

14. The sixth century BC



The sixth century in Judah began with the capture of Jerusalem by the Babylonian army under Nebuchadnezzar in 597BC (see the previous presentation). Jehoiakim died during the seige, and was succeeded by his eighteen year old son, Jeconiah (Coniah), who took the throne name, Jehoiachin. He decided to surrender, and the siege was lifted. He was taken into exile in Babylon, along with all the leading citizens. Nebuchadnezzar replaced him with another of Josiah's sons, Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, who took the throne name Zedekiah.

King Nebuchadnezzar ruled over the Babylonian Empire from 605-562. Babylon's main rival was Egypt. In 594 Nebuchadnezzar had to put down an anti-Babylonian conspiracy in which Zedekiah was involved. A few years later, Zedekiah repeated the mistake made by Jehoiakim and, encouraged by Egypt, withheld tribute. In 588 Ezekiel's threats were realised when the Babylonians besieged Jerusalem. Egypt's intervention was unsuccessful (Ezekiel 30:21). Zedekiah attempted to escape, but was captured and killed (Ezekiel 12:1-16). Ravaged by famine (see Ezekiel 4:9-11; 5:10), Jerusalem capitulated (587). A further group of the leading citizens were taken into exile (Jeremiah 52:29), and the city was razed to the ground.

Total number deported about 4,600

The Babylonian Exile (597-538BC) demanded an enormous religious adjustment. In spite of all the hopes built upon promises understood to have come from their God, the Promised Land had been taken from them. Despite the assurances that they had been given that Jerusalem would not be defeated by a foreign king – assurances that were reinforced when Sennacherib failed to capture the city in 701BC – despite all this, the Babylonian army had razed YHWH's city to the ground.

Despite assurances that God would guarantee the dynasty of David, they had lost their king. Despite their belief that the temple was the house of their God, YHWH, it had been destroyed. Any national, institutional basis for their religious identity had been swept away.

If they were going to retain any sense of themselves as a people, they had to discover a firmer basis. They had to learn a new humility, and find a deeper faith in God, independent of political and economic power.

In Babylon, they found themselves living in what was, in many ways, a superior culture, but not religiously. The concept of monotheism (there is only one God), as distinct from monolatry (among the gods only YHWH is to be worshipped) began to emerge (see Isaiah 44:6-23; 45:18-25; Deuteronomy 4:35, 39), as well as a sense of their missionary vocation (see Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:6).

Instead of identifying themselves in relation to the Davidic dynasty, they began to see themselves as a community defined by worship. In the absence of the temple they began to come together to remember and to pray.

This was the beginning of the institution of the synagogue, which has remained central to Judaism ever since. They had to ask themselves how the loss of the land, the temple, and the monarchy, could have happened. It was impossible for them to contemplate the possibility that their God, YHWH, was weaker than the gods of the Babylonians. So they concluded that it must have been their God who brought about the catastrophe that they were experiencing. Since God is just, the problem had to be their infidelity to their part of the covenant, and they interpreted their loss and suffering as God's punishment for their sin, as God's way of purifying them.

Where had they gone wrong? What must they do to bring about the purification without which they could not enjoy God's blessing? These are some of the questions that were being asked by a number of different 'Schools' during the long years of exile. We are left to imagine the dialogue, debate and discussion that went on between them, and with the other concerned groups, struggling to make sense of what had happened to them.

The Deuteronomistic School was working on a comprehensive 'history' to reflect on what had gone wrong and to provide a guide for future leaders. The Priestly School was working on composing an accurate record of the cult. In different ways both were exploring the essential ethical dimension of what it means to be YHWH's chosen people.

The prophet Ezekiel (593-571BC)

One of those taken into exile in 597 with King Jeconiah was a priest, Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:3; 3:15). His prophetic 'career' belongs to the early years of the Babylonian Exile. Ezekiel is addressing his fellow exiles. He also has in focus those who were left behind in Judah.

In Babylon and back in Judah there appear to have been two camps. **One party** was made up of those who advocated acceptance of their fate. What was required of them was that they repent. Their fidelity to the Torah would please YHWH who, in his own time, would restore the land to them.

