

Isaiah School after return from exile

12. Part 2. Isaiah 60-66



Introduction to Isaiah 60-62

Chapters 60-62 read as though they belong to the period shortly after the return from exile when the dream of rebuilding a temple even more glorious than that of Solomon was still alive, and before the grab for power caused the divisions in the community about which we have been hearing. The focus of these oracles is not on human justice or injustice, but on the grand design and promise of YHWH. The prophet-preachers are addressing Jerusalem.

Isaiah 60:1-3

Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of YHWH has risen upon you.
Though darkness covers the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples.
YHWH arises upon you,
and his glory appears over you.
Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

Isaiah 60:4-5

Lift up your eyes and look around;
they all gather together, they come to you;
your sons shall come from far away,
and your daughters shall be carried on the hip.
Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,
because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you,
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

Isaiah 60:6

A multitude of camels shall cover you,
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;
all those from Sheba shall come.

They shall bring gold and frankincense,
and shall proclaim the praise of YHWH.

Matthew 2:11

‘They offered gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh’.

Isaiah 60:7-22

These verses continue to speak of YHWH's blessing. How different this sounds from the way things actually turned out. In chapters 56-59 the community is divided, righteousness is hard to find, the poor are suffering the violence of rampant injustice, Judah is in a state of chronic depression, and salvation is urgently prayed for but not experienced. It is in this situation that the author of chapter 60 and the other servants of YHWH clung to their faith, against all the odds.

Isaiah 60:19-20

The sun shall no longer be your light by day,
nor shall the moon give light to you by night.

Yahweh will be your everlasting light,
and your God will be your glory.

Your sun will no longer go down,
your moon will not set;

for YHWH will be your everlasting light,
and your days of mourning shall be ended.

‘The city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb’(Rev. 21:23).

Isaiah 61:1-3a Inserted at exact centre of 60-62

The spirit of the Lord YHWH is upon me, because YHWH has anointed me and sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners, to proclaim the year of YHWH's favour, and the day of vindication of our God;

to comfort all who mourn;

to provide for those who mourn in Zion –

to give them a garland instead of ashes,

the oil of gladness instead of mourning,

the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.

The prophet-preachers are asserting their claim to have been anointed by YHWH to carry on the mission given to Israel (see 42:1-4), and, when the people failed to take it up, it was taken up by the School of prophet-preachers of the exile (see 49:1-6).

They see themselves as the promised 'offspring'(53:10) who are commissioned to keep YHWH's prophetic word alive. The Isaiah School saw themselves as inheriting the prophetic spirit.

Isaiah 61:10-11

I will greatly rejoice in YHWH,
my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord YHWH will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.

Isaiah 62:1-3

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,
until her vindication shines out like the dawn,
and her salvation like a burning torch.

The nations shall see your vindication,
and all the kings your glory.

You shall be called by a new name
that the mouth of YHWH will give.

You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of YHWH,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Isaiah 62:4-5

You shall no more be termed Forsaken,
and your land shall no more be termed Desolate;
but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her,
and your land Married;
for YHWH delights in you,
and your land shall be married.
For as a young man marries a young woman,
so shall your builder marry you,
and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
so shall your God rejoice over you.

Isaiah 62:11-12

YHWH has proclaimed to the end of the earth:
Say to daughter Zion, “See, your salvation comes;
his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.”
They shall be called, “The Holy People, the Redeemed
of YHWH”; and you will be called, “Sought Out, A City
Not Forsaken.”

Introduction to Isaiah 63

Chapters 60-62 form a distinct unit, placed in the centre of the third section of the Isaiah scroll. It presents the ideal state of Israel, the way the post-exilic preacher-prophets believed that God designed Jerusalem to be, and the way it would be if the people of Judah would only be open to God's will, and if Jerusalem's enemies would submit to YHWH. One might make a comparison with the opening chapters of Genesis which present the world as a paradise. That is how God intends the world to be, and how it would be were it not for sin.

The trouble is that there is sin. The trouble is that not all the inhabitants of Jerusalem are faithful to the covenant, and Jerusalem's enemies are caught up in idolatry, worshipping false gods and not submitting to YHWH.

Chapters 56-59 describe how things really were in the actual Jerusalem in the post-exilic years, and it is to this world that chapters 63-66 return. Chapter 63:1-6, forms a bridge between the picture of the ideal Jerusalem about which we have just been reading and the real Jerusalem described in the final chapters of the scroll.

We are given a portrait of YHWH as the warrior who, alone, achieves victory over Jerusalem's enemies. The prophets do not want the people of Judah to be pointing the finger of blame at their enemies. Their enemies are not the key problem. It is their own lack of fidelity, and this is something that is within their power to change. YHWH can handle their enemies, as this scene demonstrates. This was the point being made in the final scene before chapters 60-62 were inserted. Chapter 59, verses 15-20 nicely mirrors the verses we are about to read.

Isaiah 59:15-20

It displeased YHWH that there was no justice ...

He put on righteousness like a breastplate,

and a helmet of salvation on his head;

he put on garments of vengeance for clothing,

and wrapped himself in fury as in a mantle.

According to their deeds, so will he repay ...

He will come like a pent-up stream

that the wind of the YHWH drives on.

And he will come to Zion as Redeemer,

to those in Jacob who turn from transgression.

