

Isaiah 60-62

The Glory of the Lord

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In the previous two articles, I have suggested that Isaiah presented his experience as recorded in chapter 6 of his book as the paradigm for his people. Just as the man of unclean lips was enabled to speak the LORD's message to his nation, so the nation of unclean lips would be enabled to speak his message to the nations. In chapters 7-39, the nation is given a vision of the LORD and of his holiness, particularly as evidenced in his trustworthiness. At the same time the nation is given a vision of itself—a nation that seems chronically unable to trust God and is instead seduced by the glory of the nations into trusting them. An example of this fact is given in chapters 38-39 where Hezekiah, after having been miraculously healed by God, misses an opportunity to give glory to God (cf. 6:3) and instead uses the occasion to boast of his accomplishments to the Babylonians.

So what will motivate the people to trust God and, even further, enable them to actually become the servants of God that he says they are? Strangely enough, the exile was to be that motivation and means as God's grace was manifested to them through it and in spite of it. Just as Isaiah had experienced the fiery grace of God when the coal touched his lips, so the nation of Israel would experience the grace of God in the fires of the exile (cf. 4:4-6). In chapters 40-48, God establishes that the exile is not a sign either of his rejection of Israel or of his defeat by the Babylonian gods. Instead, he will use Israel as the evidence that he alone is God. He will do this by means of predictive prophecy. First of all, he will graciously use Israel, in spite of their previous sin, as his witnesses that he had long before specifically predicted not only the exile but also the return from exile. This was something none of the idol gods, being merely personified cosmic forces, could do. The first part of the prophecy having occurred, God would then carry out the second part and do something that had never occurred before; he would graciously deliver his people from their captivity, using a Persian emperor whom he had had the audacity to name in advance, as his appointed servant. Surely grace like this should motivate a people to entrust themselves to God as his servants.

However, there is still a problem. What about the sins of the past that landed Israel in exile? Will God simply ignore them, acting as though they had never happened? How can the love between Yāhweh the groom and Israel the bride be restored when all those offenses stand between them? Can a just God who has

made a world of cause and effect simply suspend cause and effect on a whim?¹ So, there are two aspects to the restoration: the physical and the spiritual, and the latter is the more serious problem. This seriousness is seen in the skepticism of the people (49:13) that it can be solved, but God has ways that are far beyond anything we can even imagine (55:6-9), and so the prophet reports that God has found a way so that he can be both gracious and just at the same time, not only to Israel but to the whole world. This is what chapters 49-55 are dealing with, the means whereby sinful Israel can become the servants of a Holy God. As we stated at length in the previous article, that way is the Servant, the one who would give his life to carry away the sins of the world. It is for this reason that chapters 54 and 55 are full of the invitation to take advantage of the gracious provision that we are assured God has given and will never withdraw (55:10-11). It is no wonder then that chapter 55 closes on a note of lyrical delight:

You will go out in joy
and be led forth in peace;
the mountains and hills
will burst into song before you,
and all the trees of the field
will clap their hands.
Instead of the thornbush will grow the pine tree,
and instead of briars the myrtle will grow.
This will be for the LORD's renown,
for an everlasting sign,
which will not be destroyed.

Isaiah 55:12-13 NIV

But all of this raises a problem. Why does the book not end at this point? What more is there to say after the revelation of the Servant who makes it possible for Israel, and indeed all persons, to become the servants of the LORD, or even better than that, his friends (John 15:13-15)? In fact there is much more to say, just as there is more to say after Isaiah's glad offering of himself for service in 6:9.² Those further things are contained in chapters 56-66, which seem to be addressed to the returned exiles in years after 539 or 538 B.C.³ What we

¹ Might it not be said, as Harry Orlinsky did (*Studies on the Second Part of the Book of Isaiah: The So-Called "Servant of the Lord" and "Suffering Servant" in Second Isaiah*, VTS 14 [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967], 3-133), that these questions do not actually arise, since Israel had fully paid for its sins in the exile itself (cf. 40:1-2)? In fact, Israel did not fully pay for its sins in the exile. The exile was one result of their sinning, but the only complete effect of sin is death. Thus, Israel should have gone into exile and simply disappeared from the face of the earth as a distinct people. The nation should have died, as should we all, as a result of our persistent self-alienation from the only source of life. That it did not do so was a result of God's grace. But the question still remains, what makes that grace possible?

² It is only very rarely that a sermon on Isaiah 6 in fact treats the whole chapter. Is it that we do not want to believe that a loving Father might call us to service that would not be pleasant and immediately rewarding?

