

# CONCORDIA COMMENTARY

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A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture

## ISAIAH 56-66

R. Reed Lessing



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56:8; 60:4), the homage of the nations (49:23; 60:14–16), a rebuilt city (chapters 54; 60–62), and the Divine Warrior (42:13; 59:16–20; 63:1–6).

These chapters are also joined through various quotes and echoes. Is 40:10b appears verbatim in 62:11c, while 60:9 blends expressions from 51:5b and 55:5b. Yahweh's presence as a rearguard is in both 52:12 and 58:8, and the question of his hand being too short appears in 50:2 and 59:1. Further shared motifs include the uplifted signal or banner (49:22; 62:10); the new Israel nursing from the breast of (foreign, gentile) queens and nations (49:23; 60:16; and from the breast of Zion in 66:11); the trees "juniper, maple, and cypress" (בְּרוֹשׁ תְּדָהָר וְתַאֲשִׁיר) in 41:19 are mentioned again in 60:13; and the word-play on בְּנֵיךָ meaning either "your children" or "your builders" (49:17; 62:5).

These thematic groupings bind Isaiah 40–55 with chapters 56–66 and argue against literary coincidence, as though chapters 56–66 were hastily added to the end of the book. These connections between chapters 40–55 and 56–66 are affirmed by Childs, who sees them not merely as reapplications or spiritualizations, but as signs of a conscious decision on the part of the author to continue the narrative of Isaiah.<sup>86</sup>

## Conclusions

Scholars have sought to explain the relationship of Isaiah 40–55 to chapters 56–66 in a variety of ways. Most of these approaches fail to give adequate force to the overall structure of Isaiah, and in so doing they miss the intricate way that the book is bound together. Isaiah does not tell three different stories, but one story in three parts. Not only are the connections between these chapters literary and thematic, but they are even more *theological*. Development manifests itself most clearly in the prophet's use of "righteousness" and "servant(s)." Chapters 56–66 are not an awkward addendum to Isaiah, but the culmination of the book's overall message. They must be interpreted as an integral part of the original book of Isaiah and not as an independent literary work that is only marginally connected with chapters 1–55. The inspired book is divinely intended to be read as a whole.

## The Historical Background of Isaiah 56–66

### Introduction

Chapters 56–66 are notorious for their lack of historical specificity. Judean and foreign rulers are not named. Dateable historical events are not discussed, whether in Israel or in the ancient Near East. What we do know is that people are called to observe the Sabbath (56:1–8; 58:13), Jerusalem and its gates will soon be functioning (e.g., 62:1–9), and Zion will receive new sons and daughters (e.g., 60:4; 66:7–13). The chapters also mention a temple (e.g., 56:7; 64:10 [ET 64:11]), fasting (chapter 58), idolatry (e.g., 57:3–13a; 65:2–4; 66:3–4, 17), and bitter factions (e.g., 66:5). Isaiah's lament in 63:7–64:11 (ET 63:7–64:12)

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<sup>86</sup> Childs, *Isaiah*, 447.

implies that the temple and Judean cities have been ransacked, while 60:10 indicates that the city walls lie in ruins.

### Dating Isaiah 56–66 in Persian Yehud

Though there are no definite concrete historical markers in Isaiah 56–66, many scholars try to reconstruct a more exact setting.<sup>87</sup> In doing so, they read against the text. Ignoring the fact that Hebrew poetry is filled with metaphors, symbols, and figurative language, these scholars try to interpret Isaiah 56–66 as addressing precise moments in Israel’s history. Many argue that chapters 56–66 address events in the early years of postexilic Persian Yehud during the reign of Darius I (522–486 BC). It is customary to date Isaiah 56–66 between 537 BC, when Sheshbazzar made an attempt to rebuild the temple, and 515 BC, when Zerubbabel finished it.<sup>88</sup> This reading believes that much of Isaiah 56–66 addresses difficulties that arose within this timeframe, or perhaps later.<sup>89</sup> For instance, Ernst Sellin and Georg Fohrer argued that they had found a “general Palestinian point of view” and maintained that these chapters “pre-suppose throughout the existence of the new Temple, which was dedicated in 515 [BC].”<sup>90</sup>

It is also common for those who hold to a postexilic audience to cite connections between Isaiah 56–66 and the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. There are, it would seem, several associations between Isaiah 56–66 and Ezra 9–10.<sup>91</sup> The main link is the title “the ones trembling/tremblers” (הַמִּתְרַדְּדִים). The adjective appears in Is 66:2 (singular) and 66:5 (plural), as well as in Ezra 9:4 (singular) and Ezra 10:3 (plural). In all four texts “the

<sup>87</sup> Westermann is typical when he comments: “As in ch. 58 throughout, the passage before us [58:2–3a] has absolutely nothing to say about the sacrificial system or the temple. Presumably then, this utterance was made previous to the restoration of the temple” (*Isaiah 40–66*, 335). Watts also attempts to reconstruct a detailed historical backdrop to Isaiah 56–66. For example, he writes: “Chaps. 58–66 are seen as representative of the author’s (and the first readers’) generation. They represent the reign of Artaxerxes in which first Ezra and then Nehemiah bring renewal and new hope for Jerusalem. They fulfill the promise of 2:2–4 and project a form of religious life for Jews under imperial rule that becomes the norm for Judaism” (*Isaiah*, 2:368). Even a conservative interpreter like Oswalt understands the audience of Isaiah 56–66 to be Israelites who returned from exile in Babylon (*Isaiah*, 2:11). However, he also writes: “That these chapters [Isaiah 56–66] may have been addressed especially to conditions that would prevail after the return from exile in the years after 538 is less important than that they are written to show how the theology of chs. 40–55 fits into that of chs. 1–39.”

<sup>88</sup> E.g., Hanson, *Isaiah 40–66*, 178–86; Whybray, *Isaiah 40–66*, 39–41.

<sup>89</sup> Brueggemann writes (*Isaiah 40–66*, 164):

This literature is likely situated somewhere between (a) the rebuilding of the temple and the revival of temple worship in the years 520–516, a crisis to which Haggai and Zechariah are related, and (b) the restoration of the torah community under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah (444 B.C.E.). It is more likely, according to current scholarly opinion, that these chapters are to be located in the earlier part of this period, thus soon after 520.

<sup>90</sup> Sellin and Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 384.

<sup>91</sup> Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah*, 3:51–54.

tremblers” demonstrate humility before Yahweh’s Word. These loyal Yahwists are opposed to the deviant leaders who are involved in heterodox worship (e.g., 56:9–12; 57:3–13a; 66:3, 17). However, in Isaiah 56–66 “the tremblers” are a persecuted minority, while in Ezra they are in league with Ezra the scribe, share in his policies, and therefore help lead the community.

Further caution is in order when attempting to link Isaiah 56–66 historically with Ezra and Nehemiah (ca. 458–432 BC). To be sure, these reformers discuss the Sabbath, prayer, the temple, and foreigners (e.g., Ezra 9:1–10:17; Neh 8:1–18; 9:14; 10:32 [ET 10:31]; 13:15–22), as does Isaiah 56–66 (e.g., the Sabbath, 56:2, 4; 58:13; 66:23; prayer, 63:7–64:11 [ET 63:7–64:12]; the temple, 56:7; 64:10 [ET 64:11]; 66:1; and foreigners, e.g., 56:3, 6; 61:5). But this is where the similarities end. Ezra and Nehemiah take a stand against outsiders who do not abandon their pagan way of life and still seek membership among God’s people. This is not an issue raised in Isaiah 56–66. Moreover, while one of Ezra’s main problems was with those who married foreign women (e.g., Ezra 9:1–2), this concern is nowhere addressed in Isaiah’s last eleven chapters. It is also misguided to think that Isaiah’s reference to city walls (e.g., 62:6) implies that this section of his book was composed during Nehemiah’s restoration of Jerusalem. Such an interpretation “ignores the dramatic and imaginative character of the writing.”<sup>92</sup>

In chapters 40–55 Babylon is Israel’s chief rival, while in Isaiah 56–66 Edom is the only foreign nation mentioned (63:1). When the Babylonians wreaked havoc upon Jerusalem, which they conquered in 587 BC, Edomites stood nearby gloating over Judah’s demise (Ps 137:7). In the postexilic period (beginning with the edict of Cyrus in 538 BC), this antagonism continued. Geshem came from the Edomite region, and he joined Sanballat and Tobiah in mocking and ridiculing Nehemiah’s efforts at rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem (Neh 2:19; 6:1–19).

Isaiah’s use of Edom in 63:1, however, is better explained along literary rather than historical lines. Because the prophet depicts Babylon’s demise in chapter 47, Edom was the only nation left that could symbolize cosmic evil. Just as Isaiah universalizes Edom in chapter 34, he does so again in 63:1. Edom should not be overly historicized in either text.

Another historical issue concerns 56:9–57:13a, which corresponds more closely to preexilic oracles against idolatry when both the Baal and Molech cults were rampant (e.g., 2 Ki 21:1–7). This prompts those who believe that chapters 56–66 address events in Persian Yehud to maintain either that “Trito-Isaiah” is employing preexilic material<sup>93</sup> or that he is not addressing the sin of idolatry.<sup>94</sup> However, in 56:9–57:13a Isaiah is reporting idol worship from his

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<sup>92</sup> Smart, *History and Theology in Second Isaiah*, 263.

<sup>93</sup> E.g., Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 317.

<sup>94</sup> E.g., Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic*, 187.

own eighth-century BC context. Furthermore, the evidence in Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi indicates that, though people in Persian Yehud had various problems, idolatry and syncretism were not high on the list. Yahweh's axe of exile had, in large part, rooted these out of Israel's life. Isaiah's description of idolatry in chapters 56–66 consists of ritual prostitution, witchcraft, and child sacrifice. These activities were common in the preexilic era but not the postexilic era.

Events in postexilic Yehud included drought, discouragement, unemployment, disappointment, and social unrest, but neither Haggai nor Zechariah indicts postexilic leaders like Zerubbabel or Joshua. Unlike Is 56:9–12, they do not accuse prophets in their day of fleecing the flock. And regarding references to the temple in Isaiah 56–66 (e.g., 56:7; 64:10 [ET 64:11]; 66:1), Muilenburg offers this cautionary note: "The reference to the temple must not be pressed ... since we are dealing with poetry in an eschatological context."<sup>95</sup>

Therefore, excessive historical speculation on Isaiah 56–66 is not helpful. Efforts to ascertain historical specificity go beyond the design of the text. To conduct an overzealous search for chronological details is to read against the grain. The issues of dates and times must be subordinated to Isaiah's overarching theological concerns. Seitz rightly maintains that "Third Isaiah is so bereft of concrete historical indicators" that "proposals as to historical and social location" are extremely speculative.<sup>96</sup> He suggests that "a diachronic approach misunderstands its limits in TI [Third Isaiah] when the literature does not emphasize new or radically altered historical circumstances" relative to chapters 40–55.<sup>97</sup>

Consequently, Seitz contends, we should interpret chapters 56–66 not in light of a speculative reconstructed *Sitz im Leben* but in the context of the book of Isaiah. When approached in this manner, Isaiah's preoccupation, including in chapters 56–66, is with "God's cleansing of Zion and its reestablishment," which the book never equates with the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple.<sup>98</sup> Seitz proposes that chapters 56–66 ask the question whether Zion can be fully restored, "given the state in which Israel as a community stands? Can Israel's people be fully the servants of God? The answer the final chapter gives us is, *Yes* (66:12–13)."<sup>99</sup>

Isaiah 56–66 asks us to bracket out historical questions. Seitz encourages interpretations that "do not depend upon a Babylonian prophet and Palestinian disciple model of interpretation."<sup>100</sup> P. A. Smith likewise admits to the "lack of

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<sup>95</sup> Muilenburg, "The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66," 653.