One final point before we begin our study of the text. It is about vengeance (nāqām). The authors could not imagine liberation without it. How could you liberate oppressed people without defeating those who were oppressing them? How could you reclaim people's rights without removing those who were responsible for trampling over them? Just as the 'redeemer'(gō'ēl) had an obligation to pursue and take the life of the person who killed his next of kin, so YHWH, the Redeemer of Israel, was thought of as having to destroy Israel's enemies in order to liberate his people. This theme recurs throughout the scroll.

Isaiah 63:1-2

The sentinel:

“Who is this that comes from Edom, from Bozrah in glistening garments? Who is this so splendidly robed, marching in his great might?”

The victorious warrior-king, YHWH

“It is I, announcing deliverance, mighty to save.”

The sentinel:

“Why are your robes red, and your garments like theirs who tread the wine press?”

Isaiah 63:3-6 : YHWH alone is victorious

“I have trodden the wine press alone, and from the peoples no one was with me; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their juice spattered on my garments, and stained all my robes. For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year for my redeeming work had come. I looked, but there was no helper; I stared, but there was no one to sustain me; so my own arm brought me victory, and my wrath sustained me. I trampled down peoples in my anger, I crushed them in my wrath, and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth.”

Isaiah 63:7-10

I will recount the steadfast love of YHWH, YHWH's deeds, worthy of praise, because of all that YHWH has done for us, the great favours to the house of Israel; the favours he has shown them in his compassion, in the abundance of his steadfast love. For he said, "Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely"; and he became their saviour. In all their afflictions he too was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them for all the days of old. But they rebelled and grieved his holy spirit.

YHWH has remained faithful to his covenant, but Israel has not. The expression 'holy spirit' is found in only two texts in the Hebrew scriptures, here (63:10, 11) and in the following plea: "Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me"(Psalm 51:11).

In Psalm 139 we find 'spirit' taking its place beside 'presence' as a way of speaking of God's presence and action while preserving God's transcendence: "Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?"(Psalm 139:7).

Isaiah 63:15-19 A psalm of lament

Look down from heaven and see, from your holy and glorious habitation. Where are your zeal and your might, the yearning of your heart and your compassion? Do not stand aloof, for you are our father. Were Abraham not to know us and Israel not to acknowledge us, you, YHWH, are our father; our Redeemer from of old is your name. Why, YHWH, do you make us stray from your ways and harden our heart, so that we do not fear you? Turn back for the sake of your servants, for the sake of the tribes that are your heritage ... We have long been like those whom you do not rule, like those not called by your name.

Isaiah 64:1-3

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,
so that the mountains would quake at your presence —
as when fire kindles brushwood
and the fire causes water to boil —
to make your name known to your adversaries,
so that the nations might tremble at your presence!
When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,
you came down, the mountains quaked at your
presence.

Isaiah 64:4-6

From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any God besides you,
who works for those who wait for him.

You meet those who gladly do right,
those who remember you by observing your ways.

But when you were angry, we sinned;
when you hid yourself, we transgressed.

We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.

Isaiah 64:6-8

We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
There is no one who calls on your name,
or attempts to take hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us,
and have handed us over to our iniquity.
Yet, Yahweh, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.

Isaiah 64:9-12

Do not be exceedingly angry, Yahweh. Do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider, we are all your people. Your holy cities have become a wilderness, Zion has become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and beautiful house, where our ancestors praised you, has been burned by fire, and our most precious possession has become a ruin. After all this, will you restrain yourself, Yahweh? Will you keep silent, and punish us so severely?

Isaiah 65:1-3

I was ready to be sought out, but they did not ask for me, I was ready to be found but they did not seek me. I said, “Here I am, here I am,” to a nation that did not invoke my name. I held out my hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices; a people who provoke me to my face continually, sacrificing in gardens and offering incense on bricks; who sit inside tombs, and spend the night in secret places, who eat swine’s flesh.

Isaiah 65:17-18

I am about to **create** new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight.

‘In accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home’(2Peter 3:13).

‘I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away’(Revelation 21:1)

Isaiah 65:19-24

I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime ...

They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat ...

Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear.

Isaiah 65:25

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,

the lion shall eat straw like the ox;

but the serpent – its food shall be dust!

They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain.

Isaiah 66:1-2, quoted in Acts 7:49-50

Thus says YHWH: Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is my resting place? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, says YHWH.

This is the one to whom I will look, to the humble and contrite in spirit, who trembles at my word.

Isaiah 66:10-11

Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her,
all you who love her;
rejoice with her in joy,
all you who mourn over her —
that you may be suckled and be satisfied
from her consoling breast;
that you may drink deeply with delight
from her glorious bosom.

Isaiah 66:12-14

Thus says YHWH: I will extend prosperity to her like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream; your infants will be carried on the hip, and dandled on the knees. As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. You will see, and your heart will rejoice; your bones will flourish like the grass; and it shall be known that the hand of YHWH is with his servants, and his indignation is against his enemies.

Appendix 1. Isaiah 66:17 devotees of pagan cults

Appendix 2. Isaiah 66:18-21 God's reign witnessed by ALL

Appendix 3. Isaiah 66:22-23

For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, so shall your descendants and your name remain. From new moon to new moon, and from sabbath to sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, says YHWH.

Isaiah 66:24

And they shall go out and look at the dead bodies of the people who have rebelled against me; for their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.

‘Thrown into gehenna, where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched’(Mark 9:48).

Isaiah 66:22-23

For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, so shall your descendants and your name remain. From new moon to new moon, and from sabbath to sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, says YHWH.