The **other party** was led by Zedekiah the ruler in Judah. They looked to Egypt to help them throw off the Babylonian yoke. There was no place in their thinking for submission or repentance.

The Ezekiel scroll hinges on the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian army in 587, by which time Ezekiel and his fellow exiles had been in Babylon for eleven years. We find the record of the beginning of the siege (588) in Ezekiel chapter 24, and the announcement of the city's fall (587) in chapter 33. The oracles in the first 24 chapters belong to the period between 593BC and 587BC. These oracles are highly critical of the people's behaviour. They seek to explain why it is that YHWH appears to have abandoned them. Ezekiel insists that the people are undergoing a punishment that they have brought on themselves by their infidelity to the covenant.

The oracles after chapter 33 belong to the period after 587BC. The time for threats is over. In these later oracles Ezekiel highlights YHWH's fidelity and promises a new beginning and a restoration of land and temple. Now that the worst has happened, he focuses on YHWH's desire to forgive. He builds on earlier oracles of hope, if only people would learn the lesson and turn to God (see Ezekiel 11:16-20; 18:30-32). In chapter 36 he speaks of a new covenant, and in chapter 37 he has a vision of the nation rising again. He declares that nothing can separate Israel from God's care (see Ezekiel 38-39).

Again and again Ezekiel makes the point that YHWH is reluctant to punish.

‘Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord YHWH, and not rather that they should turn from their ways and live? ... Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel?’(Ezekiel 18:23, 31).

He also insists that God’s judgment is just. We are punished because of the way we behave (see Ezekiel 7:3-9; 39:23). It is because the people had ‘a wanton heart that turned away from me’(Ezekiel 6:9). They were rebellious (Ezekiel 5:5-10), unfaithful to the covenant (Ezekiel 11:12; 8:1-18; 16:59). We are assured that the innocent would not be punished (Ezekiel 9:4; 18:4, 20, 30; 33).

Ezekiel is devastating in his criticism of bad leaders who look after themselves and neglect those they are supposed to care for. God will not abandon his 'sheep':

'I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness ... I will feed them with good pasture ... I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord YHWH. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak.'

The Gospels portray Jesus as the good shepherd (Matthew 9:36; John 10:1-18).

‘I will break the bars of their yoke, and save them from the hands of those who enslaved them’(34:27).

Ezekiel criticises the priests (see Ezekiel 22:26-27; 8:1-18), and especially those who claim to speak for God but who ‘follow their own spirit and have seen nothing’(Ezekiel 13:3); who see a cracked wall and cover the crack with whitewash (Ezekiel 13:10, 15); who ‘prophecy out of their own imagination’(Ezekiel 13:17). Ezekiel himself is instructed to ‘eat’ God’s word (Ezekiel 3:1-3), to ‘receive it in your heart’(Ezekiel 3:10), to speak whether people listen or not (Ezekiel 3:11).

Throughout the scroll, especially in the chapters that post-date the fall of Jerusalem (chapters 33-39), we find a promise of restoration (Ezekiel 36:8-12, 24-28; 39:25-29), and of a covenant that will last forever (Ezekiel 37:26). Though YHWH must punish, his will is that ‘they will be my people and I will be their God’(Ezekiel 14:11):

‘I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am YHWH, in order that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I forgive you all that you have done, says the Lord YHWH’(Ezekiel 16:62-63).

YHWH wants to re-establish the loving communion he offered when Israel first became his people (see Ezekiel 16:8). For this to happen the people will need a new spirit.

‘I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, so that they may follow my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them. Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God’(Ezekiel 11:19-20).



The Book of Lamentations

The Book of Lamentations is listed among the 'Writings' in the Tanak. These lamentations were composed in the wake of the siege and capture of Jerusalem in 587BC (see 2Kings 25:8-12). It is the oldest of the books listed in the Writings.

The Book of Lamentations does not record the events. Rather, it records the cries from the heart directed to God by people who have been through the experience. We are listening to those left behind in Judah during the exile.

The first, second and fourth laments are the central core of this Book. They are communal laments that give expression to the bewilderment of those who have gone through the horrors of the siege and the destruction, and who have seen their families starving and slaughtered, their king and leaders deported, and God's sanctuary defiled. They are aware of their sin, but this awareness does not add up to what has happened, which is out of proportion to their guilt. In keeping with their theology of God as controlling events, they see God as the ultimate cause of the horrors they have been through. But this is equally bewildering. How could the just God, the God who remains faithful to the covenant even when we sin, how could this God have willed such a dreadful holocaust?