<sup>96</sup> Christopher R. Seitz, "Isaiah, Book of (Third Isaiah)," *ABD* 3:502.

<sup>97</sup> Seitz, *ABD* 3:502.

<sup>98</sup> Seitz, *ABD* 3:503.

<sup>99</sup> Seitz, *ABD* 3:506.

<sup>100</sup> Seitz, *ABD* 3:506.



clear and reliable historical information relating to the early period of Persian rule”<sup>101</sup> with which many investigations are concerned. And Chris Franke maintains that theories suggesting a postexilic Jerusalem origin for chapters 56–66 are possibilities remaining to be demonstrated.<sup>102</sup> Given the lack of historical citations in the text, a good measure of restraint is in order.

### **This Commentary’s Approach**

While it is true that Isaiah 40–55 extends *historically* beyond chapters 1–39, this is not the case with chapters 56–66. They do not extend historically beyond chapters 40–55. The last section of Isaiah, rather, circles back to unite the previous parts *theologically*. Isaiah 56–66, therefore, needs to be read as a theological reflection on Isaiah 1–55 and not as a historical address to Israelites in Persian Yehud.<sup>103</sup>

Unfortunately, the unrelenting focus of critical scholarship has been upon hypotheses about texts’ pre-history, the compositional history of traditions, and the setting of those who created the final form. John Barton, as recently as 2007, writes: “The preferred description of biblical criticism [is] the ‘historical-critical method.’”<sup>104</sup> This approach creates a chasm between biblical and theological studies as well as between the academic study of the Bible and the life of the church.

Since the late eighteenth century, many biblical scholars have been either agnostic, or—worse—antagonistic, toward a theological approach to Scripture. History and theology, they maintain, are two separate disciplines. Thus the needs of the Christian church are frequently ignored by the critical academy. But this is changing. Theological readings are gaining ground.<sup>105</sup> This is good news for those seeking a conservative and evangelical approach to Isaiah 56–66. Theological interpretations focus upon the text’s final form, and not supposed

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<sup>101</sup> Smith, *Rhetoric and Redaction in Trito-Isaiah*, 189.

<sup>102</sup> Franke, *Isaiah 46, 47, and 48*, 3–4.

<sup>103</sup> This implies, then, that there is no sharp break between chapters 55 and 56. Seitz writes (*ABD* 3:503):

It is quite possible that chaps. 40–55 treat different *aspects* of the restoration of Zion than do chaps. 56–66, which demonstrate special interest in the requirements for membership in God’s Zion. But then the sharp distinction drawn between these sections on historical grounds falls away. The distinction becomes thematic and theological, and it does not necessitate separation along Babylonian/Palestinian, exilic/postexilic, or visionary prophet/disillusioned community lines.

<sup>104</sup> Barton, *The Nature of Biblical Criticism*, 31.

<sup>105</sup> See, e.g., Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture*; Fowl, *Theological Interpretation of Scripture*; and Vanhoozer, *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*. Recent commentary series that attend to the meaning of the text include the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture; Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible; The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary; and the Concordia Commentary series.

earlier versions, while affirming the historicity of the text and its true historical setting. It is just that they don't make history their only pursuit.

In the liturgy, at the conclusion of the Old Testament and Epistle Readings, is this response:

A: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.<sup>106</sup>

The Scripture reading is God speaking in the present moment. “This *is* [not just *was*, and certainly not *might somehow become*] the Word of the Lord.” Reading the Bible theologically is really an old-school approach that has been practiced by the church throughout her history. After an exile of several hundred years during the dominance of the historical-critical method, a churchly view of the Scriptures is coming back into the limelight.

A theological reading of Isaiah 56–66 reads these chapters with a hermeneutic that has the life, death, resurrection, and second advent of Jesus as its focal point. It identifies the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as the God and Father who raised his Son, Jesus Christ, from the dead. Isaiah's text, then, testifies to the restoration of all things through Yahweh's Servant and Messiah, Jesus, who is the Son of God. This reading employs the rule of the faith (*regula fidei*) as the Christian faith is understood through the church's three ecumenical Creeds. Interpreting the last eleven chapters of Isaiah in this way asks the question “What do we see when we read them through the lens of the NT and the Creeds that we would not have otherwise seen?”

And the answer is singular. We see in Isaiah 56–66, like no other place in the OT, the birth of the NT church, along with its challenges and glories, lows and highs, and final eschatological victory. Augustine's dictum still rings true: “The New Testament is concealed in the Old; the Old Testament is revealed in the New.”<sup>107</sup> Along these same lines, Geerhardus Vos offers a helpful analogy.<sup>108</sup> OT prophecies are like seeds that develop roots, stems, and leaves. In the NT the bud emerges and begins to flower. From the standpoint of the OT, the seed may not look like the blooming plant it will become (the same is true in botanical comparisons). However, careful canonical interpretation reveals the organic connections. The storyline of the OT continues in the NT and concludes with Christ's return.

Thus the focus of this commentary on Isaiah 56–66 is on the unit's literary, theological, and canonical functions. These chapters envision the miraculous beginnings of the church as well as what life is like now in the community of the Suffering Servant. They also transport us into the time when Christ “will



<sup>106</sup> See, for example, *LSB*, p. 156.

<sup>107</sup> *In Vetere Novum lateat, et in Novo Vetus pateat* (Augustine, *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum*, 2.73 [PL 34:623]).

<sup>108</sup> Vos, “The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline,” 11–15.

appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but unto salvation for those who are eagerly waiting for him” (Heb 9:28).

Therefore, this commentary interprets chapters 56–66 within their *Sitz im Text* (their context in the canon of Scripture) and not upon a tenuous reconstruction of their *Sitz im Leben* (a hypothetical historical situation). Edgar Conrad argues that וִיזִיּוֹן (“vision”, 1:1) describes a prophetic book that is composed for later audiences (cf. 29:11–12, 18).<sup>109</sup> Understood in this way, Isaiah 56–66 can only be fully interpreted at a later time and in a manner similar to the apocalyptic secrets in the book of Daniel.<sup>110</sup>

Smith is therefore correct when he writes: “Thus the whole unit of chaps. 56–66 is eschatologically oriented, so it is difficult to find any information in these messages that points to an identifiable historical date for the actual audience that first heard these messages.”<sup>111</sup> Isaiah 56–66 points to the last days, the church age inaugurated by Christ’s first advent and to be completed at his return, even as they take up the most pressing question: “Who will participate in Yahweh’s new and eternal order?”

## The Two Groups in Isaiah 56–66

### Introduction

We might read Isaiah 40–55 and conclude that “Abraham’s seed” (זֶרַע, 41:8) is equivalent to the Servant’s “seed” (זֶרַע, 53:10). If so, being Abraham’s descendant would be tantamount to being included in Yahweh’s new community that issues forth from the life, death, and resurrection of the Suffering Servant. Chapters 56–66, however, radically refute this belief. A purebred Israelite may be on the outside while a foreigner, indeed, even a eunuch, may be on the inside (56:1–8).

As early as Duhm, scholars have realized that a major problem in Isaiah 56–66 is an internal one:<sup>112</sup> the community is full of internal strife. The major theological tension in Isaiah is no longer the dichotomy between Israel and the nations,<sup>113</sup> but an internal conflict between the servants (the “seed” of the Substitute Servant, 53:10) and apostates, whom the prophet calls the offspring of an adulterer and children of deceit (57:3–4). In chapters 56–66 the meaning of “Israel,” rather than denoting ethnicity, becomes more ambiguous and theologically fluid. It is not synonymous with Abraham’s genetic seed. As a result, the major tension in chapters 56–66 is an internal conflict between Yahweh’s

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<sup>109</sup> Conrad, *Reading the Latter Prophets*, 185–86. Childs holds a similar view (*Isaiah*, 297).

<sup>110</sup> Compare Dan 12:4–13, according to which the prophetic secrets (of the sixth century BC) were to remain sealed for a time, to Rev 22:6–7, 10, which states that now—the church age—is the time for the prophetic words to be unsealed, revealed, and proclaimed.

<sup>111</sup> Smith, *Isaiah 40–66*, 520.

<sup>112</sup> Duhm, *Jesaia*, 418.

<sup>113</sup> The nations in chapters 56–66, unlike those in chapters 1–55, are not a major part of the prophet’s preaching. For example, when Edom appears in 63:1 it is depoliticized; instead of a nationality, Edom stands as a cipher for all of Yahweh’s enemies.

## The Epilogue to the Fifth Servant Song

### Translation

- 61     4    And they will rebuild ancient ruins;  
             former devastations they will raise up,  
             and they will renew ruined cities,  
             devastations of generation to generation.
- 5    And strangers will stand and shepherd your flock,  
      and foreigners will be your farmers and vinedressers.
- 6    And you, you will be called Yahweh's priests;  
      "our God's ministers" will be said of you.  
      You will eat the wealth of nations,  
      and in their riches you will boast.
- 7    Instead of your shame [you will receive] a double portion,  
      and [instead of ] dishonor they will rejoice in their lot.  
      Therefore in their land they will inherit a double portion.  
      Everlasting joy will be theirs.
- 8    "For I am Yahweh, who loves justice,  
      who hates robbery in an offering.  
      And I will give their recompense in faithfulness,  
      and an everlasting covenant I will cut with them.
- 9    And their offspring will be known among the nations,  
      and their descendants in the midst of the peoples.  
      All who see them will recognize them,  
      that they are offspring whom Yahweh blessed."
- 10   "I will rejoice exuberantly in Yahweh.  
      My soul will indeed exult in my God,  
      because he clothed me in garments of salvation.  
      In a robe of righteousness he covered me,  
      like a bridegroom dresses like a priest with a beautiful  
      headdress,  
      and like a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
- 11   For as the earth brings forth its sprouts,  
      and as a garden causes what has been sown in it to sprout up,  
      thus the Lord Yahweh will cause righteousness and praise to  
      sprout up  
      before all the nations."

