

General Comments on Isaiah 61

This chapter forms the center of the ch. 57-66 block. The pinnacle is the covenant relationship between the Lord and Israel. The preceding and following chapters follow a general covenant theology theme, but here all of the images from those chapters are intertwined and presented in union. All of these themes, marriage, endowment, ministers of the Priesthood, covenant malediction and benediction, are united in a single chapter in a mere 11 verses.

The chapter can be arranged as an inverted parallelism:

A - (v. 1-3) Groom (the Lord) calls and endows Zion - Temple theme

B - (v. 4) Zion prospered materially

C - (v. 5-6) Nations serve, Zion Lord's priests and ministers

D - (v. 7a-b) Zion's shame was twofold (covenant violation, covenant curse)

D - (v. 7c-e) Zion's allotment is twofold (firstborn's portion)

C - (v. 8) Lord abhors extortion, covenants dealt accordingly

B - (v. 9) Zion prospered with posterity and renown

A - (v. 10-11) The bride (Zion) endowed - Temple theme

The temple themes of v. 3 and 10 are very likely drawing on liturgical symbols known to the contemporary Jews and are not an innovation by Isaiah (it is plain the Jews saw this passage as pertaining to the Temple as Jesus announces he has replaced the physical temple subsequent to his anointing by the Spirit, cf. John 1:51, and also cp. Gen. 28:12). While Isaiah's rhetorical style was quite innovative, the symbolism he employed draws heavily, if not exclusively, on preceding texts. As such, we can safely assume there is some considerable overlap between the way modern and ancient temples are used.

KJV Isaiah 61

1 THE Spirit of the Lord GOD [is] upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to [them that are] bound; 2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; 3 To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give

JPS Isaiah 61

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
Because the LORD has anointed me;
He has sent me as a herald of joy to the humble,
To bind up the wounded of heart,
To proclaim release to the captives,
Liberation to the imprisoned;
²To proclaim a year of the LORD's favor
And a day of vindication by our God;
To comfort all who mourn—
³To provide for the mourners in Zion—

unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.

4 And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations. 5 And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien [shall be] your plowmen and your vinedressers. 6 But ye shall be named the Priests of the LORD: [men] shall call you the Ministers of our God: ye shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves. 7 For your shame [ye shall have] double; and [for] confusion they shall rejoice in their portion: therefore in their land they shall possess the double: everlasting joy shall be unto them. 8 For I the LORD love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt offering; and I will direct their work in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. 9 And their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they [are] the seed [which] the LORD hath blessed.

10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh [himself] with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth [herself] with her jewels. 11 For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.

To give them a turban instead of ashes,
The festive ointment instead of mourning,
A garment of splendor instead of a drooping spirit.

They shall be called terebinths of victory,
Planted by the LORD for His glory.

⁴And they shall build the ancient ruins,
Raise up the desolations of old,
And renew the ruined cities,
The desolations of many ages.

⁵Strangers shall stand and pasture your flocks,
Aliens shall be your plowmen and vine-trimmers;

⁶While you shall be called "Priests of the LORD,"

And termed "Servants of our God."

You shall enjoy the wealth of nations
And revel in their riches.

⁷Because your shame was double—
Men cried, "Disgrace is their portion"—
Assuredly,

They shall have a double share in their land,
Joy shall be theirs for all time.

⁸For I the LORD love justice,
I hate robbery with a burnt offering.
I will pay them their wages faithfully,
And make a covenant with them for all time.

⁹Their offspring shall be known among the nations,

Their descendants in the midst of the peoples.
All who see them shall recognize
That they are a stock the LORD has blessed.

¹⁰I greatly rejoice in the LORD,
My whole being exults in my God.

For He has clothed me with garments of triumph,

Wrapped me in a robe of victory,
Like a bridegroom adorned with a turban,
Like a bride bedecked with her finery.

¹¹For as the earth brings forth her growth
And a garden makes the seed shoot up,
So the Lord GOD will make
Victory and renown shoot up
In the presence of all the nations.

Specific Comments on Isaiah 61

1 THE Spirit of the Lord GOD [is] upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to [them that are] bound; 2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; 3 To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.

v1-3 The Spirit of the Lord anoints His servant and propels him to lift up the oppressed (v. 1), to bring justice (v. 2), and redeem Zion (v. 3).

Verses 10-11 form Zion's response to the ministry of the anointed servant of the Lord.

It is common for scholarly commentators (e.g., Anchor Bible, Westminster Bible) to consider this section to be a statement by the author, Isaiah, and not a quotation of the Lord or some later messianic deliverer (they see Jesus' quotation of this passage in Luke 4:19-21 not as a fulfilment but as typological).

