

Preview of Isaiah 58-66

Recall the overall structure of Isaiah (chart), and the structure of ch. 40-66 (chart).

In reading over these chapters, we hear three voices at different times.

- Sometimes the Lord speaks in the first person, as in 58:2, “Yet they seek **me** daily, and delight to know **my** ways.”
- Sometimes Isaiah is speaking, either to the community (58:9, “Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I *am*.”) or standing with the community (64:6, “But we are all as an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.”)
- Sometimes one speaks who is distinct from the Lord, yet clearly not one of the people (as Isaiah is). An excellent example is 61:1, “The Spirit of the Lord GOD *is* upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to *them that are* bound.” In 59:20 the Lord calls him “the Redeemer,” and in 63:4 this character speaks of “my redeemed ones,” so we will call him the Redeemer.

Our Lord quoted this verse of himself in the synagogue of Nazareth, and it is most natural to understand these portions as spoken by the Messiah. Yet never is the Messiah called by the title we saw so often in ch. 40-57, “the servant of the Lord” (chart). The last instance of that title is ch. 53. There, the Lord promised that his servant, who had been so humbled, would be “exalted, and extolled, and very high,” and in these chapters we see him in that exalted character, a powerful Redeemer, often described in divine terms, bringing Zion to glory. This title appears 13 times in Isaiah. Twelve of these times it is a title of the Lord, but in 59:20 the Lord speaks of “the Redeemer” in the third person. Isaiah is perceiving the mystery of the One who is both Son of God and Son of Man, and we will see that character amplified as we read the sections that concern him.

In fact, the noun “servant” never appears in the singular in Isaiah after ch. 53. We do find the plural numerous times, referring to God's people as his servants, but the plural never appears in 40-53! We have made the transition from the suffering Messiah to the triumphant Redeemer, from the first advent to the second.

The overall structure of the section is chiastic (chart). I discern four themes:

- A contrast between Israel's false worship, and the true worship that God requires of her
- An indictment for the nation's sin, and her confession of it
- The coming deliverer (both in the side panels and at the center)
- The coming glory of Zion that the deliverer will bring about.

The first two are closely related, but I separate them because their order is inverted in the two panels.

As in ch. 49-57, one of the sections is disproportionately long (chart). We need to pay attention to this,

but I think the correspondence between the two indictment and confession sections is reasonable.

The recurrence of a theme in the side panels and the center is not unprecedented; Nils Lund noted it as a recurring pattern in chiasmic structures. Both the repetition and the central position do focus our attention on the deliverer; perhaps we should change our summary of this section from “Sinful vs. Faithful Israel” to “The Deliver Glorifies Zion” or the like.

Let's move through the nine sections and read a few verses from each to get the flavor.

58:1-14, False and True Worship

The Lord accuses the people of superficial fasting.

3 Wherefore have we fasted, *say they*, and thou seest not? *wherefore* have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours. 4 Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as *ye do this* day, to make your voice to be heard on high. 5 Is it such a fast that I have chosen? ... wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? 6 *Is* not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? 7 *Is it* not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?

Toward the end of the section, he also calls for a more appropriate observance of the Sabbath:

13 If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, *from* doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking *thine own* words: 14 Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken *it*.

Ever since ch. 1, hypocritical worship has been a focal sin of the nation. In this section and the last of the book, the Lord returns to this criticism, and instructs the people on how to fix it.

It's interesting that he didn't give this corrective way back in ch. 1. Perhaps the reason is that no form of worship that people offer in their own strength is acceptable. Only after we have received the work of the Suffering Servant (ch. 53) can we offer acceptable worship to the Lord.

59:1-15a Indictment and Confession

Note the shifting pronouns. First Isaiah speaks to the people about their sin:

59:1 Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: 2 But **your** iniquities have separated between **you** and **your** God, and **your** sins have hid *his* face from **you**, that he will not hear.

Then he describes their sin in the third person, as though he were recording an indictment against them:

7 **Their** feet run to evil, and **they** make haste to shed innocent blood: **their** thoughts *are* thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction *are* in **their** paths. 8 The way of peace **they** know

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not; and *there is* no judgment in **their** goings: **they** have made **them** crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace.

