



Isaiah Chapter 61

The Anointed One Declares His Mission (61.1-4).

61.1-2

“The Spirit of the Lord Yahweh is upon me, Because Yahweh has anointed me, To preach good tidings to the meek (or ‘the poor’), He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening to those who are bound, To proclaim the acceptable year of Yahweh, And the day of vengeance of our God. To comfort all who mourn.”

We have here the abrupt change of person so typical in the passages about the Servant (42.1-4; 49.1-6; 50.3-8; 52.13-53.12). At one moment Zion is being addressed, and then in the midst of it comes the voice of one who serves God.

The One described here is God’s Anointed. This can be contrasted with Cyrus in 45.1. There Cyrus was the anointed of Yahweh, because Yahweh had set him aside for a certain task, but there is no mention of the Spirit there, for in Isaiah the Spirit only ever comes in a good sense on those Who are truly His and have a central task to perform in the final course of the salvation history (11.2; 28.6; 42.1; 59.21; see also 32.15; 44.3). The Spirit comes in directly to frustrate the enemies of God (59.19).

Here the majesty of the Spirit is brought out. He is the Spirit of the sovereign Lord Yahweh, and it is the sovereign Lord Yahweh Who will act directly and personally through Him. And the Spirit-endowed One is so endowed because Yahweh has anointed Him for a special task, to be a preacher (50.4-9), a healer of the spirit (42.7), a deliverer (11.1-4; 42.1-6; 49.1-6) and a proclaimer of God’s final purposes, not final in respect of what some call ‘the end times’, but final in the sense that once God begins to act mightily through His Spirit nothing can stop the purposes that then begin from going onwards until God’s purposes are complete (55.10-11), (though it may take a thousand years and more). Thus He is both Servant and King.

The task He has been set is manifold. As a Teacher He is to be a preacher of good tidings to the poor and meek, those too weak to help themselves (50.4-5; 52.7), as a spiritual Counselor (9.6) He is to bind up the broken-hearted (57.15; Psalm 51.9), as a Redeemer (59.20-21) He is to proclaim freedom to those who are captive (42.7, compare Leviticus 25.10; Jeremiah 34.8-10 where it is related to the Year of Jubilee, that year when all who were oppressed or in bondage were released), and the opening of the prison gates to those who are bound (42.7), and will proclaim Yahweh’s year of deliverance (59.20-21), and as the Mighty Warrior He will come with vengeance on those who rebel against God (59.17-19; 63.1-6). And while He exacts His vengeance He will comfort all who mourn over their sins as a Wonderful Counselor (9.6).

Note the process of restoration. The poor and meek were those whom men disregarded, but it is they whom He will lift up (Matthew 5.3, 5). Broken-heartedness covers a variety of attitudes and situations for the heart was considered to be the very root of a man’s life. It covers grief, despair, misery, hopelessness, man without a future. But he will receive his future from God through the Anointed One.

For the captive and the prisoner life was over. They were no longer free to enjoy all that life had to offer. They were in subjection. But deliverance would come for them through Him. Those who mourned were those who were aware of

loss and despair. They will be comforted (Matthew 5.4). It is to man in his weakness and helplessness that the Anointed One has come.

It is significant that when Jesus quoted these words He closed the book after the words, 'the acceptable year of Yahweh'. By this He made clear that the prophecy was to be fulfilled in stages. The work of deliverance and restoration had begun. The completion of His task would come later. Not all would occur at once (Luke 4.16-21).

'The Lord Yahweh.' This title is fairly rare in the second part of the book, but it begins and ends this chapter. It is a title of sovereignty. The Lord Yahweh is the One Who will come to establish His sovereign rule (40.10); He is the One Who with His Spirit sent the Servant to his task (48.16); He is the One Who will command the nations and gather His people (49.22; 56.8); He is the One Who will train and sustain His Servant (50.4-9); He is the One who will deliver and redeem His people from all oppression (52.3-6); He is the One Who here endows His Anointed One for His task and will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all nations (61.1, 11); and He is the One Who will bring judgment on those who forsake Him and blessing on those who respond to Him (65.13-15).