³ There is little unanimity among higher critics as to the authorship and composition of these chapters. Among those who advocate multiple authorship of the book, while many see chapters

have in this final division of the book is a synthesis of the viewpoint of the two previous divisions (7-39, 40-55). If each of those divisions is read by itself, it could be seen as contradicting the other. One example of this feature may be seen in their contrasting uses of the concept of righteousness (*šdāqā*).⁴ In chapters 7-39 (indeed, in 1-39), righteousness is almost exclusively viewed as a kind of human behavior that is demanded by a righteous God (1:21, 26:2). In general, Israel fails to live in this manner. In 40-55, the term is almost as exclusively used to describe God's character as deliverer (46:13, 51:5). It is an expression of God's rightness that he will not leave his covenant partner to suffer shame and disgrace. This is of course much more than legal rightness. Viewed simply from the point of view of legality, the *only* right thing to do with a partner who had repeatedly broken the covenant as Israel had was to leave that partner in such a state, but, as Moses had discovered (Ex. 32:11-13, 34:6-7), this God is more than just. Thus, the right thing for him to do is always to act in grace. This means that *righteousness* is often used synonymously with *deliverance* in this part of the book (e.g., 46:13).

On the surface, at least, it would appear that the two divisions are in conflict. Are humans righteous because of their adherence to some divine standard of righteousness, or are they simply given a relationship with God (on the basis of their birthright) through the righteousness of God? Is "servant of the LORD" only a matter of relationship, or is it a matter of character and behavior? Had the book ended at 55:13 that question would have been unresolved, but chapters 56-66 seem to have as one of their purposes the resolution of the problem. Here justice (*mišpāl*) and righteousness as demonstrated in concrete human behavior are called for. At the same time, it is God's righteousness that is seen as making such a thing possible.⁵ This synthesis emerges immediately in 56:1:

40-55 being the work of a single author, there are few today who would see 56-66 in the same light. The proposal of Bernard Duhm (*Das Buch Jesaja*, 5th edition [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968]) that they were the work of Third Isaiah has now been largely rejected. Most today would agree with Paul Hanson that it is a composite from several sources collected over a period of time after the return (*The Dawn of Apocalyptic* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975]). Fewer would adopt his idea that the work represents the struggle between the elitist followers of Ezekiel and the visionary marginalized followers of Second Isaiah. This article will attempt to show in passing that there is every reason to see it as an integral part of the book and that as such it could stem from the mind, if not the hand, of the Isaiah who is responsible for the whole book. For treatments of these issues at greater length, see John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 10-16, and John Oswalt, "Recent Studies in Old Testament Apocalyptic," in *The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 369-89.

⁴For a more detailed treatment of this issue see John Oswalt, "Righteousness in Isaiah: A Study of the Function of Chapters 56-66 in the Present Structure of the Book," in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition*, VTS 70, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 177-92.

⁵The occurrences of the terms are as follows: *justice* 56:1; 58:2; 59:4, 9, 11, 14, 15; 61:8; *righteousness* 56:1 (2 t.); 57:1 (2 t.); 12; 58:2, 8; 59:9, 14, 16, 17; 60:21; 61:3, 10, 11; 62:1, 2; 63:1; 64:5, 6. Another term having to do with behavior that recurs frequently in this division is *iniquity* 57:17; 59:2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 12; 64:6, 7, 9; 65:7 (2 t.). This term occurs fourteen times in 1-39, and four times in 40-55.

Keep justice and do righteousness,
For my salvation is about to come,
And my righteousness to be revealed.

In other words, the demand of the first part of the book is to be met through the grace revealed in the second part. There is to be a real change in the behavior of God's servants, but that behavioral change is the result of appropriation of divine grace and not the result of human effort. I am aware that this assertion has a distinctly New Testament flavor, but I believe it is supported by the data without appeal to the New Testament.

Some of this data is found in recurring themes throughout the division. They are:

Gentiles coming to God	56:1-8, 66:18-23
The people corrupt, idolatrous	56:9-57:14, 66:3-4
Redemption for the contrite	57:15-21, 66:1-2
The people corrupt, idolatrous	58:1-59:8, 65:1-16
Confession of helplessness	59:9-15, 63:7-64:12
Divine Warrior	59:15-21, 63:1-6
Glory of Restored Zion	60:1-22, 61:4-62:12

When the occurrences of these themes are examined, an interesting pattern emerges. The first recurrence is at the extreme ends of the segment; the next is one step inward, and so forth. When the recurrences are plotted graphically, the following concentric pattern emerges:

Gentiles coming to God	56:1-8
The people corrupt, idolatrous	56:9-57:14
Redemption for the contrite	57:15-21
The people corrupt, idolatrous	58:1-59:8
Confession of helplessness	59:9-15
Divine Warrior	59:15-21
Glory of restored Zion	60:1-22
Glory of restored Zion	61:4-62:12
Divine Warrior	63:1-6
Confession of helplessness	63:7-64:12
The people corrupt, idolatrous	65:1-16
Redemption for the contrite	66:1-2
The people corrupt, idolatrous	66:3-4 (17)
Gentiles coming to God	66:18-23

There thus appears a clear chiasmic structure in the segment.⁶ The recognition of this structure answers a question many students of the book have when they come to this final division. They feel that the climax of the book is chapters

⁶ For further discussion of this structure, see Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 461-65.

60-62 and that chapters 63-66 are an anticlimax. When we recognize the chiasmic structure we can see that the final four chapters are not anticlimactic at all. Rather, they are reinforcing the point made leading up to chapters 60-62. That point is that from God's point of view birthright has nothing to do with the glorious hope that beckons us all. Neither does position considered merely as a religious fiction. God is determined to have changed character in his servants, all the more so because he himself has provided the means for that change of character to take place. This divine determination is illustrated almost shockingly in the opening and closing segments. God is more pleased with foreigners and eunuchs who keep his covenant than he is with purebred Jews who do not.⁷ The shocking truth is that the people called to be God's chosen servants not only do not keep his covenant but seem helpless to do so. They are proud and arrogant about being the chosen of God and yet live lives that are an offense to him and that calls into question his very nature. What must take place? They must be delivered. The "arm of the LORD" must be bared on their behalf, but what deliverance is being talked of here? What enemy is it that must be destroyed? What Edom is it whose blood stains the garments of the Warrior?

If scholars are correct, as seems likely, that these chapters are addressed to those who will have returned from exile, then the deliverance the Divine Warrior offers is not from Babylon. Nor is Edom, having been wiped out by the Babylonians 50 years earlier, the enemy to be destroyed. The enemy to be destroyed is persistent sinning, and the deliverance that is graciously promised is a deliverance from that kind of behavior that is a reproach to the Holy One of Israel. Thus, it will be that the light of God can shine out of the lamp of Zion and draw all nations to himself. The servants have been endowed with the very righteousness of God. The placement of the Divine Warrior segments on either side of the Glory of the Lord segments seems to me to make this point inescapable. There *is* glorious hope, but it is only for those who humbly admit their helplessness to live godly lives, who detest their persistent sinning, and who avail themselves of the grace of God through the Savior to live lives that witness to his delivering power (cf. Ezek. 36:20-26).

There are, however, some elements in chapters 56-66 that do not recur, as indicated by the blanks in the graphic layout above. Two of these occur in the second part of the chiasm, and they reflect the previous mention of the dawn of the Glory of the Lord in chapters 60-62. Pointing back to those chapters and reiterating the elements necessary to their realization, there is still the assurance that those realities do lie in the future for those who are truly his servants. Thus, in chapter 65, after a rather caustic contrast between those who *are* the LORD's servants and those who are not (65:11-16), there is a promise of the new heav-

⁷ This should not be taken to be an anti-Semitic remark. The same might be said in other terms: "God is more pleased with liberals who keep his covenant than with born-again evangelicals who do not." The intent to gain attention by shock-effect is apparent.

ens and earth that God is preparing for his servants (65:17-25). Likewise, in chapter 66, after the denunciation of those who trust in ritual holiness, there is the promise to those “who tremble at his word” (66:5) that Zion will be filled with rejoicing as God rewards his servants and destroys their enemies (66:5-16). Thus, the chiasm is not static but reflects the future reality it points back to.

The third element that does not recur is perhaps the most interesting. This is found at the very center of the chiasitic structure, in 61:1-3. By definition, the center element of a chiasm is the most important, the one the entire structure is pointing to. But what is the center here? Is it the dawning of the Glory of the Lord as recorded in all of chapters 60-62, with 61:1-3 merely being the central element in the center? If we were to conclude that the referent in those verses is merely a human speaker, the prophet, or a member of the prophetic community, as many recent commentators do,⁸ we should probably conclude that. However, not only is the placement of the material suggestive of something more important, so is the material itself. Hanson admits that the language is that applied to the Servant of the Lord in 42:1, and Childs agrees that there is a connection again to 48:16, with its reference to the Spirit. What Childs does not want to permit is that there is also a connection with 11:1-4 where the Messiah is endowed with the Spirit of God.⁹ Even more important than these intertextual references is the function of these statements in their present context. What are they doing here? On either side are prophetic predictions of the dawn of the Glory of the Lord upon Israel, that his righteousness will flower in his people and that all the nations will stream to Zion in homage to Zion's God. This person is not merely going to tell of the divine grace that will enable all of this (61:1-2). He is going to *be* that grace *so that* “they may be called trees of *righteousness* [italics mine], the planting of the LORD that he may be glorified” (2-3). In 59:16 and 63:5 the Divine Warrior is the “arm of the LORD” that will make it possible for God's people to manifest his righteousness. Thus, this person is to be identified with that person, the Lord himself. That being so, this is a further revelation of the Messiah that the book has been pointing to throughout, and this segment is indeed the center of the chiasm in 56-66.¹⁰