Given the surrounding text, it is unlikely this is the case. Verse 1 indicates the character has the Spirit of God upon him, which is reserved for prophets and the occasional prophet-king (cf. Micah 3:8, 2 Sam 23:2). It then presents the character as anointed, which is reserved for priests (cf. Exod. 28:41), prophets (cf. 1 Kings 19:19), and kings (cf. 1 Sam. 15:1). The end of v. 1 then presents the servant as a spiritual and physical delivery. Verse 3 present a vindicator and exalter of the downtrodden. Thus, the character is a prophet-priest-king-herald-vindicator. Isaiah could qualify for prophet and herald, but he lacks the rest of the qualities. Furthermore, in v. 3 Zion is lifted up and clothed by the servant, which is paralleled by the enrobing in v. 10. Clearly, Isaiah did not accomplish or aspire to the events described in v. 10-11. He can be seen as a herald of those events, but he did not accomplish them. Those events can only be achieved by the Messiah, cf. 9:2-7, 11:1-5.

The servant described here is clearly the Messiah. For additional references to servants in Isaiah see 42:1, 42:7, 45:1, 49:9.

v1 "to preach good tidings", see 40:9 and 52:7 for other references to heralds.

"the meek...the brokenhearted", this is referring to the

faithful core among Israel and not Israel in general, cp. 8:16-9:2, 59:9-15.

"the captives...the prison", the physical interpretation would be a release from debtor's prison or freedom from wrongful imprisonment. The spiritual interpretation would be freedom from sin and spiritual bonds and prison, cp. 58:6.

v2 "the day of vengeance", the KJV rendering "vengeance" does not accurately present the intended meaning. The JPS rendering of "vindication", the setting of things aright, is the better translation. The anointed servant is there to judge the wicked and bless the just.

v3 This verse presents a set of synthetical parallels based on a replacement theme (the replacement theme itself is obviously antithetical):

To provide for	the mourners in Zion--
To give them a turban	instead of ashes,
The festive ointment	instead of mourning,
A garment of splendor	instead of a drooping spirit.

"the oil of joy", the Anchor Bible (AB) renders this "oil of gladness" and states, "anointing oneself was part of the proper preparation for festivities". The AB favors the reading that Zion is put into the position where it can once again rejoice in the festivals. The JPS rendering suggests the Groom is placing the turban/crown upon the Bride's head, anointing her himself and giving her a garment of splendor.

v3e-f "trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord", Zion is compared to a garden planted by the Lord, cp. v 9, 60:21.

"trees of righteousness", variously rendered "oaks of righteousness" or "trees of salvation", cp. 51:1, 51:7. The stately forests cut down because of their loftiness recover their splendor, cf. 10:33-34.

4 And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations. 5 And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien [shall be] your plowmen and your vinedressers. 6 But ye shall be named the Priests of the LORD: [men] shall call you the Ministers of our God: ye shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves.

7 For your shame [ye shall have] double; and [for] confusion they shall rejoice in their portion: therefore in their land they

shall possess the double: everlasting joy shall be unto them

8 For I the LORD love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt offering; and I will direct their work in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. 9 And their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they [are] the seed [which] the LORD hath blessed.

v4-9 After being redeemed by the anointed servant, Zion will recover itself (v. 4). All nations (v. 5) will recognize Israel's chosen covenant status (v. 6) at that time. While Israel was doubly punished for their rebellion, they will ultimately inherit the portion of the first-born son (v. 7). This is because the Lord is just and keeps the covenants He makes (v. 8). Thus will all nations know Israel is His chosen people (v. 9).

v4-6 The imagery in the text suggests the Gentiles are placed in a rather subservient position. How literally this is to be interpreted is unclear. Given the statements of 58:3-8 and 66:21 it is safest to interpret the events described here as transitory with the redemption of Zion and subjugation of worldly nations.

However, it is possibly those of natural Israel will continue serve in a special role among the nations as priests of the Lord, akin to the manner in which the tribe of Levi exclusively acted as priests among Israel. The AB states, "A special position as priests is given to the entire people of Israel; see Exod. 19:6. The Israelites shall mediate between Yahweh and the nations." With the destruction of the wicked the righteous remnant of Israel is gathered and dedicated to serve the Lord as His ministers. The destruction of the wicked serves to purge and sanctify Israel, subsequently consecrating her for the position of priesthood service, cp. 7:20, 60:4-7. The special position of not needing material things, as they are provided by those who come up to worship, is a special position of those who perform temple service as well, as was the case with the Levites in general and the house of Aaron in specific, cf. Num. 18:21, Deut. 12:18-19 and 14:27-29. Whether this status is permanent or transitional until all nations accept the Lord is unclear.

v4 Compare 54:3, 58:12, 60:10, 65:21-23, 66:1.

v6 "ye shall be named the Priests of the Lord", during Isaiah's time a priest would refer exclusively to those who serve in the temple, as the priesthood was limited to firstborn sons of Aaron of the tribe of Levi. Thus, this prediction would be seen as a broadening of opportunity of temple service to all of Israel and not just the house of Aaron. This is the curse reversal of the

events of Exod. 32.