'The acceptable year of Yahweh' or 'year of Yahweh's favor (acceptance)'. Compare 49.8 where 'the acceptable time' is linked with the work of the Servant, and 60.7 where the nations who come are received as 'acceptable' in their offerings to Yahweh. It is the year in which Yahweh comes with the offer of acceptance, the offer of His grace and favor. The use of 'year' may be seen as confirming connection with the year of Jubilee. It is the period of deliverance and new freedom. The contrast with 'day' might also suggest a longer period is in mind, with the period of restoration and deliverance brought about by the favor of God being followed by the final, shorter period of vengeance.

61.3

The Hebrew word phe'er, translated garland, means more precisely, an ornamental headdress, or adorning tiara. The Servant-Messiah accomplishes more than garland, means more precisely, an ornamental headdress, or adorning tiara. The Servant-Messiah accomplishes more than conquest-He brings coronation to His people (cf. Rom. 8:31-39). He makes it possible for believers to "sit with Him in the heavenly places" (Eph. 2:6). His followers are crowned and reign with Him over death and all other circumstances. (cf. I Cor. 5:9-13; Heb. 11:7; I Cor. 3:21-22; Rev. 5:10). The Servant anoints His followers with "the oil of gladness" by the anointing of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 1:21; I Jn. 2:26-27) which is the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit and "down payment" on the believer's future inheritance (cf. Ephesian 1:14). The ma'eteh is from the root 'ataph meaning cloak, veil. A man may, so to speak, wrap himself in his human moods as a defense mechanism. Human moods and emotions are no protection; they are capricious, vulnerable to circumstances and temporal. Instead of human moods which are so manipulative and conducive to despair, the Servant will wrap His followers in a protective cloak of praise. If our lives are wrapped in praise to Jehovah we are protected from the manipulative capriciousness of human emotions which are so subject to circumstances. The object of our hearts desires and hopes is The Almighty, Never Varying, Always Faithful God and so we do not ever need to despair (cf. I Cor. 1:8-11). The Servant will dress His people up richly like the father dressed the prodigal son when he returned home (cf. Lk. 15:22-24). All the despair and heaviness will be forgotten when the Messiah brings God's sons home! The Messiah will give His followers beauty (righteousness) and stability (trees, planting of Jehovah) (cf. Psa. 1:1-3). The messianic people are going to be established as God's people and nothing can "snatch them out of the Shepherd's hand" (cf. Jn. 10:27-28). No human, no spiritual power, no circumstance can take away their beauty. All this, of course, brings glory to the one so clothed, but ultimately to the One doing the dressing. The real glory went to the father of the prodigal because he exhibited such mercy, love and forgiveness.

61.4

'And they will build the old waste places, they will raise up the former desolations, and they will repair the waste cities, The desolations of many generations.' The Servant's followers will build up the ancient ruins. The house (tabernacle, dynasty, family) of David was in ruins. David's house was the house of messianic destiny. David's throne was the throne reserved for the Messiah. But those who were sitting on David's throne in the days of the prophets scorned and usurped its messianic destiny. They violently rebelled against God's purposes for this throne of David and had brought it to shame and ruin. Amos predicted that the house of David (tabernacle of David) would be rebuilt (Amos 9: 11-12). Amos' prophecy was fulfilled when the Gentiles were brought into the messianic kingdom (the church) (cf. Acts 15: 12-21). We have already commented on this "rebuilding" (cf. Isa. 59:10, etc.). The church is built as a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:22); Christians are living stones built into a spiritual house (I Pet. 2:4-8).

The picture is one of total restoration. Nothing will be left waste, nothing will remain desolate. Centuries of devastation will be restored. All will be made perfect. All man's destructive work will be put right. The thought is of much work to be done in order to establish God's righteous kingdom, put here in physical terms because it was the only way in which his hearers could conceive of it. It is not without significance that the New Testament regularly depicts God's people as builders (Matthew 7.24; Romans 15.20; 1 Corinthians 3.9-10; Ephesians 2.20-22; Colossians 2.7; 1 Peter 2.5; Jude 1.20). And they have continued building through the ages and will continue to do so until the final brick is in place.