The inspiring thing about these communal laments is that some of the people have somehow retained their faith. They have not discarded their God. They have not rejected their belief. These laments are addressed to God. The community is pouring out its heart to God, pleading for God to take notice, and to intervene. For reasons that are beyond their comprehension, God has willed the horrors (such was their perspective). Only God can intervene to bring relief.

The fifth song is like the others, but appears to be a later addition.

The third song is very different. It is a personal lament, composed by a later author who is distant from the experience of the siege and destruction of the city.

What is special about the Book of Lamentations is that it is not a reflection on events by an inspired prophet. It is not a teaching text, listing the lessons that need to be learned. It is (for the most part) a cry of the heart addressed to God by people who are bewildered by the horror of their experience, who can make no sense of it. The only one to whom they can turn is God, and their intuition is right. They are allowed to give expression to their anger, their bewilderment, their pain. While their understanding of God's role in the catastrophe should be questioned, they continue to look to God, knowing that God will hear their cry and respond as only God knows best. Surely there is a precious lesson in this for us?



The Isaiah School in Exile (scroll chapters 40-55)

A dramatic turn of events came with the victories of Cyrus II of Persia. The ailing Babylonian Empire was ruled by the usurper Nabonidus who reigned from 555 to 539. In 550 Cyrus of Persia conquered Ecbatana, the capital of Media (west-central Iran). Three years later he captured Sardis, the capital of Lydia (western Turkey). Then he took Susa, the capital of Elam (at the foot of the Zagros Mountains in the Khuzistan region of Iran). News of Cyrus's victories and of his policy of allowing exiles to return to their homeland awakened a similar hope in the exiles from Judah.

Most scholars agree that the bulk of the material in Isaiah 40-55 was composed in Babylon during the years of the Babylonian exile. It is often assumed to be the work of an unnamed individual prophet, called for convenience 'Deutero-Isaiah'. I am following those who attribute it to a 'School' of prophet-preachers. These prophet-preachers show familiarity with the Isaiah tradition, as they do with other prophetic and Deuteronomistic material, but their writing has its own distinct character, which has most in common with the temple singers responsible for the psalms.

It is likely that the oratorical nature of the material in Isaiah 40-55 is because it was composed for the preaching that took place in the synagogue.

Isaiah 40-48

The rise to power of the Persian king, Cyrus, provides essential background especially for chapters 40-48.

Further background is provided by knowledge of the Babylonian New Year festival that celebrated the power of their god, Marduk. The Isaiah text sets out to parody the Babylonian liturgy and to contrast the real power of YHWH with the supposed power of Marduk.

Isaiah 40-48 is like nothing that has preceded it. The 8th century prophets carried out their ministry against the background of Assyrian aggression. The prophets of the last decades of the 7th century and the early decades of the 6th century ministered in the catastrophic years of the rise of Babylon and the collapse of Judah.

These nine chapters of the Isaiah scroll promise an end to exile and a return to the Promised Land. They call for hope and trust and look forward to the excitement of taking part in a second Exodus. YHWH, the Lord of creation and the lord of history, is coming, not to punish, but to comfort and redeem (40:1; see 41:10; 43:1). We have in these chapters an inspired response to the call to 'sing a new song'(42:10). It is a call, also, to mission (42:1-7).

1Corinthians 2:16

On the subject of the need for discernment Paul cites from the Isaiah scroll and goes on to claim that as disciples of Jesus ‘We have the mind of Christ’:

“Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” (Isaiah 40:13). But we have the mind of Christ.

Luke 3:4-6

All four gospels portray John the Baptist as preparing the way ‘of the Lord’,
of the promised Messiah

‘It is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth;
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God’ (Isaiah 40:3-5).

Matthew 12:18-21

Matthew applies the following to Jesus:

(See also the Synoptics accounts of Jesus' baptism).