## Textual Notes

The translation in this commentary indicates parallel lines by indenting them equally.

**61:4** וְכִנּוּ חֲרָבוֹת עוֹלָם—The renewed community (61:1–3) is empowered to renew what was long ago torn down by Israel’s enemies. Rebuilding places devastated by warfare is an ongoing theme in Isaiah 40–55 (e.g., 51:3; 52:9; 54:11–12). The *waw* consecutive (ו) on the perfect וְכִנּוּ, “and they will rebuild,” links 61:4–11 with the Fifth Servant Song (61:1–3). The verb in the next clause (see the next textual note), יִקְוּמוּ, “they will raise up,” reinforces the rebuilding motif. The verbs כִּנּוּ and קוּם (Polel) function in the same way in 58:12. For the nuance of כִּנּוּ here and for the construct phrase חֲרָבוֹת עוֹלָם, “ruins of ancient time,” see the first textual note on 58:12.

יִקְוּמוּ רְאשֵׁי שְׁמָמוֹת—By means of יִקְוּמוּ, “they will raise up” (Polel of קוּם, as in 58:12), the rebuilding motif is highlighted. The nominalized plural feminine participle שְׁמָמוֹת (from שָׁמַם) is rendered as “devastations” (see the third textual note on 49:8<sup>1</sup>). Its repetition in the last clause of 61:4 makes the idea emphatic. Often רְאשֵׁי serves as an adjective, “former (in time),” and most English versions render רְאשֵׁי שְׁמָמוֹת as “former devastations.” However, the masculine gender of the plural רְאשֵׁי is inconsistent with the feminine plural שְׁמָמוֹת. The LXX renders רְאשֵׁי with the adverb πότερον, “(things that) formerly (were) devastations.” Another possibility is that the plural רְאשֵׁי serves as a substantive, “former persons, ancestors, men of old” (BDB, רְאשֵׁי, 1 a). If so, then שְׁמָמוֹת רְאשֵׁי would be a construct phrase, “devastations of (buildings originally built by) the ancients.”<sup>2</sup>

עָרֵי חָרָב—Within chapters 56–66, Isaiah employs the adjective חָדָשׁ, “new,” to announce Zion’s new name (62:2) as well as the new heavens and new earth (65:17; 66:22). Here, the cognate Piel verb חָדָשׁ, “they will renew,” denotes “repair a city” (see *DCH*, חָדָשׁ I, Piel). The Piel of חָדָשׁ also describes rebuilding Yahweh’s house (2 Chr 24:4, 12) and his altar (2 Chr 15:8). The noun חָרָב in the construct phrase עָרֵי חָרָב, “cities of ruination,” is cognate to the noun חָרָבָה (see the first textual note on 61:4).

דּוֹר וָדוֹר—For the phrase דּוֹר וָדוֹר, “(from) generation (to) generation,” see the second textual note on 58:12.

**61:5** וְעָמְדוּ זָרִים וְרָעוּ צִאֲנֵיכֶם וּבָנֵי נָכָר אֲכָרִיכֶם וְכֹרְמֵיכֶם—Yahweh’s address changes from only third person plural forms in 61:4 to include second person masculine plural forms here. The theme of reversal, so central to chapters 60–62, continues with the announcement that זָרִים, “strangers,” and בָּנֵי נָכָר, “sons of foreignness/foreigners,” will serve the citizens of the new Zion. The following terms belong in the same semantic field: זָרִים, “strangers” (61:5); בָּנֵי (ח) נָכָר, “foreigners” (56:6; 60:10; 61:5); עַמִּים, “peoples” (56:7; 61:9; 62:10); and גּוֹיִם, Gentile “nations” (61:6, 9, 11).<sup>3</sup> In these verses of

<sup>1</sup> Lessing, *Isaiah 40–55*, 473.

<sup>2</sup> Joüon, § 137 i, notes that in the OT רְאשֵׁי never has the Hebrew article even though it denotes a class of individuals, “the ancients.”

<sup>3</sup> גֵּר, “alien,” and נָכָר, “sojourner,” are not in Isaiah 56–66, but they appear earlier: גֵּר in 5:17 and נָכָר in 14:1.

chapters 56–66 these words are not used pejoratively, but evangelically. For instance, in 56:6 “foreigners” (בְּנֵי הַנֶּכֶדָר) are welcome in Yahweh’s temple and serve him there, enjoying full participation in the new Israel. The marks of being his people, such as joining themselves to Yahweh, serving him, loving his name, becoming his servants, keeping the Sabbath, and holding on to his covenant (56:2–6), are not political or ethnic, but *theological*. These are OT descriptors for the church of all nations (e.g., Rev 7:9).

“Farmers” (אֲבָרִים) are mentioned along with “vinedressers” (פְּרָמִים) also in Joel 1:11; 2 Chr 26:10.

**61:6** וְאַתֶּם כֹּהֲנֵי יְהוָה תִּקְרְאוּ—The second person plural personal pronoun אַתֶּם, “you,” is unneeded (because of the second person plural verb) and so is emphatic, and doubly so because it stands near the beginning of this verse. “Yahweh’s priests” (כֹּהֲנֵי יְהוָה) are his intermediaries to the world. This mediation “applies in two directions,” since “priests represent the people to God by means of sacrifice and intercession and God to the people by means of instruction and benediction.”<sup>4</sup> The Niphal of קָרָא, “call,” here and in 56:7; 62:4, 12; 63:19 could be translated as “be named,” as could be the Niphal of אָמַר, “say” (see the next textual note).

מִשְׁרָתִי אֶל־יְהוָה יֹאמַר לָכֶם—The Piel participle (in construct: מִשְׁרָתִי) derives from שָׁרַת. When employed with a human subject and God (implicitly or explicitly) as its object (here אֶל־יְהוָה, “our God”), it denotes liturgical service in a worship setting (e.g., Ex 28:35, 43; Num 3:31; Deut 10:8; 17:12). See further the first textual note on Is 56:6, which promises that even Gentiles will be permitted to participate in such service. The singular Niphal verb in יֹאמַר לָכֶם, literally, “it will be said to you,” shows that מִשְׁרָתִי אֶל־יְהוָה (with the plural participle as the *nomen regens*) is an appellation, a (singular) name or title.

חֵיל גּוֹיִם תֹּאכֵלוּ—The nations’ riches flow into Zion also in 60:5, 11; for חֵיל, see the fourth textual note on 60:5. Because priests and Levites did not own land or animals, God made provision for them to “eat” (אָכַל) some of the meat offered to Yahweh in worship (e.g., Ex 29:32; Lev 6:9, 19 [ET 6:16, 26]). Here “you [who are called Yahweh’s priests and ministers] will eat” (תֹּאכֵלוּ) “the wealth of the nations” (חֵיל גּוֹיִם).

וּבְכָבוֹדָם תִּתְיַמְרוּ—Parallel to the preceding “wealth of the nations” is כְּבוֹדָם, “their glory,” which in this context denotes riches (see *DCH*, כְּבוֹד, 2). The last word in this verse, תִּתְיַמְרוּ, is a Hithpael (second masculine plural imperfect) derived from יָמַר, a by-form of מָוַר. מָוַר can mean “to exchange” (see *DCH*, יָמַר; cf. *HALOT*, יָמַר, Hithpael), as does the only other occurrence of יָמַר in the OT (the Hiphil in Jer 2:11). If that is the verb’s meaning here, the people “will exchange” their layman’s garments for glorious priestly clothes, comporting with the idea in 61:3 (cf. 52:1). This is how Barthélemy takes it.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, Rabbinic Hebrew attests מָוַר as a by-form of אָמַר (Jastrow, מָוַר II). And the Vulgate’s *superbietis* takes it as a by-form of אָמַר, “say,” meaning “to act proudly, boast, glory.” Both Pieper and Oswalt suggest that Jerome’s interpretation

<sup>4</sup> Koole, *Isaiah III*, 3:283.

<sup>5</sup> Barthélemy, *Critique textuelle de l’Ancien Testament*, 2:422–23.

fits the context better.<sup>6</sup> Supporting the Vulgate is the Peshitta, *ܐܘܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐܢܐ*, “and with their glory/honorarium you shall boast/be glorified.” The Ethpaal of *ܡܠܥܐ* can mean “to be glorified” (Sokoloff, *ܡܠܥܐ*, Etpa., 2) or “to boast, vaunt, brag” (Sokoloff, *ܡܠܥܐ*, Etpa., 3). The LXX translates with *θαυμασθήσεσθε*, a future passive indicative from *θαυμάζω*, “marvel, wonder,” but that appears to be a paraphrase. “You will boast/glory” is the best translation.

**61:7** *תַּחַת בְּשִׁתְּכֶם מִשְׁנָה*—The terse syntax is, literally, “instead of your shame, double.” *בְּשִׁתְּכֶם* is the noun *בִּשְׁת* (derived from the verb *בוש*) with a second person plural suffix, “your shame.” The syntax changes abruptly to third person plural forms in the next clause (see the next textual note). However, there is no need to emend the text to smooth it out. These shifts in person occur occasionally in prophetic texts (GKC, § 144 p).

The noun *מִשְׁנָה* appears at the end of both the first and the third lines of 61:7. It denotes a “double” or “twofold” amount in, e.g., Ex 16:5, 22; Job 42:10. Moses indicates that those robbed of their livestock should receive double payment (*שְׁנַיִם*, Ex 22:3 [ET 22:4]), and the context of robbery resonates with the statements about justice and theft in Is 61:8. Both 58:1–5 and 59:1–15a go into great detail about such injustices. The righteous receive a double compensation for all the evil inflicted upon them by the apostates: the righteous will inherit the land (60:21), and the shame unjustly inflicted on them will be transferred to their adversaries, who will be put to shame (e.g., 66:5).

The noun *מִשְׁנָה*, “double,” doubled in 61:7, is different from *כְּפָלִים* in 40:2, but it is the same as in the conclusion of Job: after being sorely tested and shamed by his three friends, Job received back from Yahweh “twice as much” as he had before his ordeal (*מִשְׁנָה*, Job 42:10).

*וּבְכִלְמָה יִרְנוּ חֵלְקָם*—The preposition *תַּחַת* that began the preceding line is implied here too (GKC, § 119 hh), hence, “and [instead of] dishonor they will rejoice in their lot.” The sequence of the noun *בִּשְׁת*, “shame” (derived from *בוש*), in the preceding line and the noun *כְּלָמָה*, “disgrace” (derived from *כָּלַם*), here is comparable to the sequence of the two verbs in the same order (*בוש* then *כָּלַם*) in 41:11; see the first textual note there.<sup>7</sup> *יִרְנוּ* is the Qal third masculine plural imperfect of *רָנַן*, here meaning “shout for joy, rejoice,” though in some contexts it may mean “cry out, lament” (e.g., Lam 2:19).

