

Notes on Isaiah 59 & 60

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Isaiah 59:1-13

In chapters 56,57 Isaiah wrote of two kinds of people: the righteous and the wicked. In 57 he wrote of the Lord's intervention to bring repentance. Then in 58 Isaiah gave two very different uses of the Sabbath. In 59 the great sinfulness of God's people is emphasized again to the point where they give up all hope. Because God does more than accuse, a tremendous amount of gospel follows immediately, where the Lord intervenes through Christ in the power of the Spirit. 59:1-13 prepares for that with:

1. Clarity about sin, guilt, and man's spiritual need, as he is helpless under sin's dominating power.
2. Confession, as the people of God in the very process of being brought to repentance speak the truth about their sin – a wonderful example of godly sorrow leading to repentance and salvation (2 Corinthians 7:8-11).

The preaching of the law is bearing fruit; God is using His Word. Those confessing in 59 do not make the slightest defense of their sin. Knowing our sin and misery is needed so we may see how much we need Christ. Having presented the work of the Servant earlier, Isaiah again moves from sin to Savior. He moves from the basis of the gospel (the cross) to implementing the benefits as sinners turn to the Lord in "repentance unto life".

Verses 1-4b are second person verbs to express accusation. Verses 5-7 are third person to describe their sin. Verses 9-12 are first person plural to make their confession.

59:1,2 – God is able to save and able to hear. The reason for His refusal to hear is in us: sin separates us from God (1:15). For reconciliation, sinners pray to God in repentance (Luke 18:13); then prayers are received because they have been reconciled. Repeatedly in John 14-16, we are told that our asking is to be in the Name of Christ. When God blesses, He shows that He has been reconciled to us. In Numbers 6:22-27 the priests blessed the people, saying, "The Lord turn His face to you...". Those priests had offered sacrifices for sinners, so in God's Name the priests could pronounce a blessing. God hides His face from sinners, but shows it when the sacrifice of Christ brings us to Christ for cleansing (John 12:32).

59:3,4 – Various sins are listed in the accusation. He says their hands are stained or defiled. Hands raised to God in prayer were raised against man to kill (1:15). Stained hands are unfit to approach God. The Lord Jesus is the only man in history with “clean hands and a pure heart” (Psalm 24:4). Many sins in Isaiah 59 are man against his fellow man. Somehow the judicial system, which was designed to frustrate sin, was used to advance it (1:17). Many sins listed here are related to our speech (James 3:2-12).

59:5-6 – When eggs hatch and a spider’s web is spun, such activities take time to develop. In the case of the eggs hatching, what is happening is at first concealed and only later comes into the open. So it is with sins that are “hatched” in the heart – evil plans are laid and then executed openly (Psalm 10; Proverbs 1:10-19). The goal of these sins is the destruction of others. The cobweb makes a very poor covering; it will not keep one warm, and everyone can see through it. Sinners invent excuses and arguments to cover themselves before God. Of course God sees through this cobweb. They justify their sin, while in the gospel God justifies sinners without a cover-up of their sin (Romans 4:5). He does this for those who trust in Christ and gives them a genuine righteousness that is not the product of their obedience but Christ’s (Philippians 3:8,9). The Lord clothes with robes of righteousness, not cobwebs.

59:6-7 – Isaiah follows with the results of the sins conceived in the heart: deeds of violence, and murder; since it was done swiftly, this may indicate a sudden act of passion. In v.3, the tools of sin were hands, fingers, lips, and tongues. Now in v.7 Isaiah has added the feet. Using various Old Testament passages, the Apostle Paul did the same in Romans 3:10-18. Clearly the parts of the body are instruments of sin (Romans 6:13). Evil deeds come from evil thoughts. Sin does not just happen; often it is planned. It festers in the heart, and appears when opportunity strikes. The result is destruction, not merely for the sinner and his victim, but of the order and peace of the community; everyone suffers.

59:8 – V.8 is a summary of what preceded with ‘peace’ as brackets for the verse. Isaiah brings up peace a number of times. He speaks of peace with God, as in 53:5, but here he shows there is no peace of any kind (Romans 3:17). Sin pollutes in every way. It never does anyone any good. So Isaiah ends this segment with a picture of devastation before the radical change of theme that follows. This verse expresses the same turmoil of a tossing sea found in 57:20,21.