“Here is my servant, whom I have chosen,
my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased.
I will put my Spirit upon him,
and he will proclaim justice [God's verdict] to the Gentiles.
He will not wrangle or cry aloud,
nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets.
He will not break a bruised reed
or quench a smoldering wick
until he brings justice [God's verdict] to victory.
And in his name the Gentiles will hope”(Isaiah 42:1-4).



Isaiah 49-55

The material found in the Isaiah scroll from chapters 49 to 55 appears to have been composed after Cyrus's triumphant entry into Babylon in 539. From the opening words of chapter 49 it is clear that there has been a significant shift of focus. Two things have happened.

The first is that Cyrus did not live up to the expectations that the composers of Isaiah 40-48 had of him. Though Cyrus conquered the Babylonian Empire, Judah is still devastated and Jerusalem and its temple are still in ruins.

The second is partly a consequence of this: the doubts already expressed by the community have hardened into rejection of this School and of their prophetic message.

Yet the prophet-preachers remain convinced that it is YHWH's will to bring about the return of the exiles and to build up Judah so that the people can carry out the mission that they have inherited from Abraham and Jacob; namely, to reveal YHWH to the nations. Since the people are not in a position yet to do this, and since they are no longer listening to the prophetic message, the members of this exilic School realise that it is they who are called to be YHWH's 'servants', to keep the flame burning and to realise the mission given to Israel. They must, in that sense, be Israel.

Their opening words, then, are no longer addressed to the people of Judah, whether in Jerusalem or in exile. They are addressed to the nations, for it is YHWH's will for the nations to come to know him and experience freedom and salvation through following the way of the Torah, the way YHWH has revealed to Israel, the way that has its source in communion with YHWH and flows into a world order characterised by justice.

Isaiah 49-55 continue to speak of the redeeming action of YHWH, the Lord of creation and the Lord of history. They continue the theme of mission (49:5-7) and the call to leave the land of captivity (52:11). They add a call to be faithful to one's mission even when faced with rejection (see 50:4-10; 52:13 - 53:12). They speak of God's tender love (49:14-15) and of the offer of a covenant that will last forever (55:3).

‘Who has believed what we have heard?

And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?’(Isaiah 53:1)

John commenting on the rejection of Jesus

‘This was to fulfill the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah:

“Lord, who has believed our message,

and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”(John 12:38)

Matthew 8:17 (see also 1Peter 2:24)

Matthew has just been focusing on Jesus' healing ministry:

'This was to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah, "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases"(Isaiah 53:4-5)

Luke 22:37

As Jesus is about to go to Gethsemane, he says:”

‘I tell you, this scripture must be fulfilled in me, **‘And he was counted among the lawless’**; and indeed what is written about me is being fulfilled”(Isaiah 53:12).

John 6:45

Referring to the truth that the Father is drawing people to Jesus, Jesus quotes from the Isaiah scroll:

‘It is written in the prophets, “And they shall all be taught by **God**”(Isaiah 54:13). Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me.’

John 12:38 (see Romans 10:16)

John sees the failure of people to believe in Jesus
as part of a pattern:

‘This was to fulfil the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah:

“Lord, who has believed our message, and to whom has
the arm of the Lord been revealed?” (Isaiah 53:1).

2Corinthians 6:2

Paul urges the Corinthians to welcome the grace being offered them:

‘For God says, “At an acceptable time I have listened to you,
and on a day of salvation I have helped you” (Isaiah 49:8).

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!’

2Corinthians 6:17

Paul advises the community in Corinth not to get caught up
in the lifestyle of the unbelievers in Corinth.

He quotes from the Isaiah scroll:

‘Therefore come out from them,
and be separate from them, says the Lord,
and touch nothing unclean;
then I will welcome you’ (Isaiah 52:11).

Romans 10:15

And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”(Isaiah 52:7).

Romans 15:21

Paul does not carry out his ministry in places where other missionaries have already preached the word:

‘As it is written,

“Those who have never been told of him shall see,
and those who have never heard of him shall understand.”

(Isaiah 52:15).

Acts 8:32-33

Philip explains to the eunuch that the following words refer to Jesus:

‘The passage of the scripture that the eunuch was reading was this:

“Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,
and like a lamb silent before its shearer,
so he does not open his mouth.

In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth” (Isaiah 53:7-8).