“Their portion/lot” (*חֵלְקָם*) includes the status of priesthood described in 61:6. Under the old covenant of Moses, the Levites—the tribe that included all the priests (Ex 4:14; 28:1; Num 3:6)—did not receive any “portion” (*חֵלֶק*) nor any “inheritance” (*נַחֲלָה*) as did the other tribes, for Yahweh himself was the Levites’ “inheritance” (*נַחֲלָתוֹ*, Deut 10:9). But when Yahweh restores his people in the new “covenant” (Is 59:21; 61:8), all of his people will be “priests” (61:6; cf. 1 Pet 2:9) who “minister” (Is 56:6; 61:6), and they will all receive a double portion (61:7). Contrast this with the “portion” (*חֵלֶק*) and “lot” (*נֹרָל*) Yahweh assigns to the apostates in 57:6.

<sup>6</sup> Pieper, *Isaiah II*, 607; Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 2:568.

<sup>7</sup> Lessing, *Isaiah 40–55*, 210–11.



לִכְנָן בְּאַרְצָם מִשְׁנֶה יִירָשׁוּ—See the discussion of מִשְׁנֶה, “double (portion),” in the first textual note on 61:7. Regarding יִירָשׁוּ, “to inherit,” see “inheritance” (נִחְלָה) and “portion” in the preceding textual note.

שְׂמֵחַת עוֹלָם—The construct phrase שְׂמֵחַת עוֹלָם, literally, “joy of eternity,” has an adjectival genitive, “eternal joy.” שְׂמֵחַת עוֹלָם is likewise promised in 35:10; 51:11. Cf. the Gospel promises with the cognate verb שָׂמַח, “rejoice,” in 56:7; 65:13; 66:10.

61:8 אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱהֵב מִשְׁפָּט—Yahweh begins speaking here and continues through 61:9. The phrase אֲנִי יְהוָה, “I am Yahweh,” derives from Ex 3:14. Ezekiel employs this phrase more than any other OT writer, some eighty-seven times. Blenkinsopp writes: “As a self-designation of deity it expresses much in small compass: permanence, permanent presence and availability, dependability, and unchangeability.”<sup>8</sup> See further the second textual note on 41:4.<sup>9</sup>

Isaiah is fond of the construction יְהוָה followed by a participle (e.g., 27:3; 43:3; 60:16). This verse has two participles. The first is אֱהֵב, “who loves.” For the verb אָהַב, “to love,” see the third textual note on 41:8.<sup>10</sup> The direct object of the participle is the noun מִשְׁפָּט, “justice,” which appears forty-two times in Isaiah. It is one of the main characteristics of the messianic kingdom (e.g., 9:6 [ET 9:7]; 16:5; cf. 11:3–4). See further the second textual note on 56:1.

שֹׂנֵא נֶזֶל בְּעוֹלָה—“I am Yahweh” continues with a second Qal participle, שֹׂנֵא, “who hates.” שֹׂנֵא, “to hate,” is the polar opposite of אָהַב, “to love” (see the preceding textual note). The participle’s direct object is the noun נֶזֶל, which usually signifies the action of “robbery” but in Ezek 22:29 (also נֶזֶל in Ezek 18:18) concretely denotes the items robbed (see BDB). Isaiah uses the noun עוֹלָה, “(burnt) offering,” four times elsewhere (1:11; 40:16; 43:23; 56:7) and spells it plene (with -i-) twice (עוֹלָה in 40:16; עוֹלִיתִיָּהם in 56:7). If that is the noun here, the preposition בְּ with עוֹלָה may mean “in/with a burnt offering,” or if the בְּ is a *bet essentiae* (BDB, בְּ I, I 7), the thing stolen may be sacrificed “as an offering.” The two nouns בְּעוֹלָה נֶזֶל together may mean “the offering of something stolen.” The Vulgate supports the MT with *rapinam in holocausto*, “robbery in holocaust.” English versions that follow the MT include KJV, NASB, NKJV. However, the LXX, translating an unpointed Hebrew text, renders the phrase as μισῶν ἀπράγματα ἐξ ἀδικίας, “who hates things stolen out of injustice.” Apparently the LXX vocalized the consonants בְּעוֹלָה as בְּעוֹלָה, the preposition בְּ with the noun עוֹלָה, “injustice,” which appears in the MT of Isaiah only in 59:3 (see the fourth textual note on that verse). The Peshitta supports the LXX with ܥܡܠܐ ܥܡܠܐ, “robbing and iniquity.”<sup>11</sup> Some scholars

<sup>8</sup> Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah*, 2:197.

<sup>9</sup> Lessing, *Isaiah 40–55*, 191–92.

<sup>10</sup> Lessing, *Isaiah 40–55*, 208–9.

<sup>11</sup> One might counter that the Peshitta opted for ܥܡܠܐ, “iniquity,” simply because that Syriac word is a homograph of the Hebrew עוֹלָה.



and English translations prefer the LXX and advocate a translation like “I hate robbery in/with injustice” or “I hate robbery and wrong” (RSV, ESV).<sup>12</sup>

**וְנִתְּנָהּ בְּאֵמָתָהּ**—In chapters 40–66 the noun **בְּעֵלָהּ**, “recompense,” appears also in 40:10; 49:4; 62:11; 65:7. In 40:10 it denotes the spoils of war that will be made available to the new community by the Suffering Servant’s victory (as does **שָׁלָל**, the victor’s “booty, spoils,” in 53:12).<sup>13</sup> In 62:11–12 **שָׂכָרוֹ**, “his reward,” and **בְּעֵלָתוֹ**, “his recompense,” are for his “holy people, Yahweh’s redeemed ones.” Consistent with those other passages is the interpretation that here **בְּעֵלָהּ**, “recompense,” is a Gospel motif for the grace earned by the Servant (not merited by the people themselves) and given freely to the believing remnant. (For the only time in chapters 40–66 that **בְּעֵלָהּ** is not a Gospel word, see the third textual note on 65:7.) The noun **אֵמָתָהּ** with **בְּ** (“in faithfulness”) could be translated adverbially in reference to Yahweh’s activity: “I will *faithfully* give.”

**וְבִרְיִית עוֹלָם אֶכְרֹת לָהֶם**—Yahweh pledges, “And an everlasting covenant I will cut with them.” This is the same Gospel “covenant” (**בְּרִית**) promised in 42:6; 49:8; 54:10; 55:3; 56:4, 6; 59:21. Isaiah uses the same construct phrase, **בְּרִית עוֹלָם**, “everlasting covenant,” in 55:3, and he speaks of the “covenant” using **עוֹלָם**, “everlasting/forevermore,” in 59:21. Contrast 24:5, where “they broke the everlasting covenant.” Elsewhere in the OT **עוֹלָם בְּרִית** occurs fourteen times.<sup>a</sup> It is ratified by the Substitute Servant, Jesus, who on Good Friday inaugurated this covenant once and for all (Heb 9:11–22; 13:20). See also “the new covenant in my blood” instituted on Maundy Thursday in Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25.

**61:9 וְנִוְדַע בְּנוֹיָם זֶרְעָם וְצִאצְאֵיהֶם בְּתוֹךְ הָעַמִּים**—The parallel subject nouns are **זֶרַע**, “offspring, seed,” and the plural **צִאצְאִים**, “descendants,” a reduplicated form (**צא-צא**) of the last two consonants of the verb **יָצָא**, which can mean “go out” in a procreative sense (e.g., from a father’s loins in Gen 15:4; 2 Sam 7:12; 16:11). These two nouns (in the same order) are parallel also in 44:3; 48:19; 65:23 (also Job 5:25; 21:8). These people belong to the Suffering Servant; they are called his **זֶרַע**, “offspring,” in 53:10 (see also 61:9; 65:9, 23; 66:22). They are “the servants of Yahweh” (servants through *the* Servant) in 54:17, and the promise to “your offspring” (**זֶרַע**) extends to succeeding generations, “the offspring [**זֶרַע**] of your offspring [**זֶרַע**],” in 59:21. See the fourth textual note on 53:10.<sup>14</sup> They “will be known” (**וְנִוְדַע**, Niphal perfect with *waw* consecutive of **יָדַע**) throughout the world (**בְּנוֹיָם**, “among the nations,” and **בְּתוֹךְ הָעַמִּים**, “in the midst of the peoples”).

<sup>12</sup> A consideration of word usage in other OT passages does not help resolve this issue. Several other OT verses include both **עֹלָה**, “(burnt) offering,” and **מִשְׁפָּט**, “justice,” as does Is 61:8, but in them **מִשְׁפָּט** has the sense of the “regulation” or liturgical “rubric” for the offering given in the Torah (e.g., Lev 5:10; 9:16; Num 29:6; Ezra 3:4). Hence Is 61:8 is the only OT verse with both **עֹלָה**, “(burnt) offering,” and **מִשְׁפָּט** in the sense of “justice.” According to the MT, the sole OT verse with both **עֹלָה**, “injustice,” and **מִשְׁפָּט**, “justice,” is Zeph 3:5. Therefore, the interpreter cannot appeal to either **עֹלָה**, “(burnt) offering,” or to **עֹלָה**, “injustice,” as being combined more frequently with **מִשְׁפָּט** in the sense of “justice.”

<sup>13</sup> See the third textual note on 53:12 (Lessing, *Isaiah*, 603–4).

<sup>14</sup> Lessing, *Isaiah* 40–55, 600.

כָּל־רְאִיָּהֶם יִכְיֹרוּם—The subject of this clause is the Qal participle with an objective suffix, רְאִיָּהֶם, “all who see them.” The participle is the subject of the Hiphil imperfect of יָכִיר with another objective suffix, יִכְיֹרוּם, “will recognize them.”

כִּי תִהְיֶה זֶרַע בְּרֵךְ יְהוָה:—The subordinating conjunction כִּי, “that,” introduces this clause as an explication of יִכְיֹרוּם, “will recognize them.” This clause states how the faithful remnant will be recognized (by obviously being blessed offspring) and/or their identity (the recognition that they are indeed the blessed offspring). The last two words (בְּרֵךְ יְהוָה) form a relative clause: “for they are offspring *whom* Yahweh blessed.” This promise shares similar features with 65:23: the noun זֶרַע, “offspring,” and the verb (here Piel) בָּרַךְ, “to bless,” with “Yahweh” (יְהוָה) as the one who blesses.