59:9-13 – The Confession

Sinners being brought to confession is a benefit that came from God accusing them in vv.1-4, or illustrating and describing sin as in vv.5-8. Describing sin may have no effect on a sinner, but confession is agreeing with God about our sin. Confession alone and sorrow alone are not repentance; there must be a turning

from it and a turning to the Lord. Repentance is impossible without a recognition and admission of sin before God. This is vital to conversion, because without repentance there is no faith and no salvation (Matthew 11:20: 21:31,32; Luke 13:1-5). In this confession we have the fulfillment of God's declaration in 57:19 that He would create the suitable words on the lips of those who mourn because of their sin.

In Daniel's prayer (Daniel 9), we find the prophet confessing sin with the people as one of them. Here Isaiah does the same saying 'us', 'we' and 'our'. (See also 1:9. 33:21,22, & 53:6.) Later in 64:5-12, Isaiah will join in the confession again. The most righteous people on earth have made but a small beginning in holiness. Every man has reason to confess sins often. Every one of God's people needs salvation from the Savior.

59:12, 13 – A strong word for sin opens v.12; it indicates rebellion, showing that the sin is willful. God declares sinners guilty, until in justification He acquits the sinner. Our sins testified that His original declaration about us was true. (Christians have sins and thus the kind of guilt that means sin is still present and wrong (1 John 1:8-10), yet we are not guilty of our sin in the sense that we are not forgiven, nor that "sinner" is our status before God. This anomaly is temporary, lasting until salvation is complete. Our sin is real but, thank the Lord, temporary.) When Isaiah says "iniquity", he means to show how serious our sin is. He elaborates by calling it treachery. Just as there can be no adultery unless a marriage covenant is broken, there can be no treachery unless a pledge of faithfulness has been violated. That is the terrible position every person is in when he confesses to being in covenant with God. People who never knew God at all, have not turned their backs on God as 'their God', so in that sense, are not as wicked as covenant breakers.

The lies they confess were conceived in the heart (Matthew 15:16-20; Proverbs 4:23). This confession is not the end. The Lord created it on their lips so that He could bring healing and comfort (57:18). Yet, if God had no Savior for us, we could confess day and night every sin we ever committed with sincere contrition and tears, and it would do us no good at all. The justice of God must be satisfied, and it was satisfied only by the sacrifice of Christ – not confession, not repentance, not sorrow, not ritual, not penance, not prayer, and not faith.

Isaiah 59:14 – 63:6 is not as well known to many Christians as the earlier chapters with the Servant Songs. 59-63 also has four units that center on Christ; one of which, 61:1-3, is famous because Jesus quoted it of Himself in Luke 4:16-21. All four references appear close together: 59:21; 61:1-3; 61:10 – 62:7; 63:1-6.

So much of 56-59 has been about sin that it is clear a Savior is needed. Christ has been shown in 52,53 as the One who would die for sinners; now Isaiah shows that He is also the One Who will proclaim the gospel. He will do what is

needed in sinful hearts to bring about all that God promised in 51:5 & 56:1. The basis of the gospel is the cross of Christ. To finish the work, that gospel must be delivered by proclamation and a proper response to it generated in the hearts of sinners. All God intended in the death of Christ must be brought to completion in His people. This section also shows that all who remain rebels must be brought to justice as God takes vengeance on them. The prophet will show the final end of the two sets of people: those who repent and those who do not.

The work of Christ is connected closely to the Holy Spirit coming on Christ in 59:21 and 61:1-3, as the Lord Jesus is commissioned and empowered for His work. While 61:10 – 62:7 does not mention the Spirit, it reiterates that the Father clothed Jesus for His work (61:10), an example of the Spirit's empowerment of the Messiah. The Father sending the Spirit on Christ is an anointing. This shows He is the only one chosen for His task, that He was equipped for it, and that the Father authorized the ministry of Christ. The Hebrew word for the anointed one is "Messiah"; in Greek, it is "Christ". These Isaiah Scriptures predict Jesus' anointing at His baptism (Matthew 3:13-17), and fit John 3:34 exactly, because Christ had the Spirit without limitation. Jesus was conceived by the Spirit (Matthew 1:18-20) and was led by Him (Matthew 4:1). He was full of the Spirit (Luke 4:1), worked in the Spirit's power (Luke 4:14), and was full of joy through the Holy Spirit (Luke 10:31).

