

# Exegetical Notes on Isaiah 61:10-62:3

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The reading from the Old Testament which is assigned to the Second Sunday after Christmas in Series C of Lutheran Worship (as also in Series A and B) consists in the final two verses of the sixty-first chapter of the Book of Isaiah, namely verses 10-11, and the initial three verses of the sixty-second chapter of the Prophet Isaiah. (The exegesis of these verses below, *principia principio*, is in no way designed to promote the use in the main service of the week of any such modern selection of gospels and epistles as those suggested in Lutheran Worship. This exegete, on the contrary, would continue to urge, on various grounds, fidelity to the pericopal tradition inherited from the ancient church by the church of the reformation and modified only slightly by the gospels and epistles to be read in the main (eucharistic) service of the week. No comparable series of readings, on the other hand, from the Old Testament was either handed down from the ancient church or bestowed on us by the Blessed Reformer; nor, indeed, is there such a program of readings from the New Testament to be used in all the possible additional offices of any given week. In such cases, therefore, even such a traditionalist as this exegete is able, with consistency, to make use of any pericope drawn from the region of Holy Scripture desired.)

## HISTORICAL AND LITERARY SETTING

The historical and literary observations which follow assume the auctorial integrity of the Book of Isaiah which this exegete has defended elsewhere (especially in *An Introduction to the Book of Isaiah*). Isaiah ben-Amoz began his lengthy prophetic ministry of some six decades already in 739 B.C. in the final year of the reign of Uzziah as King of Judah. He then uttered the various prophecies contained in the first main unit of the Book of Isaiah (chapters 1-35 as we have come to call them since medieval times) on various occasions in the years leading up to 701 B.C. In the course of these years Isaiah prophesied again and again the miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrians which finally occurred in 701 B.C. in the midst of the reign of Hezekiah -- as recounted in the "historical bridge" constituting chapters 36-39 of his magnum opus.

Isaiah then proceeded to compose in the course of the ensuing two decades the tightly integrated third unit of his book consisting in the chapters which we now enumerate as 40-66. The prophet had, indeed, evidently finished these chapters by the time that King Hezekiah died in 686 B.C. in view of the absence of any succeeding king from the superscription to the volume as a whole (1:1). Isaiah subsequently published the final edition of his book in its entirety circa 680 B.C., shortly before his martyrdom in the bloody persecution of the true faith sponsored by King Manasseh.

An additional presupposition in the exegesis here is the elaborate nature of the triadic structure which characterizes the whole third unit of Isaiah (chapters 40-66), as has, again, been delineated in detail elsewhere (*ibid.*). Chapters 58-66 of Isaiah constitute the third of the three main divisions of this third unit of Isaiah and, so also, the seventh of the seven distinct cantos of the volume in toto. Each of these cantos provides, in its own individual way, the rationale of the thesis of Isaiah as a whole, namely, that the Lord is the only reasonable object of faith.

Canto 7, then, of the Book of Isaiah argues that the Lord is the only reasonable object of faith because, in addition to all the points presented, He gives a blessed future to His people in time and eternity. This future bliss was to come, predicted Isaiah, in the messianic age (1.) through the repentance of Israel (chapters 58-60), (2.) through the word of the Messiah Himself (chapters 61:1-63:6), and (3.) again, in chiasmic fashion, through the repentance of Israel (chapters 63:7-66:24).

Within the middle sub-canto (chapters 61:1-63:6) of Canto 7, the first section clearly concludes with a stanza (61: 10 and 11) in which there is a change in speakers from the preceding verses (61: 1-9), as there is, contrariwise, a change back again to the Messiah speaking in the ensuing section (chapter 62). The following outline thus emerges of the Seventh Canto of Isaiah (chapters 58-66) with special emphasis on chapters 61 and 62 of the book:

The Lord's Gift of a Blessed Future to His People

Words Concentrating upon the New Testament Era

from circa 30 A.D. to the Parousia

1. Through the Repentance of Israel (chapters 58-60)

1. Its Nature (chapter 58)

1. Its distinction from empty formalism (verses 1-7)
2. Its indispensability to the Christian life (verses 8-12)
3. Its distinction from self-indulgence (verses 13- 14)

2. Its Necessity: Israel's sinfulness (chapter 59)

1. As shown by Isaiah's accusations (verses 1-8)
2. As shown by a corporate confession (verses 9-15a)
3. As shown by the Lord's response (verses 15b-21)

3. Its Issue: Blessedness (chapter 60)

1. The extension of the church throughout the world (verses 1-9)
2. The security of the church (from divine wrath and her enemies) (verses 10-18)
3. The enlightenment of the church (verses 19-22)