**61:10–11** Who is speaking in these verses? First person singular forms appear in 61:10. Targum Jonathan prefaces 61:10 with אָמְרַת יְרוּשָׁלַם, “Jerusalem said,” and also embellishes the “praise” (תְּהִלָּה) in 61:11 to become “praise to Jerusalem” (תְּשֻׁבַּחַתָּה דִּירוּשָׁלַם). Delitzsch believes that because the Servant speaks in 61:1–3, he is speaking again in 61:10–11 after the interlude of 61:4–9.<sup>15</sup> However, elsewhere the Messiah is never described as clothed in “salvation” (יְשׁוּעָה) and “righteousness” (צְדָקָה).<sup>16</sup> Rather, he is the *giver* of these gifts.<sup>17</sup> The speaker, then, must be Isaiah, who speaks not only for himself, but on behalf of all of the Anointed Servant’s offspring, the church, the bride of Christ (cf. the bridal imagery in 61:10). In fact, Isaiah sprinkles psalms of praise that are analogous to 61:10–11 throughout his book.<sup>18</sup>

**61:10** שׂוֹשׁ אֲשִׁישׁ בִּיהוָה—The Qal infinitive absolute שׂוֹשׁ (translated adverbially, “exuberantly”) with the imperfect אֲשִׁישׁ (“I will rejoice”) intensifies the prophet’s expression of joy. For שׂוֹשׁ, see the third textual note on 61:3. While אֲשִׁישׁ is the regular form of the Qal imperfect (not cohortative in form), the context implies that its mood is cohortative, i.e., a strong volitional declaration of the speaker’s intention to rejoice. See Joüon, § 114 b (1) and the next textual note.

וְתִגְלַל נַפְשִׁי בְּאַלְהֵי—The form of תִּגְלַל, “to exult,” is jussive (תִּגְלַל), rather than imperfect (תִּגְלַל). This volitive form (and mood; see Joüon, § 114 g (1)) confirms the volitional (cohortative) mood of אֲשִׁישׁ in the preceding clause and likewise is a powerful expression

<sup>15</sup> Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, 2:402–3 (trans. J. Kennedy).

<sup>16</sup> For the interrelated Hebrew vocabulary of “righteous(ness)” and “salvation,” see the second and third textual notes on 56:1.

<sup>17</sup> A possible exception might be 50:8. The Servant is scourged, abused, and spit upon by his human tormentors (50:6), but nevertheless declares, קָרוֹב מַצְדִּיקִי, “near is my Justifier.” However, in that context the Hiphil participle of צָדַק does not have the sense “to declare [a sinner] righteous/justify or impute righteousness to an unrighteous person.” The Servant has always been perfectly obedient (50:4–9) and “righteous” (53:11). Rather, the sense of “my Justifier” (50:8) is that Yahweh will “vindicate” the sinless Servant who was wrongly condemned (53:9). Yahweh will publicly “declare” him “to be righteous” by exalting him as the victor (52:13; 53:12) to disprove the false accusations leveled against him and to defeat his enemies (cf. 50:11).

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., 12:1–6; 42:10–13; 44:23; 49:13; 55:12–13. The prophet’s lament (63:7–64:11 [ET 63:7–64:12]) also functions in the same way. Isaiah speaks on behalf of all “your [Yahweh’s] servants” (63:17), for the whole church, as he confesses their corporate sin and expresses the yearning faith of the remnant.

of the will (Joüon, § 114 h), thus “*indeed exult*.” הָנִיף is third feminine singular since its subject is נַפְשִׁי, the suffixed feminine singular noun נַפֶּשׁ, “soul.” Compare St. Paul’s terminology for the “inner man” who delights in God’s Law (Rom 7:22), is being renewed daily (2 Cor 4:16), and is strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit (Eph 3:16), and his terminology for the “new man” created “in the righteousness and the holiness of the truth” (Eph 4:24).

כִּי הִלְבִּישְׁנִי בְּגָדֵי-יֵשַׁע מְעִיל צְדָקָה יַעֲמִנִי—The “garments of skin” Yahweh provided for Adam and Eve (Gen 3:21) were a down payment of glorious attire to come. In the next clauses Isaiah will describe this garb in bridal terms (see the next textual note). Hebrew poetry often alternates between plural and singular forms, as here with בְּגָדֵי-יֵשַׁע, “garments of salvation,” and then מְעִיל צְדָקָה, “a robe of righteousness.” Isaiah and by extension all believers are clothed in this vesture; cf. the Christian’s “breastplate of righteousness” in Eph 6:14 and “crown of righteousness” in 2 Tim 4:8. The terms בְּגָד, “garment,” and מְעִיל, “robe,” also appear together in Is 59:17 to describe the Divine Warrior; and for the Davidic Messiah, “righteousness will be the belt of his waist” (וְהָיָה צִדְקָתוֹ אֲזוּרָה מְחַגְגֵּתוֹ, 11:5). The nouns יֵשַׁע or יִשׁוּעָה, “salvation,” and צְדָקָה or צִדְקָה, “righteousness,” are also parallel in 45:8; 51:5, 6, 8; 56:1; 59:17; 62:1.<sup>19</sup> In 52:1 Yahweh commands, לְבַשְׂי עֲגוֹד צִיּוֹן לְבָשִׁי | בְּגָדֵי תִפְאָרֶתָךְ, “put on/clothe yourself with your strength, O Zion; put on garments of your beauty.” Similar expressions are in Ps 132:9, 16.

Here, instead of Isaiah/the faithful remnant clothing himself/themselves (Qal of לְבַשׁ, as in 49:18; 51:9; 52:1) with a garment provided by Yahweh, the entire action is performed by Yahweh alone. He is the subject of both verbs. This depicts divine monergism in salvation: Yahweh does it all! Both verbs take a double accusative construction: the first accusative is denoted by the first common singular pronominal suffix on each of the verbs (נִי-, “me,” the person clothed), and the second accusative is the two-word phrase that refers to the garment (בְּגָדֵי-יֵשַׁע and then מְעִיל צְדָקָה). The first verb, הִלְבִּישְׁנִי, “he clothed me, caused me to be clothed,” is the (causative) Hiphil of לְבַשׁ. The second verb form, יַעֲמִנִי, is the Qal perfect third masculine singular of יָעַם, to “cover” (BDB, *DCH*), a hapax legomenon, with a first common singular suffix. Some suggest emending it to a Hiphil imperfect third masculine singular of the related verb עָטָה, “wrap with, cover with” (*DCH*, עָטָה I, Hiphil), but emendation is unnecessary.

כְּחַתָּן יִבְהֶן פֶּאֶר וְכַכְלָה תַעֲדָה כְּלִיָּה—Is 61:10b–11 is connected through four similes, each beginning with the preposition כְּ: “like a bridegroom” and “like a bride” (61:10b) and “as the earth” and “as a garden” (61:11; see also 58:11). The subjects here, the “bridegroom” (חַתָּן) and “bride” (כַּלָּה), likewise rejoice in 62:5. This same marital joy is expressed in Jer 33:11. The noun פֶּאֶר, “headdress,” appears also in 61:3; see the second textual note there. The noun פֶּאֶר was worn by Israelite priests (Ex 39:28; Ezek 44:18). This and other priestly connections explain the use of the denominative Piel

<sup>19</sup> For the interrelated Hebrew vocabulary of “righteous(ness)” and “salvation,” see the second and third textual notes on 56:1.

verb (derived from the noun כֹּהֵן, “priest”) יִכְהֶן, “dress like a priest.”<sup>20</sup> Note the gift of the title כֹּהֲנֵי יְהוָה, “priests of Yahweh,” in 61:6. The investing of the bridegroom with a priestly headdress may be compared to the crowning of the bridegroom on his wedding day in Song 3:11.<sup>21</sup> The parallel verb תַּעֲדֶה is the third feminine singular Qal imperfect of עָדָה, “adorn/ornament oneself” (see BDB, עָדָה II), although the form itself could be Hiphil (not used in the OT).<sup>22</sup> This verb appears in the context of Bridegroom Yahweh adorning his bride Jerusalem in Ezek 16:11, 13. Cf. the cognate noun עָדִי denoting a bride’s “ornaments” in Is 49:18; Jer 2:32; Ezek 16:11. Here in Is 61:10 כְּלִיהָ, the suffixed plural of the multivalent noun כֶּלִי, denotes “her ornaments” or “her jewels.” כֶּלִי denotes precious betrothal gifts in Gen 24:53 (cf. Ex 3:22; 11:2).

**61:11** Both 55:10–11 and 61:11 employ nature comparisons to make stunning theological claims. God has designed nature to be fruitful and productive by means of rainfall and soil; how much more fruitful and productive, then, will God be as he accomplishes salvation by the power of his Word (55:10–11) to yield “righteousness” and “praise” (61:11). These texts organize their claims by means of the conjunctions כַּאֲשֶׁר and כִּי<sup>23</sup> and the adverb כֵּן. In 55:10–11 the sequence is כַּאֲשֶׁר, “just as,” and then כֵּן, “thus.” In 61:11 it is כִּי twice, on כַּאֲרֵץ, “as the earth,” and כִּי כִנְנָה, “as a garden,” and then כֵּן, “thus.”

תֹּצֵיאַ אֶרֶץ—The feminine noun אֶרֶץ, “earth,” is the subject of תֹּצֵיאַ, the feminine (causative) Hiphil imperfect of יָצָא, whose direct object is the noun צִמָּח, a collective singular, “sprouts,” whose feminine suffix (צִמָּחוֹת) refers back to אֶרֶץ, “earth.” Literally, the earth “causes its sprouts to go out,” i.e., to emerge out from the ground, but the verb is rendered as “brings forth.” For similar agricultural instances of the Hiphil of יָצָא, see Gen 1:12, 24; Hag 1:11; Ps 104:14 (BDB, יָצָא, Hiphil, 4 j).

וְכִנְנָה זֶרַע תִּצְמָח—Parallel to the preceding clause, the feminine כִנְנָה, “garden,” is the subject of תִּצְמָח, the feminine (causative) Hiphil imperfect of צָמַח, “cause to sprout.” The direct object is the suffixed plural of the noun זֶרַע, “what is sown.” This passive noun formation<sup>24</sup> is related to זָרַע, “seed, offspring,” and likely alludes to the

<sup>20</sup> The Piel of כָּהֵן usually means “minister as a priest” (BDB, כָּהֵן, Piel, 1), but its contextual nuance here is “to dress as a priest.” After defining the meaning of the verb here as “play the priest,” BDB explains that it means he “decks himself with a splendid turban such as the priests wore” (Piel, 3).

<sup>21</sup> See Mitchell, *The Song of Songs*, 774–76, 785–88.

<sup>22</sup> Joüon, § 125 d (2), notes that Hebrew verbs of wearing or donning clothing regularly take a direct object. That is the case here. Both verbs take a direct object: יִכְהֶן כֹּהֵן and then תַּעֲדֶה כְּלִיהָ. English idiom, however, requires the insertion of “with” in the translation of both phrases.

<sup>23</sup> Normally כִּי functions as a preposition, “like.” In each of the first two clauses in 61:11, however, it functions as a conjunction: “as [not ‘like’] the earth brings forth ... as a garden ...” See Joüon, §§ 158 a\*, note 2, and 174 d.