Acts 13:34

In his preaching in the Antioch synagogue, Paul declares that in raising Jesus to life, God was carrying out a promise he had made to David:

As to his raising him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, ‘I will give you the holy promises made to David’ (Isaiah 55:3).

Acts 13:47

Preaching in a synagogue Galatian Antioch, Paul cites the following in support of his call to the non-Jews:

‘For so the Lord has commanded us, saying: I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth’(Isaiah 49:6).

Revelation 7:16

Referring to those who were martyred in the persecution, the author of the Book of Revelation cites the following:

‘They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat’(Isaiah 49:10).



Back in Judah after the Return from Exile

The Judah to which the exiles returned was a very different place from the Judah they had been exiled from some sixty years earlier. The Edomites, under pressure from the Nabatean Arabs had occupied southern Judah, and the population had been drastically reduced and impoverished.



Population 75,000 down to 35,000

75% those who remained on the land. 25% returned exiles

Not surprisingly there were those in Judah who were reluctant to welcome the returning exiles (see Ezra 3:3; Zechariah 8:10). They were not happy to hand back the land they had occupied. The mixed population in Samaria, north of Jerusalem, did not want to revert to having a strong neighbour on their southern border. The zeal of the returning exiles met with strong resistance and their attempts to carry out their mission of rebuilding the temple were thwarted (see Ezra 4:4-5).

Among the returning exiles were Zerubbabel, who is described as the 'son of Shealtiel'(see Ezra 3:2, 8; 5:2; Nehemiah 12:1; Haggai 1:1, 12, 14; 2:2, 23), which makes him the grandson of King Jechoniah. The Ezra scroll does not indicate his position in Judah, but he is called 'governor of Judah' in Haggai 1:1, 14; 2:2, 21. With him was Jeshua, who was appointed high priest (Ezra 2:2). They led a large contingent of over forty thousand exiles (see Ezra 2:64-65). The record is unclear as to when exactly they arrived.

The prophets Haggai (520BC) and Zechariah (1-8) (520-518BC)

It is not surprising that the presence of King Jeconiah's grandson in Judah awakened a desire for a restoration of the Davidic kingship (see Haggai 2:23). The prophet Zechariah is confident that the dire situation in Jerusalem and Judah will be reversed when YHWH returns. Like Haggai, Zechariah is confident that YHWH will bring in a new order, for YHWH is 'YHWH of hosts'(1:3), the 'lord of the whole earth'(4:14).

Unlike Haggai who looks to Zerubbabel to restore the Davidic dynasty, Zechariah speaks more vaguely of a coming 'Branch'(3:8; 6:12) of the Davidic line, who will be YHWH's instrument in reconstructing the temple. His vision is more expansive than Haggai's in that he sees other nations as joining Judah in YHWH's new order (2:11; 8:20-23).

A number of factors need to be kept in mind if we are to understand something of the situation of Judah in the period after the exile. One is the dramatic loss of population. Most of those who were dispersed to Babylon or Egypt never returned. Another is that Judah was landlocked, surrounded by unfriendly neighbours and was of little economic interest to Persia. Judah remained economically stagnant through till the middle of the fifth century.

This highlights the extraordinary achievement of such a small population living in such a depressed environment. Everything being equal, it is a wonder that the Jews in Judah did not disintegrate and disappear, as did many of the small nations around them.

Prior to the exile the temple was closely linked with the king's palace. The ordinary populace came to it only on special occasions. This changed after the exile. There was no king, and the temple functioned as Jerusalem's social and economic, as well as religious, centre. The local leadership of the Jews was in the hands of a governor, the temple priests and the leading landowners.

Taxation was a major and chronic problem. The Persian empire was built on a tightly controlled public service, to facilitate trade, and to ensure the collection of taxes. Like other subject peoples, the people of Judah had to support the king, the satraps and the local governors. Added to this was a temple tax for the support of the temple building and the cult.

The Isaiah School back in Judah (Isaiah 56-66)

They continue to speak of the breaking in of a new age of salvation (compare Isaiah 62:11-12 with the opening words of Isaiah 40).

They continue to speak of the central role of Zion in the promised New Age (compare Isaiah 62:1ff with Isaiah 49:14ff).