59:14, 15 – In Isaiah 59:1-13 God accuses of sin and people confess how they are powerless under it. Vv.14,15 agree with their confession. Truth and righteousness are not found. (See Psalm 14:2,3.) Human nature is so corrupt that a person can be in trouble for doing what is right.

A Little Hermeneutics

In vv.15-17, Isaiah applies human ways of reacting, thinking and feeling to show the response of God to the plight of His people who are helpless in their sin. He speaks of God searching out information, being amazed (even shocked) at His finding and then getting dressed to do something about it. These analogies are not literal events or thought processes; they are a way of describing vividly, in human likeness, the seriousness of God's response to our need so that we will understand better. By communicating in this way, the Holy Spirit gives us a more powerful sense of the motivation of the Lord in our salvation. Words like "He was appalled" stay in our memory better because of the emotion conveyed.

59:15, 16 – God knows sinners are helpless; He is not really surprised. It is essential that sinners learn that they are powerless. We cannot control sin; sin will control us unless its power is broken for us by One stronger than our sin (Romans 6:6,22,23; 1 John 4:4). Since there is no help for man in man (Psalm 12; 60:12), God decided that He would intervene. Somehow He would stand between the people and the results of their sin. How has God done this? He

placed Christ as Mediator between Himself and us (1Timothy 2:5,6).

Man is helpless, and only God can save him. False religions tell man how to help himself. They say, "This is what you are to do." In the gospel, God tells us what He has done. There is a difference between advice and salvation! We once lived dead in sin, "but God...made us alive with Christ" (Ephesians 2:4,5). We were hated and we hated right back, "but when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us..." (Titus 3:3-5). Salvation is divine intervention. The incarnation of Christ is God's counterattack.

Earlier the "Arm of the Lord" was Christ (50:2; 51:5,9; 52:10; 53:1). Isaiah says in v.16 that God's arm worked salvation. He may mean that He was personally and powerfully involved, which is true, and he may mean that by Christ, God worked salvation, which is also true. Isaiah may have left it ambiguous deliberately so we would consider both truths.

59:17 – The picture is of God getting dressed to take on some work. We can tell what a man is going to do by what clothes he puts on. A uniform for a soldier and clothing for a farmer suggest their activity before they even begin. Here God puts on the armor of a warrior.

59:17, 18 – This means He is entering into a battle. By showing what clothing He puts on, He announces His righteous intention to save and also to take vengeance. In our culture, all talk of God saving and forgiving fits what we would like Him to be, but when the truth of vengeance is expressed, many feel that such a notion is sub-Christian. To bring us salvation, God battles error, unbelief, and the resistance of our hearts. It is also warfare when God repays wrath to His enemies for what they have done. In 42:10-13, the Lord brings salvation to distant islands and also triumphs over His enemies. God always deals in justice. He either shows just vengeance on sinners with no Mediator, or shows grace to sinners because His justice was satisfied by our Mediator.

59:19 – In all the world men will revere the glory of the Lord, the opposite of what God observed in vv.14,15 before His arm went to work for Him (v.16). Only God can bring such a change. The enemy came in like a flood and the Lord raised a banner against this threat, by the same Spirit that will be on Christ (v.20).

The Entire Trinity Involved

The Lord (the Father speaking) put on His armor in 59:15-17. The Spirit is active (v.19). The Father dresses Christ with garments of salvation (61:10) just as He said He would clothe Himself. When the Lord reveals His activity this way, we see the involvement of all three Persons, but it is still true that One Person can act through Another, as in 2 Corinthians 5:19; Matthew 12:28; John 5:19-23; & Hebrews 1:2. When we do not have specific persons of the Trinity identified, we

should not presume that any One Person is acting alone, because that is never the way it is with the Lord. The unity of God cannot and does not co-exist with independency among the three Persons.