Finally, he takes his stand with the people and confesses their sin:

12 For **our** transgressions are multiplied before thee, and **our** sins testify against us: for **our** transgressions *are* with **us**; and *as for* **our** iniquities, **we** know them; 13 In transgressing and lying against the LORD, and departing away from **our** God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood.

59:15b-21, The Redeemer Described

Isaiah introduces the Redeemer as the solution to this problem of pervasive sin. The coming one is first described as the Lord (יהוה), but then as “the Redeemer,” spoken of in the third person by the Lord.

15b and the LORD saw *it*, and it displeased him that *there was* no judgment. 16 And he saw that *there was* no man, and wondered that *there was* no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him. ... 18 According to *their* deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompence to his enemies; to the islands he will repay recompence. 19 So shall they fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him ... 20 And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD.

ch. 60, Zion's Glory (2fs)

The focus is on the geopolitical prominence of Zion, receiving tribute from all the nations.

First we hear from Isaiah:

60:1 Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. 2 For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. 3 And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.

Then the Lord takes credit for bringing this about :

15 Whereas thou hast been forsaken and hated, so that no man went through *thee*, **I** will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations. 16 Thou shalt also suck the milk of the Gentiles, and shalt suck the breast of kings: and thou shalt know that **I the LORD** *am* thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob. 17 For brass **I** will bring gold, and for iron **I** will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron: **I** will also make thy officers peace, and thine exactors righteousness.

61:1-11, The Redeemer Speaks

At the very center of the chiasm, the Redeemer, whom Isaiah introduced in 59:15-21, speaks on his own account. This focal section is what the Lord Jesus chose to introduce himself at Nazareth. But he

stopped short of the full description, which includes the coming day of vengeance.

61:1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD *is* upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to *them that are* bound; 2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; 3 To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty 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 the LORD, that he might be glorified.

ch. 62, Zion's Glory (2fs)

The deliverer is still speaking as the section opens:

62:1 For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp *that* burneth. 2 And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name. 3 Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God.

63:1-7, The Redeemer Speaks

Again the Redeemer is speaking, declaring the coming day of judgment.

63:1 Who *is* this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this *that is* glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. 2 Wherefore *art thou* red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat? 3 I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people *there was* none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment.

63:7-65:25 Indictment and Confession

Consider a portion of the people's confession:

64:5b behold, thou art wroth; for we have sinned: in those is continuance, and we shall be saved. 6 But we are all as an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. 7 And *there is* none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities. 8 But now, O LORD, thou *art* our father; we *are* the clay, and thou our potter; and we all *are* the work of thy hand. 9 Be not wroth very sore, O LORD, neither remember iniquity for ever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we *are* all thy people.

66:1-24 False and True Worship

The nine chapters close, as they began, with a condemnation of the peoples' flawed worship.

66:1 Thus saith the LORD, The heaven *is* my throne, and the earth *is* my footstool: where *is* the house that ye build unto me? and where *is* the place of my rest? 2 For all those *things* hath mine hand made, and all those *things* have been, saith the LORD: but to this *man* will I look, *even to him that is* poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word. 3 He that killeth an ox *is as if* he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, *as if* he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, *as if he offered* swine's blood; he that burneth incense, *as if* he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations. . . . 20 And they shall bring all your brethren *for* an offering unto the LORD out of all nations upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, saith the LORD, as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the LORD. 21 And I will also take of them for priests *and* for Levites, saith the LORD.

Summary

The Divine Redeemer, exalted from his humiliation of ch. 53, will restore his sinful but repentant people to pure worship, and elevate Zion to a position of glory before all nations.

Key applications for us:

- Example to Follow and Prayer to Echo: the confession of the people, led by Isaiah. The way to exaltation leads through humiliation. Our Lord commended the publican who recognized his sin.
- Sin to Avoid and Command to Obey: pure worship. The book begins and ends with condemnations of false worship. Recall the Lord's dealing with Nadab and Abihu, who offered unholy fire before the Lord (Lev 10), or the kings Saul (1 Sam 13) and Uzziah (2 Chr 26), who assumed roles for which they were not qualified. We must worship the Lord, but we must do so in the way that he commands.
- Promise to Claim and Truth to Believe: God will bring this wicked world under submission to his Son, and those who long for righteousness will be satisfied, not only individually, but in society.