They see their servant ministry as a continuing of the ministry of the 'servants' of the exile (see Isaiah 56:6; 63:17; 65:8, 13-15).

Chapters 56-66 focus on the internal wrangling of the community back in Jerusalem. These chapters do not have a single author. The exhortations and criticisms come from a minority movement in Jerusalem that is discontent with the way things are working out since the erection of the Second Temple in 516, and the material seems to range from the return from exile through to the time of Ezra (458BC).

Those who composed Isaiah 56-66 have nothing good to say about the leadership, including the temple priesthood (see Isaiah 63:18-19; 65:5,13-16; 66:5), and they rail against the prevailing religious compromise in the cult, and the rampant injustice that is contradictory to the religion of Israel.

What God wants of his people is 'to break unjust fetters, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, to break every yoke'(Isaiah 58:6).

However they were not in a position to do anything about it apart from complaining and continuing to point out the will of YHWH as expressed in the Torah and the Prophets. They shared the fate of those responsible for Isaiah 40-55, in that they were a persecuted and shunned minority. Things would change with the coming of Ezra (458), but that is another story.

The salvation-hopes of the prophet-preachers of the Exile were not realised. Life in post-exilic Judah was defined by economic hardship (Isaiah 60:17; 62:8-9), insecurity in political life (Isaiah 60:10,18), ruin and devastation (Isaiah 61:4), and the burden of continuing shame (Isaiah 61:7, 62:4). Those who, back in Judah, carried on the mission of the prophet-preachers of the Exile blamed the community, who failed to keep the Sabbath (Isaiah 56:2-7; 58:3); failed to observe dietary laws (Isaiah 65:4; 66:17); had a false attitude to fasting (Isaiah 58:1-5); and were involved in immorality and idolatry (Isaiah 57:3-10,13; 65:1-7). Especially to blame were those responsible for the cult (Isaiah 57:1-13; 58:1-5; 65:1-7; 66:1-4,17).



However, the members of the Isaiah School continued the proclamation of salvation. This salvation would be a historical one, though Isaiah 60:19-20 and 65:16b-25 speak in more transcendent terms. It would affect the Gentiles (Isaiah 60:3; 60:9b; 60:6, 61:9, 62:2).

Cult worship has a place in the promised state (Isaiah 60:7,13; 62:9), though it is not stressed the way others are stressing it at the time. God would come 'soon' (Isaiah 56:1) and directly intervene (Isaiah 63:1-6; 65:17-25; 66:12-16).

The material in Isaiah 56-66 is outstanding for its sense of the all-embracing ('catholic') mission confided by God to Judaism. This is clear from the opening chapter's attitude to foreigners and eunuchs (chapter 56). The temple is to be 'a house of prayer for all peoples'(Isaiah 56:8; see 60:3; 66:18). The Isaiah School is critical of the prevailing narrowness of the leadership of Judah (see, for example, Isaiah 56:9-12).

The authors are critical also of the compromises that were found in the cult (chapter 57). Fasting is no substitute for justice (chapter 58).

There is the opportunity for a new beginning, for YHWH is bringing about a new creation (Isaiah 65:17; 66:20), a new redemption (Isaiah 59:20; 60:16; 61:1-2; 62:12).

‘I will bring them to my holy mountain,
and make them joyful in my house of prayer;
their burnt offerings and their sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar;
for my house shall be called a house of prayer
for all peoples’(Isaiah 56:7).

‘Jesus was teaching and saying, “Is it not written,
‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’?
But you have made it a den of robbers.”(Mark 11:17).

Luke 4:18-19

Jesus reads this passage in the Nazareth synagogue , and then declares that it is being fulfilled in him, here and now.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour”(Isaiah 61:1-2).

1Corinthians 2:9

Speaking of the glory that God intends for us, Paul writes:

'As it is written,

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the human heart conceived,
what God has prepared for those who love him”(Isaiah 64:4).

Romans 11:26-27

For Paul God's promises are irrevocable.

This encourages Paul to hope that 'all Israel will be saved:

'And so all Israel will be saved; as it is written, “Out of Zion will come the Deliverer; he will banish ungodliness from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins”(Isaiah 59:20-21).