When we see 61:1-3 in this way, it makes it easier to see how 60:1-22 and 61:4-62:12 parallel each other. If we look at 60:1-62:12 as some sort of a unit, it is very

⁸ So Paul Hanson, *Isaiah 40-66*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1995), 223-24.

⁹ Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 504-5.

¹⁰ When 61:1-3 is looked at in connection with 59:15-21 and 63:1-6, we perhaps see again the two poles of the Messianic person that have posed such problems for interpreters and theologians over the years. Is the Messiah the Davidic king coming in royal power, or is he the Child who will not break a bent reed? The answer to both questions is yes. For further discussion of this polarity and others in the book see T. Dwyer, ed. *The Newell Lectures*, vol. 3 (Anderson, Ind.: Warner, 1996), 13-90, esp. 53-71.

difficult to see any kind of structure in it. It seems miscellaneous in character.¹¹ On the other hand, when the two blocks of material on either side of 61:1-3 are compared with each other, we see commonalities and differences that are instructive. First of all, while this is certainly not determinative, the two blocks of material are almost exactly the same size, with twenty-two verses in the first and twenty in the second. Second, both discuss the righteousness of God having been realized in the behavior of his people (60:17, 21; 61:10, 11; 62:1, 2). Third, both make the appearance of the divine righteousness (God's glory) in the lives of God's servants the reason for the coming of earth's nations to Jerusalem (60:3, 61:11, 62:2). Fourth, this coming of the nations is the chief theme of both blocks of material.

However, the two blocks are not merely repetitive. They look at these common themes from slightly different perspectives, as might be expected if they are not indeed part of the same unit, but are separated by the restatement of the cause of all this in 61:1-3. In chapter 60, four segments can be identified. The first is introductory (vv. 1-3). Here the basic point is made: The glory of God will now be seen in the very nation that only one chapter previously had confessed that there was only darkness and evil resident in it (59:1-15a). To that light of God, all the nations will be drawn. The second and third segments expand on verse 3 as they speak of the nations coming to the light. In the second segment (vv. 4-9), it is said that the nations will come bringing Zion's children back to her but also bringing their gold to beautify the Lord's house. Verse 9 confirms the statement of 51:5 that the ends of the earth ("the islands") will put their trust in ("wait for") Zion's God. The third segment (vv. 10-16) might seem at first glance to contradict what was just said. Here the foreigners serve Zion, and, if they will not, they will be destroyed (v. 12). This hardly sounds like partners in worship! The overall point of the segment is to focus upon the amazing reversal that God is going to orchestrate for his people. Once foreigners came to destroy Judah and Jerusalem. Now they come to build it up. Once the city gates were fast shut to keep the looting nations out. Now the gates stand open to allow the eager nations to come in with their gifts. Once Israel was forced to bow down in oppressive servitude to the nations. Now the nations will serve Israel. Thus, the point is not so much to make some final statement about the nations as it is to underline the completely reversed relationship between the past and the future. When the second and third segments are read together, as they should be, and not in opposition, a wholistic picture emerges. The nations may join with Zion in worship, but if they will not, they will be compelled to servitude and if not to that, then to destruction. The fourth and final segment (vv. 17-22) expands on verses 1 and 2, that is, the nature of the glory that will be seen in Zion. There will be no question that it will be a reflected

¹¹ See the comments of Ronald Ernest Clements on chapter 60 in "Arise, Shine for Your Light has Come": A Basic Theme of the Isaianic Tradition," in *Writing and Reading in the Scroll of Isaiah*, 1:441-54.

glory. It will be God's light that shines out of the nation (vv. 19-20); it will be his righteousness that is reproduced in the nation (vv. 17, 21). The reference to the nation as a plantation of trees is interesting because while the same word occurs in 61:3, and also in the context of righteousness, trees are used throughout the book, both to represent a life that is blessed of God and a life that is lived in arrogant defiance of God.¹² In short, what this segment portrays is the kind of reversal that God had promised in 1:25-27: from dross to gold, particularly on the ethical level. It seems very significant to me that the next material the reader encounters is the further revelation (after 59:15b-21 and 63:1-6) and indeed, the final revelation of the means whereby that reversal can occur, the Messiah, in 61:1-3.