"To appoint to those who mourn in Zion, To give to them a garland crown 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 Yahweh, That he might be glorified.

The Lord's task is to transform the lives and experiences of people. He will bring about our transformation from mourning and weeping to total joy. The ashes of mourning smeared on the head will be replaced by the garland crown of rejoicing. Men put ashes on themselves when they wished to demonstrate their total misery and despair. They put garland crowns on themselves or others when they wished to express happiness and rejoicing. The Anointed One will remove the ashes of mourning and replace them with a garland crown of rejoicing. Mourning will be replaced by the application of the oil of joy. When in mourning men had no regard for their appearance, but once their balance was restored they would anoint themselves with oil so that they could appear before the world in full respectability.

For the spirit of heaviness and dullness we may compare the use of the same root in the 'dimly burning wick' (42.3). It is man at his lowest. It will be replaced by the garment of praise. They will be lifted from their state of misery and dejection, in which they are spiritually naked, to being fully clothed as expressed in praise and worship and contentment. We might see in the background the dejected Adam and Eve, bowed down by being caught in sin and found naked before God, and then being clothed by God so that they were once more acceptable to Him and gave Him glad praise (Genesis 3.21).

His people will become mighty trees of righteousness, those who have been planted by Yahweh to represent Him and fulfill His work and do His will, and to bring glory to His name. Large trees were seen as the product of many decades. They took a long time to grow. As such they were much treasured and carefully protected. Even the enemy, apart from the unconcerned and uncaring, the vindictive nations like Assyria, would seek not to harm the trees, for they were the future for whoever dwelt in the land. Thus God's own are to be like mighty trees, planted by Him, firmly established, permanent, a testimony to the glory of God.

The 'naming' of them as 'trees of righteousness' indicate a new beginning. A new name was regularly given to depict a new beginning (compare Genesis 17.5-6; 32.27-28). The 'large trees of righteousness' are probably to be contrasted with the large trees in the gardens of idolatry (1.29; 57.5), the latter replaced by those of God's planting. The world will finally not look to false religion but to His people.

Amazing but true, many of those who are now your enemies, alienated against you, will, in the days of the messianic Jubilee, become subjects of the New Kingdom of Zion and join with you in service to Jehovah. All of you together will be anointed as priests and ministers of Jehovah. Those former enemies who become members of New Zion will be the most precious thing their nations have and they will aid in the ongoing of Zion and their coming will bring fame and honor and blessing to you. The fact that Jehovah will conquer and make citizens of Zion of those who once opposed and mocked Him will replace whatever shame YQU once knew with twice as much glory and honor and blessing. And Zion will be glad and happy forever because of this.

Isaiah Adds His Words to Those of the Anointed One (61.5-7a).

It is not always clear in this chapter who is speaking. In verses 1-3 and probably 4 it is the Anointed One. In verse 8 it is Yahweh. But otherwise we have to choose between the Spirit inspired Isaiah or God Himself. 'Our God' in verse 6

points in that section to Isaiah. Perhaps we may see the change from third person to second person, and back again as determining the distinction.

61.5-6

'And strangers will stand and feed your flocks, And aliens will be your ploughmen and your vinedressers, But you will be named the priests of Yahweh, Men will call you the ministers of our God, You will eat the wealth of the nations, And in their glory will you boast yourselves.'

The picture switches from building to ministry. It is now a picture of God's people, released from the mundane that they might serve Yahweh. That this includes some from among the nations who have united themselves with Israel comes out in 66.21. God's true people are to be priests to the nations (Exodus 19.5-6). As a result of the work of the Anointed One, other peoples will look after mundane things, the feeding of flocks, the ploughing of fields, the dressing of vines, but His people will concentrate their efforts on ministering to all men in His name. It is the attitude of mind that is primary. The whole of the efforts of God's people are to be concentrated on serving Him in worship and praise and in ministering to the nations.

