failed in their ability to carry out the basic task given to humanity after creation (Gen 1:28). The answer to this problem can be nothing less than a new humanity and a renewal of creation. This solution comes through God’s chosen nation Israel. It is through Israel that the nations will be blessed with a new age that will include the ability to carry out the creation mandate.

35. Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, 268.

36. E.g., Bernhard W. Anderson identifies Gen 1:28 as a “divine blessing” (*Contours of Old Testament Theology* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999], 90). Fretheim rightly notes that this new creation is greater than the Garden of Eden because it cannot be undermined by human failure (*God and World in the Old Testament*, 198).