<sup>24</sup> For similar noun forms that may have a passive meaning, see GKC, §§ 84<sup>a</sup> m and 84<sup>b</sup> g. Waltke-O’Connor, § 22.6c, including note 35, suggests that instead of a noun, זֶרַע may be a Qal passive participle.

prominent theme of the Servant’s “offspring”; see the first textual note on 61:9 and the fourth textual note on 53:10.<sup>25</sup>

Isaiah employs the root צָמַח three times in this verse, once as a noun in the preceding clause (צִמְחָה, “its sprouts”) and twice as a Hiphil verb (תִּצְמַח here and יִצְמַח in the next clause). See the third textual note on 42:9.<sup>26</sup> The verb appears in 58:8 when Yahweh promises that healing will quickly sprout. In 4:2 Yahweh’s צִמְחָה, “Sprout, Branch,” is messianic, as it is also in Jer 23:5; 33:15; Zech 3:8; 6:12. Additional botanical motifs in Is 61:11 include כִּנְנֶה, “as a garden,” and וְרִיעֵיהָ, “what has been sown in it.”

“Garden” (כִּנְנֶה here; גֶּן in 51:3; 58:11) retrospectively alludes to Eden (Genesis 2; see Is 51:3) and prospectively to paradise restored (Is 58:11; Lk 23:43; Rev 2:7; 22:1–2, 14, 19). During the present era, the apostates pollute the “garden” by their idolatrous practices (e.g., Is 65:3; 66:17), but God intends it to be the place where bride and groom meet (גֶּן or כִּנְנֶה in Song 4:12–5:1; 6:2, 11; 8:13) to celebrate the love that is “the flame of Yah” (Song 8:6).<sup>27</sup> Thus the garden motif in Is 61:11 relates to the bridal motif in 61:10; 62:5. Eden was the site of the first wedding (Gen 2:24), and the eschatological “wedding” of the divine Bridegroom and his beautifully adorned bride, the church (Rev 19:7–8; 21:2), is celebrated in the greater Eden (Rev 22:1–2).

כֵּן וְאֵלֶּי יְהוָה יִצְמַח צְדָקָהּ וְתִהְיֶה לָּהּ נֶגֶד כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם:—The adverb כֵּן, “thus, so,” introduces the soteriological point of the preceding creation comparisons. Instead of the “garden,” now it is יְהוָה יִצְמַח, “the Lord Yahweh” (see the first textual note on 61:1), who “will cause to sprout up” (יִצְמַח, Hiphil of צָמַח, as in the preceding textual note). Moreover, the object here is not vegetation; the compound direct object is צְדָקָהּ וְתִהְיֶה לָּהּ, “righteousness and praise,” and in that order, because justification by grace alone is the basis for rendering praise to God (e.g., Ex 15:2; Deut 10:21; Ps 7:18 [ET 7:17]; Is 25:1; 45:25; 60:18; Phil 1:11). Zion’s inhabitants will be צְדִיקִים, “righteous” (60:21), and אֵילֵי הַצְּדָקָה, “oaks of righteousness” (61:3). “Righteousness” (צְדָקָה) is parallel with יְשׁוּעָה, “salvation” (61:10).<sup>28</sup> Because “Salvation” (יְשׁוּעָה) is the name of the new Zion’s walls, “Praise” (תְּהִלָּה) is the name of her gates (60:18). Jerusalem will become the cause of “praise [תְּהִלָּה] in the earth [בְּאֶרֶץ]” (62:7).

## Commentary

The four Servant Songs in Isaiah 40–55 continue with epilogues.<sup>29</sup> The First Servant Song (42:1–4) is elaborated in 42:5–9, and the other three likewise give rise to postscripts: the Second Song (49:1–6) is followed by 49:7–13; the Third Song (50:4–9) is explicated in 50:10–11; and the magnificent Fourth Song (52:13–53:12) resounds throughout chapter 54. In like manner, the ramifications

<sup>25</sup> Lessing, *Isaiah 40–55*, 600.

<sup>26</sup> Lessing, *Isaiah 40–55*, 253.

<sup>27</sup> See “The Garden Paradise” in Mitchell, *The Song of Songs*, 263–74.

<sup>28</sup> For the interrelated Hebrew vocabulary of “righteous(ness)” and “salvation,” see the second and third textual notes on 56:1.

<sup>29</sup> See “The Servant Songs in Isaiah 40–55” in Lessing, *Isaiah 40–55*, 76–90, as well as the commentary sections on the verses cited above.

of the Fifth Servant Song (61:1–3) are detailed in this pericope (61:4–11): a new community (61:4–7), an eternal covenant (61:8–9), and a song of thanksgiving (61:10–11).

Words denoting foreign nations appear five times in this section: “foreigners” (בְּנֵי יִנְכָר, 61:5), “nations” three times (גּוֹיִם, 61:6, 9, 11), and “the peoples” (הָעַמִּים, 61:9). There are three sections between 61:1–3 and 62:10–12, and each one clarifies the new Zion’s relationship with the nations: (1) Zion will enjoy the wealth of the nations (61:4–11); (2) she will witness to the nations that Yahweh has not abandoned her (62:1–5); and (3) the nations will not consume Zion’s treasures (62:6–9).

Is 61:4–9 has generated two interpretations regarding the role of the nations in the restored Zion. Based on critical presuppositions, the first position argues that the nations are subordinate to Israel.<sup>30</sup> The second (and correct) view posits that they are equal to Israel.<sup>31</sup> Because of the justifying work of the Suffering Servant (see “justify” and “righteous(ness)” in 53:11; 54:17; 60:21; 61:10–11), Gentiles participate fully in the new covenant (56:3–4; 61:8–9) and have equal access to the temple (56:5, 7; 60:7). They even share in priestly service (56:6; 66:21; cf. 61:6, 10; 1 Pet 2:5, 9; Rev 5:10; 20:6). The full inclusion of Gentiles by grace alone not only begins (56:1–8) the third part of Isaiah (chapters 56–66), but it also permeates the entire book (e.g., 2:2–4; 14:1–2; 19:18–25; 40:5; 45:20–25; 66:10–12, 19–21; “all flesh” in 66:23). Through faith, Israelites and Gentiles also share the same status within the larger context of the Bible.<sup>b</sup>

The new community that enjoys the Jubilee freedom of the Anointed Servant (61:1–3) is also given the gifts Yahweh promised to Abraham. By faith, Abraham is credited with righteousness (Gen 15:6), and so are they (Is 61:10–11); their forefather was called to be a witness to the nations (Gen 12:2–3), and so are they (Is 61:9, 11); he would become a great nation (Gen 12:2), and this new Israel will sprout from the stump (cf. Is 6:13; 11:1) and become an even greater people throughout the world (Is 61:9, 11). Because Abraham is the father of all who believe (Rom 4:16), these promises are for all who are in Christ Jesus; all baptized believers are “sons of God,” “the seed of Abraham,” and “heirs of the promise” (Gal 3:26–29).

The pericope is outlined as follows:

- 61:4–7      Freedom to Serve
- 61:8–9      Freedom to Act
- 61:10–11   Freedom to Celebrate

(b) E.g., Gen 12:1–3; Mt 28:18–20; Acts 10–11; Rom 1:13–17; Eph 2:14–22; 4:4–6



<sup>30</sup> E.g., Blenkinsopp believes that there is a hierarchical distinction between Israelites and the nations: “These Judeans will be to Gentiles as priests are to laity, who therefore are obliged to support the priests with material resources; hence, a more vivid restatement of the ‘despoiling of the Egyptians’ theme [Ex 12:35–36] often heard in these chapters, most recently in 60:5–7, 16” (*Isaiah*, 3:226). Westermann, writes: “There [Isaiah 60] the nations and kings contribute towards the renewal of Zion, but here in 61.5f. the intention is to give the reason for a continuing state of things in which aliens do the menial work while the Israelites all belong to the class of the spiritual leaders, the priestly class” (*Isaiah* 40–66, 369–70).

<sup>31</sup> Pieper, *Isaiah II*, 608–9; cf. Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 2:571–72.



**Freedom to Serve (61:4–7)**

**61:4** The faithful remnant is freed by the Servant both to live (61:1–3) and to serve. Empowered by the Jubilee gifts of the Anointed Servant, they will rebuild, raise up, and repair (cf. 44:26; 45:13; 58:12). The building materials are listed in 60:17 and include gold, silver, copper, and iron (cf. timbers in 60:13). Normally when cities have lain in ruins for a long time, most of the original materials (except perhaps the stones) become useless. And because rebuilding means starting from scratch, the normal response is to let the ruins lie. But this is no normal city, and this is no normal God!

Though the desolation is immense (e.g., Isaiah 34), new life will spring from death (e.g., Isaiah 35). Yahweh promises not only new citizens (49:8; 58:12; 61:1–3) but also new cities. This urban renewal is linked to Zion’s new name (60:14; 62:2) and will be revealed in the new heavens and new earth, which includes a new Jerusalem (65:17–25; Revelation 21–22).

“Devastations of many generations” (61:4) is a fitting summary of human history. This is what sin does. Sinners victimize other sinners who then feel entitled to retaliate, hurting those who hurt them, seeking revenge. And this creates more victims and more retaliation. Every battle is a counterstrike. “They started it!” We live in a world of grievances and counter-grievances. Everyone has a long list of people who have hurt them. As the endless cycle of violence escalates, everyone’s fuse grows shorter. Explosions of anger happen on a regular basis.

But the day is surely dawning when all of these long-standing devastations will be repaired. God will prove how much he can love and restore ruined people. Everything sin has taken away, Yahweh will give back twofold, “double” (see the commentary on 61:7; see also Is 40:1–2; Job 42:10). He lays in Zion the “precious cornerstone” (Is 28:16; see Eph 2:20; 1 Pet 2:6). He does this *for* us and then also rebuilds *through* us. Mourners (61:3) become builders (61:4). The Gospel empowers people to become a force for reconstruction (1 Cor 14:12; Eph 4:12; 1 Thess 5:11).

**61:5** Foreigners profited from Israel’s destruction (1:7). Now in the great reversal they will assist in the people’s restoration. These outsiders are not second-class citizens in the new order. Rather, the new relationship between Israel and the nations must be seen in light of the justifying work of the Suffering Servant, for both Israel and the nations (53:11; 54:17; Hab 2:4; Rom 1:16–17). Israelites, who were slaves in foreign lands (e.g., Egypt and Assyria), will labor side by side and hand in hand with their former enemies. “He died for all so that those who are alive no longer live for themselves but on behalf of him who died for them and was raised again” (2 Cor 5:15).