And from the nations they will receive their tithes, their portion from the wealth of the nations. And they will take great pride in the progress of the nations towards glory. The ministry of the Good News of the Gospel (compare verse 1) is here very much in mind as Jesus, the true vine (John 15.1), and the new Israel of God, built on the foundation of the Apostles, went out to the world with the news of God's salvation, receiving help and support from those who were not themselves the people of God, but were potentially so. And some becoming so, would also bring their wealth with them. So God will even make nations that are not His own, assist with the work of the people of God. The contrast is with the nations who in the past had come for the sole reason of bringing God's people into subjection.

As Isaiah looked into the future under God's inspiration he foresaw many things which he sought to put in understandable terms to the people of his day. As we have seen in past chapters he foresaw God's judgment on those who saw themselves as His people, a judgment because of their sins, he foresaw a purified remnant who would come through as His true people, he foresaw many from the nations who would join themselves with, and become one with, the people of God (consider 66.21), and he foresaw that God would use even the unconverted of the nations to bring about His purposes for His people. Many of these ideas are being expressed here from the perspective of Israel's way of thinking.

Note the change from third person to second person, possibly indicating that two prophecies have been brought together. Note the sudden change back to the third person in 61.7. But the change may be simply a literary one for the purpose of a special emphasis of the passage to his hearers, or for the purpose of different emphases when reading aloud.

61.7

'For your shame, double, And for confusion they will rejoice in their portion, Therefore in their land they will possess double, Everlasting joy will be to them.

They had experienced shame and confusion. But in the future those who are His true people will, instead of shame, have a double portion of blessing. Instead of confusion they will rejoice in what God has allotted to them (compare 45.7). Yes, in the land of their inheritance they will have 'double' what was theirs before, that is an abundant excess, and they will have everlasting joy (a constant theme of Isaiah, compare 35.10; 51.11). The idea is one of a perfect future arising out of their suffering when God will triumph

That this is not to be applied literally comes out in the use of everlasting. No land will be everlasting except the new heaven and the new earth. Thus 'their land' here must refer to that new earth. Isaiah's conception is constantly of the 'everlasting', a problem which has to be explained away by those who seek to literalise everything. Isaiah was seeing into the everlasting future, not some future earthly kingdom that could only pass away.

We must constantly keep in mind that as Isaiah looks ahead he is restricted to what his hearers can understand. They see the future in terms of a world that goes on and on in the same way. Thus the everlasting future is depicted in earthly terms, and its perfection in those terms. They had no conception of a spiritual future. The idea of 'Heaven' would have been meaningless. (We may think we have better understanding but our view of 'Heaven' is also grossly misrepresentative. Literally speaking Heaven is beyond our comprehension). They had no other way of describing it. It is the great, perfect, Promised Land, the new Jerusalem, lasting for ever. Even the resurrection was seen as being a resurrection into the promised land (26.19).

61.8-9

For I, Yahweh, love judgment, I hate robbery with a burnt offering, And I will give them their recompense in truth, And I will make an everlasting covenant with them. And their seed will be known among the nations, And their offspring among the peoples, All who see them will acknowledge them, That they are the seed which Yahweh has blessed.

By now it is Yahweh Himself Who is speaking. All that has been described must be so because God is determined to produce a world in accordance with His desires, a world of justice, honesty and truth. He is the One Who loves true justice, both official and personal, and will therefore bring it about. 'Robbery' here is contrasted with compensation and would thus seem to indicate robbery of blessings from those who deserve them. It sees all injustice and unjust gain as robbery.

'Robbery with (in) a burnt offering.' This directly contrasts with 'recompense in truth'. It may be speaking of the hypocrisy of those who rob God's true people, or even are generally deceitful and dishonest, and then blatantly and hypocritically offer tongue-in-cheek offerings to God thinking that it will make everything right. They have a mechanical view of the process of forgiveness which is not valid, forgetting that no religious rite can benefit a man if his heart is wrong, for when a man offers an offering God first looks at his heart. Or it may simply signify that God hates those who blatantly sin and at the same time pretend to be genuinely godly. They thus live a lie, and their offering is a lie, for it purports to be a whole offering of the person while they are in fact withholding themselves from God. As Jesus Himself said, "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do the things which I say?" (Luke 6.46).