"the riches of the Gentiles", both literal material wealth (cf. 60:5-11) as well as the figurative wealth (cf. 49:18-21).

v7 The shame of rebelling against the covenant is contrasted with the blessing of being the firstborn son. The rebellious covenant breaker received double for all their sins (cf. 40:2), while the firstborn son receives a double portion of the inheritance (cf. Deut. 21:17). Here the imagery of double serves to illustrate the rebellious covenant breakers inherit destruction in this world and destruction again in the world to come, while the faithful inherit the earth in this world and the world to come. Additional doubling to faithful Israel could be their absorption of the nation's wealth and children, cf. v. 6.

v7 "everlasting joy shall be unto them", cp. 12:1-6, 35:10.

v8 "an everlasting covenant", cp. 54:10, 55:3.

v9 Israel will become famous among nations rather than cursed and spurned as they formerly were. A curse reversal.

"the seed which the Lord hath blessed", the JPS renders it "a stock the Lord has blessed", the AB renders this "a race blessed by Yahweh". The JPS rendering maintains the garden and tree imagery from v. 3 and 11, and may be deliberately avoiding any language that could be interpreted as "racist". In any case, the intent is to invoke the imagery of the Abrahamic covenant (cf. Gen. 12:2, 18:18 and 22:18) and integrate the garden imagery elsewhere in the chapter. Such a connection would present the Lord as the deliberate and thoughtful caretaker of the vineyard of the Lord (cf. 5:1-7) and the trees in His vineyard (cf. Jacob 5:3-4). The WB states, "Isaiah likens salvation's springing up to the growth of the plants in the garden, that is to say, the place that is cultivated and tended. As thus described, God's saving work for Israel's sake is very different from a once-for-all act of deliverance."

10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh [himself] with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth [herself] with her jewels. 11 For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.

v10-11 Zion, the bride of the Lord, exults in her vindication

and exaltation, cp. 49:18, 52:1-2, 62:4-5, and especially ct. 3:18-24. Also cp. Rev. 19:7-9 and 21:2.

v10 The AB renders this verse as follows:

I will joyfully exult in Yahweh;
my soul will triumph in my God;
For he has clad me in garments of salvation;
he has spread over me a cloak of righteousness,
As a bridegroom puts on a crown,
and a bride decks herself with jewels.

Note where the AB uses "salvation" and "righteousness", the JPS uses "triumph" and "victory". The KJV, NAS, WB and Gileadi all render it "salvation" and "righteousness". Also in v. 11d The JPS renders the term "victory" where the others render it "righteousness", and the same thing occurs in 45:8 as well.

The terms in question are yesha and tsedekah, as follows from Strong's Concordance:

03468 yesha` {yeh'-shah} or yesha` {yay'-shah}
from 03467; TWOT - 929a; n m

AV - salvation 32, safety 3, saving 1; 36

1) deliverance, salvation, rescue, safety, welfare
1a) safety, welfare, prosperity
1b) salvation
1c) victory

06666 ts@daqah {tsed-aw-kaw'}
from 06663; TWOT - 1879b; n f

AV - righteousness 128, justice 15, right 9, righteous acts 3,
moderately 1, righteously 1; 157

1) justice, righteousness
1a) righteousness (in government)
1a1) of judge, ruler, king
1a2) of law
1a3) of Davidic king Messiah
1b) righteousness (of God's attribute)
1c) righteousness (in a case or cause)
1d) righteousness, truthfulness
1e) righteousness (as ethically right)
1f) righteousness (as vindicated), justification, salvation
1f1) of God
1f2) prosperity (of people)
1g) righteous acts

The AB states of v. 10-11:

The response of Zion is a cry of gladness. The "salvation" and the "righteousness" in which Zion is clothed are the saving acts of Yahweh; "righteousness" here signifies both the moral quality and the vindication which moral quality secures. The figure of the bride, suggested in v. 10, is amplified in the following poem. The closing verse repeats the theme that the saving act of Yahweh will be manifested throughout the world. "Righteousness" is here again both the moral quality and vindication, and the manifestation of Yahweh elicits the praise of all nations.

As the JPS previously has no problem attributing righteousness to the Lord or to the His faithful followers, it seems likely in this case the JPS rendering is a paraphrase intended to follow the same meaning the AB offers above, but they use more emphatic terms to reflect the exultant nature of the righteous remnant at this point. The context does support it, given the exaltation of Israel over their former oppressors, the imagery of Israel as a bride, and the renewal of the ancestral lands and cities. Israel has finally achieved its purpose, the Abrahamic covenant is fulfilled, this is victory and triumph for Israel and for the Lord.

v10 "garmets of salvation...robe of righteousness", contrast the garments described here with those of the world described in 51:5-8.

v11 Regarding the garden imagery, see comments on v. 9, also cp. 35:1, 45:8, 51:3, 58:11.

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