Agricultural work is not a menial sign of subordination, but a tangible indication of peace and prosperity (e.g., Is 2:4; Micah 4:3–4). In Is 62:8–9 Yahweh promises Zion that she will enjoy agricultural produce, such as grains, wine, and other harvest. God’s servants, that is, his remnant people, are pictured as building houses and planting vineyards in the new heavens and new

earth (Is 65:21–22; cf. Amos 9:13–15). The nations therefore are not inferior because they engage in agricultural activities. Rather, believing Israelites and Gentiles will share the same status in the eschaton. In fact, some from among the nations, the eunuchs and the foreigners who join themselves to Yahweh (56:1–8), will even function as priests and Levites (56:6; 66:21; cf. 61:6, 10). This is astounding!

Is 56:1–8, as the programmatic text of chapters 56–66, sets the tone for the destiny of Yahweh’s servants (both Israelite and Gentile) in his plan of restoration. The condition for anyone to become a part of the redeemed is to be righteous (justified) through faith in him and accordingly to practice justice and righteousness.<sup>32</sup> Ethnic, national, geographic, and physical factors play no role in defining whether one belongs to Yahweh’s people. Those foreigners who have joined themselves to Yahweh, serve him, love his name, keep the Sabbath, and hold fast to his covenant are God’s people (56:2–6). Yahweh brings them to his holy mountain so that they can worship and offer sacrifice, for Yahweh’s house is “a house of prayer for all the peoples” (56:7).

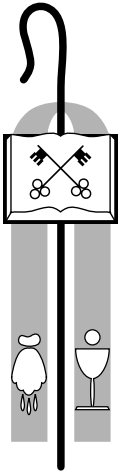
Foreigners may also be priests in God’s house. This is not only anticipated at the beginning of the book in 2:2–3 and envisioned in 56:6 but also stressed at the end of the book (66:21). This last text (66:21) is enveloped by 66:17, 24, where Yahweh condemns apostates in the community. In between, God gathers the nations to see his glory (66:18) and then sends them to proclaim this glory among the nations (66:19). The converted nations will no longer threaten Yahweh’s people politically and theologically, but instead will be his missionaries and priests. Yahweh even promises that their descendants and their name will last as long as the new heaven and new earth (66:22), that is, forever (60:21; cf. “an everlasting covenant” in 61:8).

The same idea of reciprocal service among different ethnicities appears in Rom 15:26, where Paul relates that churches in Macedonia and Achaia (made up largely of Gentile Christians) were willing to financially assist poor congregations in Jerusalem (made up largely of Jewish Christians). “For if Gentiles share in their spiritual blessings, they should be of service to them in material blessings” (Rom 15:27). This comports perfectly with Isaiah’s teaching about the nations.

**61:6** The audience is now specifically addressed with an emphatic “and you” (וְאַתָּה). The new community is recommissioned to serve as Yahweh’s priests (cf. Ex 19:6); they are his “holy people” (Is 62:12). These “offspring” of the Anointed Servant (53:10; 59:21; see also 61:9; 65:9, 23; 66:22; and the third textual note on 57:3) will serve as priests, mediating the patriarchal blessing “to all the families of the earth” (Gen 12:3; 28:14; see also Gen 18:18; 22:17–18; 26:3–4).

<sup>32</sup> See the second textual note and the commentary on 56:1. See also the second textual note and the commentary on 53:11 (Lessing, *Isaiah 40–55*, 601–3, 621–22) and the commentary on 60:21.





In the book of Exodus, Yahweh selects a specific group, set apart from the world of profane things, to serve him as priests. He picks one of the twelve tribes, Levi, and then narrows it down further by ordaining only those Levites descended from Aaron (Ex 28:1). However the universal priesthood (Ex 19:6) was not annulled when he selected a single priestly clan. Just so, in the new order when Yahweh takes priests from among Israel and the Gentiles (66:21), the community's universal priesthood is not negated. As priests before Yahweh (61:6), the people have access to the holy mountain (56:7), which is synonymous with the divine sanctuary. The NT likewise teaches that only some men are to be ordained into the office of the holy ministry (e.g., 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus) at the same time that it affirms the universal priesthood of all believers (1 Pet 2:5, 9; Rev 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).

It is misguided to suppose that Isaiah conceives of only Israelites serving as priests for the Gentiles, who are relegated to be menial ranchers and farmers (cf. 61:5). Because the prophet is using figures of speech drawn from the realm of OT Israel's experience, they should not be pressed into literal straight-jackets. All will be servants and all will be priests, for through the great High Priest all believers have equal access to God's throne of grace (Heb 4:14–16).

**61:7** Continuing the motif of radical reversal (e.g., 60:17; 61:3), Isaiah begins with “instead of.” Along the lines of “comfort, comfort my people” (40:1), two times in this verse Yahweh pledges to restore his people twofold; “double” is doubled. When Yahweh restored “double” to Job (Job 42:10), this included twice the numbers of animals, and probably also twice the number of his children and the years of his life.<sup>33</sup> God also promises to restore “double” to the people of postexilic Yehud (Zech 9:12). Here in Is 61:7 it is not entirely clear what the “double portion” will be. Since the firstborn son in Israel received a double portion of his father's inheritance (Deut 21:17) and the original Israel was Yahweh's firstborn son (Ex 4:22), “double” may designate the new community as God's new firstborn (cf. Christ, the new people's founder, as the “firstborn” in Rom 8:29; Col 1:15, 18; Heb 1:6; 12:23; Rev 1:5). In other cases a double portion denotes compensation for damages (e.g., Ex 22:3, 6, 8 [ET 22:4, 7, 9]), so “double” may be restitution for the people's “shame” and “dishonor” (Is 61:7). Or because Yahweh is the sole owner of the land (Lev 25:23), the new Zion's “double portion” may consist of both the land and the riches of

<sup>33</sup> The numbers in Job 42:12–13 are exactly twice those in Job 1:1–3, except for Job's children: he received an additional seven sons and three daughters, the same number he had before they were killed (Job 1:18–19). Many commentators interpret this as a resurrection motif. If the original ten who died still lived on in eternal life, to be raised bodily on the Last Day (as would the additional ten), then already in chapter 42 Job had a total of twenty children, who would join him in the eschaton. Also, because Job lived an additional 140 years (Job 42:16), many commentators presume that he was 70 years old at the time of his crisis (Job 1–2). According to LXX Job 42:16, Job lived an additional 170 years and a total of 248 years; that math may assume that he was 70 at the time of the calamity and that it lasted eight years before he was restored (though the additional 170 years would be in excess of twice the earlier 70 or 78 years).

the nations (Is 61:6; cf. Deut 6:10–11). At any rate, this gift will bring “everlasting joy” (Is 61:7) to God’s people.

### Freedom to Act (61:8–9)

**61:8** The subject change is abrupt, as now Yahweh speaks directly. He loves justice; indeed, “Yahweh is the God of justice” (30:18).<sup>34</sup> This is why he hates robbery in injustice (61:8) and promises to repay all sinners (59:18). “That which a person sows he will also reap” (Gal 6:7).

While there is a change of speakers here, there is still continuity between 61:7 and 61:8 through the word “everlasting” (עוֹלָם). The “everlasting joy” (שְׂמֵחַת עוֹלָם, 61:7) is coupled with God’s gift of “an everlasting covenant” (בְּרִית עוֹלָם, 61:8). Humanity’s fickleness does not affect Yahweh’s fidelity; he remains ever faithful (2 Tim 2:13). He issued fallen humanity the unconditional promise of the Seed who would crush the serpent (Gen 3:15). He reiterated his unswerving covenant commitment to Noah and every living creature (Gen 9:16), Israel’s patriarchs (e.g., Gen 17:7, 13, 19), and the house of David (e.g., 2 Samuel 7 || 1 Chronicles 17; 2 Sam 23:5; Is 55:3). These covenant promises are implemented by the Servant/Messiah<sup>c</sup> and sealed in his covenant blood (Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25; Heb 13:20).

**61:9** “Their offspring” looks to succeeding generations of the “offspring” of the Anointed Servant (see the commentary on 53:10).<sup>35</sup> This verse, therefore, continues the trajectory of 59:21, which first refers to the Servant himself (“you”), then to his “offspring,” and farther into the future to “the offspring of your offspring” (see the commentary on 59:21). This is one of the major points in chapters 56–66. *The Servant continues to live in his servants* (cf. 57:1–2; 59:21). Paul’s words express this in an individual way: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20). In a corporate sense, the church is the living body of the living Christ.

This promise about the future<sup>36</sup> is at least partially fulfilled now (inaugurated eschatology) during the present age. Already during the era of the OT church, various unbelievers were compelled to acknowledge that God was blessing his people.<sup>37</sup> Jesus clarifies that according to the theology of the cross, Christians, who are indeed “blessed” in him, may not necessarily be recog-

(c) Is 42:6;  
49:8; 54:10;  
55:3; 59:21;  
Jer  
31:31–34;  
Ezek  
16:59–62;  
34:25; 37:26

<sup>34</sup> For a discussion on justice in the book of Isaiah, see “Justice (מִשְׁפָּט)” in “The Theology of Isaiah 40–55” (Lessing, *Isaiah 40–55*, 73–76).

<sup>35</sup> Lessing, *Isaiah 40–55*, 620.

<sup>36</sup> The first half of the verse begins with a perfect with *waw* consecutive (וַיֵּדָע), “and ... will be known”), while the second half continues with an imperfect verb (יִכְרֹם), “will recognize them”).

<sup>37</sup> For example, in Gen 39:2–5 it became obvious to Potiphar, an Egyptian, that Yahweh “blessed” (Gen 39:5) all that had been entrusted to Joseph. In Numbers 22–24 the polytheistic prophet Balaam was compelled to “bless” Israel, because Yahweh had “blessed” them (Num 22:6, 12; 23:11, 20, 25; 24:1, 9, 10). Even Satan had to admit that Yahweh had “blessed” Job (Job 1:10). The queen of Sheba was so impressed by Solomon’s administration that she “blessed” Yahweh (1 Ki 10:9).

nized as such by the world now, since he pronounces those who suffer and are persecuted for his sake as “blessed” (Mt 5:3–11; cf. Mt 16:17; Jn 20:29; James 1:12; 1 Pet 3:14; 4:14). However, on the Last Day (future eschatology) all unbelievers will be forced to acknowledge publicly that those in Christ truly are the “blessed” (Mt 25:34; Rev 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14; cf. Rev 3:9–10). Then, if not before, the divine blessings received by the remnant people will be acknowledged as such in the sight of all.

“All who see them will recognize ... that they are offspring whom Yahweh blessed” (Is 61:9). In a similar manner, when the Jewish authorities “saw the boldness of Peter and of John, for they were men who were uneducated and untrained [ἰδιῶται; cf. “idiots”], they were astonished and *recognized* them, that they were with Jesus” (Acts 4:13).