But to His true people, who reveal what they are by their righteous living, He gives 'recompense in truth'. 'Recompense' means reward for work and then the giving of what is due. This may be translated as either 'true recompense', a full and satisfactory recompense, or 'recompense because they come in truth', i.e. because they come with true hearts in contrast with those who offer offerings while engaging in dishonesty. Those who love justice as He loves it will receive their due reward.

'And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, and their seed will be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them will acknowledge them, that they are the seed which Yahweh has blessed.' God's promise to His own continues. With those who come in truth He will make His everlasting covenant which will guarantee their recognition as the people of God in the eyes of the nations. Their seed will be known among the nations as the seed which Yahweh has blessed (see especially 59.21 compare also 54.10; 55.3). In the end all will see their quality of life and being and have to recognize them for what they are and admit that they are truly God's people. Note the emphasis on seed and compare 41.8; 53.10. These described are the true seed of Abraham, and the seed of the true Servant.

The Anointed One Is Clothed Suitably For His Task (61.10-11).

61.10-11

'I will greatly rejoice in Yahweh, My inner being will be joyful in my God, For he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with a robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom puts on as a priest his head-dress, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth her bud, And as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, So the Lord Yahweh will cause righteousness and praise, To spring forth before all the nations.'

Again we have the sudden change of person. The Anointed One now describes His joy in God. The thought of Yahweh takes over His heart. And this is because of the glorious task that He has had assigned to Him. In 59.17-18 the Mighty Warrior put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head, but now He does not go forward to do battle, but in order to produce fruitfulness. For this He clothes Himself with priestly garments of salvation, including the priest's head-dress, and covers Himself with a robe of righteousness like a bride decking herself with jewels. They are the same basic attributes but worn in a totally different situation, a time of priestly activity and celebration instead of in a time of battle. He is at the equivalent of a wedding feast, clothed ready for the final sealing of the everlasting covenant at the covenant ceremony, accomplished through His priestly ministration (compare Revelation 19.7-9; 21.2).

'As a bridegroom dons as a priest His head-dress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.' The Anointed One likens Himself to a priestly bridegroom. He is priest to His people, and loves them. He also likens Himself to the bride wearing her jewels. He is suitably clothed for His purpose. It is salvation that is represented by His priestly head-dress,

and righteousness that is represented by His jewels. It is clear that as a Priest the salvation is blood bought, tying in with chapter 53, and that as a bride it is based on righteousness.

So the Anointed One knows that salvation for His own is still a necessity and righteousness must be at the root of it all, but now both have been accomplished and made available. Being clothed in salvation and righteousness indicates that He has been given both to dispense as He wills. Rights in them are now provided to Him for Him to pass on. The righteous Servant can as a result of His own sacrifice of Himself make many to be accounted righteous (53.11) and can finalise His deliverance to His seed (53.10) in accordance with Yahweh's will.

It is to be like a new beginning, the buds breaking forth, the garden vegetation blooming, as the sovereign Lord Yahweh causes righteousness and praise to spring forth before the nations. In view of what is said earlier we may connect this with the general pouring out of the Spirit on His own true people (32.15; 44.1-5) in which He reveals His sovereignty, and on the bringing of light to the Gentiles (42.6; 49.6). Thus the nations beholding His people, both Israelites and Gentiles, recognise that they have been first accounted righteous and then made righteous, and give praise to Yahweh on their behalf. It is noteworthy that whereas here the picture of the bridegroom is connected with the Anointed One, in 62.5 it is connected with Yahweh Himself.

Alternately we might see verse 10-11 as spoken by the redeemed through the mouth of Isaiah, as he rejoices in God's provision for him. God has taken away his filthy rags (64.6) and replaced them with the garments of salvation and the robe of righteousness. Thus instead of misery he has the joy of his coming union with God, and can look forward to the revivifying of God's people as righteousness and praise spring forth before all nations.