59:20 – The Redeemer will come to Zion. This coming is not His coming to make atonement for sin. That had been revealed and explained earlier in Isaiah. This coming is to those who repent (1:27); so it speaks of a response to the message. The atonement was *accomplished* at the cross; now Isaiah speaks of it being *applied* in the hearts of His people. This happens when God comes to heal, to comfort and to create sincere words of repentance (vv.18,19). “Jacob”, is a reminder of their ancestor who was deceptive and cunning, yet this same Jacob was brought by God to be a repentant man.

The first reference to Christ: 59:21

God announced He would react to their helpless condition (vv.16,17). Here He says what His covenant with them will be. This is not a continuation of the covenant with Adam, which was broken by man and since then can only bring death from God (Genesis 2:17). The covenant with Adam was made with a sinless man. How can our holy God have a covenant that brings life with His people when they are sinners?

The answer is Christ. The words show a swift shift of focus. “This is my covenant with them ... My Spirit is on You”. We cannot have any covenant blessing on our own when we break covenant every time we sin! If God were to deal with the people of Zion without a Mediator, they would be damned. Moaning (59:11) and mourning (57:19) for sin does not satisfy God’s justice. God has One to intervene and so He speaks to Christ in this verse.

Note that the “you” in v. 21 is singular. This unnamed Person will have the Spirit. This is a reference to Christ as 61:1 and Luke 4:16-21 clearly show. The Lord puts His Spirit on Christ in 42:1 to give the Lord’s words as in 49:2 & 42:4, and bring comfort as in 50:4 & 61:2,3. What Isaiah said earlier of the Servant fits what he says later of the Anointed One. It is the same Person.

The words found in Jesus’ mouth continue on without a break in the mouths of His children forever. We are saved by the blood shed for us, and we are saved by the message carried to us. He alone was the sacrifice, but He is not alone in delivering the message. This salvation was first announced by the Lord (Hebrews 2:3) and has been in the mouths of His children ever since.

Christ as a Covenant for us

Christ was sent to be a covenant for Gentiles resulting in their salvation (42:6). In

49:8, Christ, as a covenant for the people, brings the restoration of Israel's inheritance. They had lost it because of their covenant breaking! Since God's anger fell on our covenant Mediator, a covenant of peace is guaranteed (54:10); an everlasting covenant (61:8) that rests in the perfect righteousness of Christ is ours. The covenant promised to the Gentile world in 55:3 was that God would bring Christ, the Son of David, to be their king too. How can this be?

The basic structure of a covenant is found in the words, "I will be your God, and you shall be my people" (Leviticus 26:12). When Christ is a covenant for His people, it means that even though He is the Lord God, He entered into our side of the covenant as a man. That means the Lord God dealt with Christ to represent us in the obligations and penalties of the covenant. Since God is now dealing with Christ, He is all we covenant breakers need to be saved. In His death, He took on the sanctions of the covenant in our place, because of our sin. In His obedience to the law, Christ again represented us, so that all the blessings promised are secured for us. In Christ, we are forgiven just as if we had died for our sins, and rewarded just as if we had kept covenant for ourselves. No sinner can survive being in covenant with God without a Mediator. We stand before Him only in the covenantal faithfulness of Jesus.

Isaiah 60

This is a chapter that has no reference to the sin of God's people; it speaks only of blessing. The movement of the prophecy is important. 59 has much of sin and 60 has none. What happened? When they were powerless (Romans 5:6), God's powerful arm worked salvation (59:16). He acted to save by turning to Christ to be a covenant for them (59:21). Only then is the "Arise shine" of 60:1 said to a people whose darkness was described in 59. All the good news of Isaiah 60 is the consequence of the saving intervention of Christ. They had not become covenant keepers on their own.

The world-wide scope of salvation is so prominent that reading 'Zion' should make us think of the center to which the nations flow (2:1-4). The incoming peoples of the earth have been blessed in Abraham (Genesis 12:3). The glory of the Lord was seen in Israel, so the nations came to this clean light and to their Lord Who had chosen Israel and set His Name in their midst (See Deuteronomy 12.)