How then does 61:4-62:12 function as a chiastic partner of 60:1-22? A similar collection of themes is to be found: Israel's reflected glory drawing the nations to Jerusalem (61:8-9, 11; 62:2, 10), the nations that had destroyed Zion becoming the ones to rebuild it (61:4-5), and God's city being a place of beauty and delight rather than horror and derision (61:7; 62:4, 12). The way in which these themes are presented is rather different from the way they are presented in the first occurrence of the pair, and I would contend that this is because of the occurrence of 61:1-3 between them. Here in 61:4-62:12, the focus is more on the change in Israel itself and less on the change in its circumstances. That change has primarily to do with Israel's relationship with God. Here the previously discussed issues of salvation and righteousness come together in explicit ways. Here also the issue of Israel's alienation from God is addressed. Israel sees herself as delivered or saved, and that means that God's righteousness is seen in her. This is not merely the fact that he has righteously delivered her from her sinfulness but that his actual righteous character is displayed in her. This is the truest evidence that she is "no longer forsaken" (62:4, 12), and it is this evidence that becomes the attraction of Jerusalem for the nations (61:8-62:2).

In fact, this thought that Israel's character is the attraction for the nations forms the entire core of the unit. Verses 4-7 recap the previous thought of the oppressor nations now rebuilding the city and nation, so that its former shame is replaced with glory. Why is this so? Isaiah 61:8 begins with the causal conjunction *kî* that indicates that what follows is the substantiation for what preceded. God will have restored glory to his people because he wants to display his ethical character in them. God will display this righteousness in his people before all the nations.

For I, the LORD, love justice,
 hating robbery in place of burnt offering.
 I will make their work true,
 and will cut an everlasting covenant with them.

¹²1:29, 2:13, 10:33-34, 37:24, 44:23, 55:12, 57:5, 65:22. On a related note, it is surely significant that "gardens" (of trees) appears in the first and last chapters of the book, both in connection with pagan worship (1:29, 30, 66:17, cf. also 65:3). By contrast, Israel is God's garden (see 61:11).

Their descendants will be known among the nations,
 and their offspring in the midst of the peoples.
 Everyone who sees them will acknowledge them,
 because they are the posterity the LORD has blessed.

61:8-9 (Author's translation)

In one sense, this thought continues steadily onward right to the end of chapter 62, with 62:10-12 being a kind of climactic conclusion. Thus, 62:10 can speak of raising up a signal flag to call the nations home to Zion. *Signal flag* is used throughout the book, normally as a call to assembly.¹³ Both the first and the last occurrences (5:26 and 62:10) use it in this way but to very different effect. In the first, the nations are called to come and destroy God's vineyard. In this last occurrence, they are called to come and see what God's vineyard looks like when he has redeemed them and made it possible for the life of his Torah ("the everlasting covenant" 61:8) to be realized in them. Along the way are two other occurrences that are of unmistakable importance. They are 11:10, 12 and 49:22. What is this signal flag that calls the nations to their Lord? It is the Messiah who will himself be the flag to call the nations to himself (11:10) and who will be the sign for the nations to restore the captives to God's city (11:12, 49:22).

Thus, the chiasmic pair complement each other as they speak of the fulfillment of the picture that was first painted in 2:1-5 and 4:2-6. A nation that has been made pure and clean, from which God is no longer alienated, but has taken up his residence, becomes such a manifestation of the validity of the Torah that the nations come streaming to learn it and to conform their lives to it. This reality is no glory to the nation, any more than Isaiah's ministry was a testimony to him. Just as was the case with the prophet, so the ministry of the nation would be a testimony to the glorious grace of God, a grace made available supremely and solely through the Messiah. In this light, chapters 60-62 do indeed form the climax of the book, but more than that, they express the climax of history when God's saving purposes will have finally been realized and "all flesh will come to worship before me" (66:22).¹⁴

¹³5:26; 11:10, 12; 13:2; 18:3; 30:17; 31:9; 33:23; 49:22.

¹⁴ For a compact way of looking at the book of Isaiah as a whole as per the presentation in this series of articles, see John Oswalt, "The Kerygmatic Structure of the Book of Isaiah," *Go to the Land I Will Show You*, ed. J. Coleson and V. Mathews (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 143-57.