### **Freedom to Celebrate (61:10–11)**

**61:10** Isaiah makes this confession for himself as well as for the remnant community. The first person singular discourse creates an *inclusio* around chapter 61. In 61:1–3 the Anointed Servant speaks in the first person as he proclaims the gifts he brings, while here Isaiah celebrates those Gospel gifts. Luther rightly comments: “This is a song which the prophet sings as representative of the church.”<sup>38</sup> And just like to Peter, “flesh and blood” did not reveal this to Isaiah (Mt 16:17). It was not human insight or imagination. It was rather Yahweh’s self-disclosure through his Anointed Servant (Is 61:1–3), who let the prophet see the beauty of salvation.

Envision a woman dressed for a funeral who receives word that a mistake has been made. She is told, “Instead of a funeral there will be a wedding with the love of your life!” What does she do? In breathtaking speed she washes the ashes from her face, dons her wedding garments, and crowns her head with a garland of flowers. It is time to celebrate! In like manner, Zion’s wailing has been turned into celebration; her sackcloth is gone, and she is girded with joy (cf. Ps 30:12 [ET 30:11]). Zion’s beauty comes from Yahweh. And it is everlasting!<sup>39</sup>

In the OT the process of marriage often begins with the payment of a bride price or gift (e.g., Gen 24:51–53; 34:12; 1 Sam 18:25; cf. Song 1:10–11). Yahweh paid for his bride through the suffering and death of his faithful Servant (Is 52:13–53:12), so the baptized have been bought, “not with gold or silver, but with His [Christ’s] holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death.”<sup>40</sup> God does not pursue his bride because she is lovely; he seeks the one who is unlovely to bestow upon her a perfect righteousness (Hos 2:21 [ET 2:19]; Eph 5:25–28).

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<sup>38</sup> AE 17:341.

<sup>39</sup> The following describe the joy of a wedding day: Jer 33:11; Ps 19:6 (ET 19:5); Song 3:11; Mt 22:2; Rev 21:2.

<sup>40</sup> SC II 4 (*LSB*, p. 323).

The Anointed Servant gives gifts so that the faithful become “oaks of righteousness” (Is 61:3). Now, speaking for Zion, Isaiah responds with praise to Yahweh for having cloaked his people with righteousness. Justification is not an improvement, an alteration, a change of heart, or a cleaning up of the old Adam. It is an imputed righteous standing, received by faith, for Christ’s sake (Is 53:11; 54:17; Rom 3:24–30; Gal 3:8–14). These garments of salvation and righteousness are similar to the Divine Warrior’s clothes (Is 59:17). We therefore not only receive a righteous standing, but incorporated into Christ, we also become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). Our cups overflow with celebrative elation (Ps 23:5)!

These garments of salvation are the same clothes John calls white robes washed in the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:14). Paul maintains that the baptized bride of Christ stands before him “without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Eph 5:27; cf. Gal 3:27; Col 3:9–10). The salvation story is truly one of rags (see Is 64:5 [ET 64:6]) to riches because Christ went from riches to rags (cf. Jn 19:23–24; 2 Cor 8:9).

**61:11** Characteristically, praise begins with Isaiah and the remnant he speaks for (Is 61:10) and then expands to include all the nations (Is 61:11). The same development appears in Psalm 22. David announces, “I will recount your name to my brothers” (Ps 22:23 [ET 22:22]). This is followed by “you who fear Yahweh, praise him” (Ps 22:24 [ET 22:23]). Finally David sings, “All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to Yahweh” (Ps 22:28 [ET 22:27]).

Isaiah frequently employs creation to make a point.<sup>41</sup> Just as he likens the efficacy of God’s Word to rain and snow that bring forth food (Is 55:10–11), so in Is 61:11 he links the gift of righteousness with the earth’s ability to bring forth plant life. In both cases, the prophet is reflecting upon Gen 1:11–12; 2:9; 8:22. “In this way God’s activity in nature is the image and the guarantee of his activity in history.”<sup>42</sup>

This confirms the pledge in Is 60:21 when Isaiah says that the remnant will possess the land forever and become a branch of Yahweh’s planting. This branch, though the smallest and least, will grow into a mighty nation (Is 60:22; cf. Mk 4:30–32). God’s people will be called “oaks of righteousness” and “a planting of Yahweh” (Is 61:3; cf. Jn 15:1–9). The gift of righteousness extends to coming generations (Is 61:9; cf. Mt 19:14; Acts 2:39; 2 Tim 3:15), and Yahweh is the foundation for this transformation (Is 61:8). It is his initiative and covenant faithfulness that makes new life happen. In the place of devastation the land will be restored and renewed, as will the persecuted remnant.

The righteousness that the Israelites were unable to attain for themselves (e.g., 48:1; 64:5 [ET 64:6]) will now spring up, blossom, and grow! “If nature is reliable, how much more so is the Creator of nature!”<sup>43</sup> Yahweh asserts sim-

<sup>41</sup> See Lessing, *Isaiah* 40–55, 63–66.

<sup>42</sup> Koole, *Isaiah III*, 3:296.

<sup>43</sup> Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 2:575.



ilar promises connecting righteousness to the Creator’s faithfulness in, e.g., Is 45:8; Psalms 72 and 85. Paul makes the message clearer. Quoting from Hab 2:4 the apostle writes: “For [the] righteousness of God is being revealed in it from faith[fulness] into faith, just as it stands written: ‘But the righteous person will live from faith’” (Rom 1:17).<sup>44</sup> In subsequent chapters Paul makes the revelation of a righteous standing before the Father crystal clear (e.g., Rom 3:22–24; 4:25; 5:1). The climactic revelation of righteousness comes through the death and resurrection of Jesus: “The one not knowing sin, he made sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor 5:21). “Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness My beauty are, my glorious dress.”<sup>45</sup>

The vision of a renewed garden appears in, e.g., Is 51:3; 58:11; Jer 31:12. The way into the eternal garden paradise (Rev 2:7; 22:1–2) is opened by Jesus. “Now in the place where he was crucified was a garden, and in the garden, a new tomb in which no one yet had been placed” (Jn 19:41). Wright adds:

The Spirit who brooded over the waters of creation at the beginning broods now over God’s world, ready to bring it bursting to springtime life. Mary goes to the tomb while it’s still dark and in the morning light meets Jesus in the garden. She thinks he is the gardener, as in one important sense he indeed is. This is the new creation. This is the new Genesis.<sup>46</sup>

## Reflections

In 61:10–11 Isaiah joins other prophets (e.g., Hosea) in portraying Yahweh’s relationship with his people as a marriage. These spokesmen frequently depict Israel as an unfaithful bride who breaks her marriage covenant through acts of idolatry (e.g., Jer 3:6, 9; Ezek 16:36; 23:37–39) and harlotry with other nations (e.g., Ezek 16:26; 23:22–23). God however is portrayed as the faithful husband who keeps his covenantal obligations (e.g., Ezek 16:9–14). Israel’s failure to turn from her unfaithfulness results in Yahweh sending her away (e.g., Is 50:1–3; Hos 2:4–15 [ET 2:2–13]). Nevertheless, she, despite deserving nothing but punishment, is promised redemption and “remarriage” by his grace alone, which will restore the relationship (e.g., Is 54:5–6; Jer 3:14–18; Ezek 16:60–63; Hos 2:16–25 [ET 2:14–23]).

The marriage between Yahweh and Israel begins with great promise. When he passes by Jerusalem and sees that she is at the time for love, he covers her nakedness with his garment and enters into a covenant with her (Ezek 16:8). When Israel follows Yahweh as a bride in the wilderness it is a time of “loyalty/devotion” (נֶאֱמָרָה, Jer 2:2). But after some time, she forgets the days of her youth and so commits abominations (Ezek 16:43).

When God’s people forget their marriage they are often described as turning to other lovers. Then they play the harlot.<sup>d</sup> These other lovers include worshipping

(d) Jer 3:1–3, 6, 8–9; Ezek 16:15, 22, 25–26, 28–31, 34–36, 41; 23:3, 5, 7, 11, 14, 17, 19, 27, 30; Hos 2:7 (ET 2:5); cf. Deut 31:16

<sup>44</sup> For this translation, see Middendorff, *Romans* 1–8, 83.

<sup>45</sup> *LSB* 563:1.

<sup>46</sup> Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus*, 176.

idols and graven images and depending on heathen nations, primarily Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon (e.g., Ezekiel 16 and 23). What does Yahweh do? He announces judgment (Ezek 16:38; 23:45 cf. Lev 20:10; Deut 22:20–21).

Yet Yahweh is steadfastly devoted to his wife (e.g., Deut 7:7). He reconciles with her in the wilderness again (Hos 2:16–25 [ET 2:14–23]); cf. Jer 2:2), thus joining the marriage covenant with Sinai as the time when Yahweh first married his people. He will remember his wife and will reconstitute the marriage under an everlasting covenant (Ezek 16:60). His covenant of peace (Hos 2:20 [ET 2:18]) is parallel with his “betrothal” of her forever (נָשָׂא, twice in Hos 2:21 [ET 2:19]). His rejoicing over the restoration of his people is compared to a bridegroom “marrying” a bride (בָּעַל, Is 62:5; cf. Is 62:4). She will come to “know” Yahweh, indicating intimate knowledge by faith (Hos 2:22 [ET 2:20]).<sup>47</sup>

John the Baptist’s metaphor of the bride/bridegroom brings clarity to the relationships between himself, Jesus, and Christ’s followers. He refers to the Savior’s disciples as the bride, soliciting marital imagery surrounding Israel’s characterization as Yahweh’s bride. The Baptist identifies his role as “the friend of the bridegroom” (Jn 3:29) who is sent before Christ. Traditionally a friend or friends were responsible for bringing the bride and bridegroom together, and one would wait outside their bridal chamber to attest to their union. “The bridegroom’s voice” (Jn 3:29; cf. Jer 7:34; 16:9; 25:10; Rev 18:23) is arguably the triumphant shout that is made to indicate to the friend outside that the bridegroom has united with his bride, whom he has found to have been a virgin. The Baptist is, therefore, the one who leads the bride to her groom and rejoices in their successful union. Similar is the role of St. Paul in betrothing the church at Corinth to Christ (2 Cor 11:2).

Mt 22:1–14 is the first of two parabolic wedding banquets in Matthew (the other being Mt 25:1–13) that comprise an invitation to be joined to Christ. Contrary to the Baptist’s more intimate indication of Jesus’ followers as the “bride” (Jn 3:29), those who are invited to the kingdom’s gathering are given a more general category of wedding “guests.” The marital analogy focuses on the wedding guest list to indicate the all-inclusive nature of the Gospel invitation and the expectation that people be prepared for the groom’s arrival at any time. In the Bible’s final vision, John beholds the consummation of the eschatological marriage between Christ and his church (Rev 19:7–8; 21:2). “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev 19:9).

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. Ezek 16:8, and the refrain in Ezekiel, “you/they will know that I am Yahweh,” which appears in Gospel contexts in, e.g., Ezek 36:11, 23, 38; 37:28; 38:23. See also “you will know” in Jn 8:28, 32; 14:20.