60:1-5 – The changed people became radiant in holiness and thus would be attractive to the nations. God called the nations in 55:1 after the gospel was established in the death and resurrection of His Servant in 53. Now in 60, both Jews and Gentiles are coming. (This is far beyond a return from Babylon.) With sin forgiven, He now has no restraint in His favor to them. The stream of gifts is not from the idols but the Lord. They understand and are overjoyed. Isaiah prophesies that the nations will be won to the Lord by the gospel, and as a result,

all will be gathered to Him when Jesus returns. Like the song after passing through the Red Sea (Exodus 15), the saints in heaven sing “the song of Moses ... and the song of the Lamb”. It is praise for an exodus not merely in the sight of the nations, but the liberation of them:

Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed." (Revelation 15:3,4 ESV)

60:6-7 – These nations are now worshippers bringing gifts. Their offerings are accepted, which means that they too, have been accepted by the Lord. “They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the LORD.” Those who brought these gifts to Christ at His birth were just a foretaste when all the world will acknowledge and worship Him.

60:8,9 – In the preceding verses they come by land; now they come in ships. On a road a group must come in a line one behind the other; here they come as clouds, for ships can travel side by side. Coming like doves to their nests, means these foreigners left to come to the Lord as their true home. They leave the gods of their fathers and come to Israel’s God, the living and true God. They come to the people of God for His splendor is in them, which shows how great a change Christ has produced in those once dominated by sin. In earlier times, Israel was not different from the nations. God even called their city ‘Sodom and Gomorrah’ (1:9).

60:10-11 – The foreigners build the walls not as slaves but as willing citizens. The attraction was the grace God showed His people. That He should be angry and punish them for their treachery is understandable (Deuteronomy 29:22-27), but He has had compassion on those so faithless and treated them well because of their Mediator (59:21). This is a surprise that gets their attention and draws them to the Lord. The world understands vengeance; it is not a surprise, but grace is. With so much wealth coming, the gates are never closed. These kings probably do not come as prisoners but as kings welcomed and bearing gifts – not as kings defeated but attracted and serving gladly.

60:12-14 – Any nation that will not serve Israel will be destroyed. Coming and bowing to them means they honor Israel’s Lord. Refusal to serve is a rejection of the Lord Who chose to reside among His people (Deuteronomy 6:15). One cannot submit to God and reject His anointed Son of David (Psalm 132). No more enemies afflict them. Now the sons of those who once carried them captive do the opposite, as in v.4. They bow before them because they are the people of the Lord, calling them the City of the Lord. It is the recognition that God is among them that changes their minds and makes them bring their gifts.

60:15-18 – Life for Israel changes from being ignored to being revered. The Lord

makes all things new: they are supported by the leaders of other nations (v.16); material possessions are replaced by what is superior (v.17); they will be ruled by peace and righteousness (26:12,13). This is the opposite of 5:7 and so much Isaiah said in the early chapters about oppression and evil. The violence of invaders will never occur again. (See 1:7). The walls are no longer for security. As in 26:1, they are called "Salvation", not because they wait for salvation, but because it is what they enjoy. In the same emphasis, the gates are renamed "Praise".

60:19-21 – They have a different light. The sun is not constant. In James 1:17, unlike the Lord, the shadows of a sundial move. The Lord is not their light occasionally but their everlasting light. He will be among them constantly. (In Ezekiel 10:18, the glory of the Lord had departed from Jerusalem!) This means: No more sin! Their sorrow ends because their sin has ended. All will be righteous in life and so the condition of having the land will be met. They will not lose their land again. (See Deuteronomy 4:1,25,26). They will be the planting of the Lord. This is beyond merely entering territory; apostate Israelites could do that. They will be planted by the Lord permanently (Matthew 15:13).

60:22 – Solitary Abraham was turned from one man to a nation; Israel was to remember their humble beginning because a family had become a nation (Deuteronomy 26:1-11). God promised to multiply them a thousand times (Deuteronomy 1:11; Ezekiel 36:8-12). When God's time has come, He will act quickly to fulfill His promises. The emphasis in v.22 is on long standing promises made to Abraham, such as Genesis 15:4,5.

Q. 87. What is repentance unto life?

A. Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience. (Westminster Shorter Catechism)

Q. 114. But can those converted to God keep these commandments perfectly?

A. No. In this life even the holiest have only a small beginning of this obedience. Nevertheless, with earnest purpose they do begin to live not only according to some but to all the commandments of God. (The Heidelberg Catechism)

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