2. Through the Word of Messiah (chapters 61:1-63:6)

## 1. His Proclamation of the Gospel (chapter 61)

1. Its basis: the commission of the Messiah (verses 1-3)

2. Its addressees: men of all nations (verses 4-9)

3. Its issue: rejoicing in the resulting church of God (verses 10-11)

1. Its essence: joy in the One True God (verse 10a1)

2. Its basis (righteousness and so salvation) expressed in a complex figure (verse 10a2- 10b)

1. The basic metaphors (10a2)

2. The salvation won by the Messiah (verse 10a2a)

3. The righteousness of the Messiah (verse 10a2b)

4. The internal similes (verse 10b)

1. The simile of the bridegroom (verse 10b1)

2. The simile of the bride (verse 10b2)

5. Its basis and results (righteousness and praise respectively) expressed in a simple simile (verse 11)

1. The agricultural side of the comparison (verse 11a)

2. The spiritual side of the comparison (verse 11b)

1. The saving righteousness of the Messiah (11b1)

2. The resulting praise of the Messiah (verse 11b2)

## 2. His Zeal to Save His People (chapter 62)

1. Because of His devotion to them (verses 1-5)

1. Its manifestation in the expansion of His church (verses 1-2)

1. The basis of its growth: His own empowering devotion in action (verse 1a)

2. The means of its growth through the agency of the church itself (verse 1b)

1. The proclamation of imputed righteousness (verse 1b1)
2. The proclamation of salvation (verse 1b2)
3. The essence of its growth: the addition through faith of an international royalty (verse 2)
  1. In terms of individual hearers of the message of the church (verse 2a)
  2. In terms of the church as a whole: a renaming to be explicated in verses 4-5 (verse 2b)
2. Its manifestation in His protective perception of His church (verse 3)
  1. Its spiritual beauty in His eyes (verse 3a)
  2. Its spiritual kingliness in His eyes (verse 3b)
1. Its manifestation in the expansion of His church, expressed by the renaming of the church intimated in verse 2b (verses 4-5)
  1. The primary enunciation of the renaming by the rejection of previous names (verse 4a)
    1. In regard to God: "Forsaken" (verse 4a1a)
    2. In regard to men: "Desolate" (verse 4a1b)
  2. The explication of the renaming (verses 4a2-5)
    1. By giving new names with contrary significance (verse 4a2)
      1. In regard to God: "Hepzibah" (verse 4a2a)
      2. In regard to men: "Beulah" (verse 4a2b)
    2. By explaining the new names in a general way (verse 4b)
      1. In regard to God (verse 4b1)
      2. In regard to men (verse 4b2)
  3. By explaining the new names more specifically (verse 5)
    1. In regard to men (verse 5a)

- 2. In regard to God (verse 5b)
  - 2. Because of His oath to them (verses 6-9)
  - 3. Because of His promise to them (verses 10-12)
- 3. His Vengeance on His Enemies (chapter 63:1-6)
  - 1. The nature of the Avenger (verse 1)
  - 2. The nature of the vengeance (verses 2-4)
  - 3. The unique role of the Avenger (verses 5-6)
- 3. Through the Repentance of Israel (chapters 63:7-66:24)
  - 1. Its Necessity: Israel's sinfulness (chapters 63:7-64:12)
    - 1. Shown by reference to her previous conduct despite the Lord's grace (chapter 63:7-14)
    - 2. Shown by the Lord's chastisement of Israel (chapters 63:15-64:4)
    - 3. Shown by a confession of sinfulness and an appeal for pardon (chapter 64:5-12)
  - 2. Its Alternative: Condemnation (chapter 65)
    - 1. Contrasted with the blessedness of the Gentiles who repent (verses 1-7)
    - 2. Contrasted with the blessedness of the Israelites who repent (verses 8-12)
    - 3. Contrasted with the blessedness of all who repent (verses 13-25)
  - 3. Its Circumstances (chapter 66)
    - 1. The rejection of the Israelite nation (verses 1-4)
    - 2. The acceptance of an Israelite remnant (verses 5-11)
    - 3. The evangelization of the Gentiles (verses 12-24)

The five verses, then, which are the objects of this study all fall within the middle sub-canto (chapters 61:1-63:6) of the Seventh Canto of Isaiah, which has as its theme that the Lord gives a blessed future to His people through the word of the Messiah.

The first two verses, however, of the five concerned belong to a different section of the sub-canto than do the remaining three verses. Verses 10 and 11, on the one hand, of chapter 61 conclude a section, coterminous with chapter 61, which treats of the Messiah's proclamation of His salvific gospel. Verses 1-3, on the other hand, of chapter 62 form the first two parts of the tripartite stanza which begins a section equating chapter 62 and asserting the zeal of the Messiah to bring salvation to His people <sup>^x</sup> and, specifically in the first stanza (verses 1-5), His zeal to save His people because of His devotion to them.

## A LITERAL TRANSLATION AND COMMENTS

### I. Isaiah 61: Words of the Church

10. I shall exult greatly in the LORD; My soul will rejoice in my God. For He will have clothed me with garments of salvation; A robe of righteousness will have covered me, As the bridegroom makes himself priestly with a turban, Yea, as the bride adorns herself with her jewels.

In the first nine verses of Isaiah 61 the speaker is the Messiah, as is confirmed, for one thing, by His own citation of verses 1-2 in the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4 [verses 18-19 in the framework of 16-21]). The Messiah describes in these nine verses the purpose and results of His mission. The purpose is the establishment of the new testament (in verse 8) and the proclamation of the messianic gospel (in verses 1-3). The results are the joy (in verses 3 and 7) and righteousness (in verse 3) of human sinners, the establishment of the church of the new testament (in verse 4), its extension to the Gentiles (in verses 5, 6, and 9), and the priesthood of all believers (in verse 6).

In verses 10 and 11, on the other hand, the speaker is the church, responding with great joy to all that the Messiah has accomplished on her behalf. Thus, the rejoicing of verse 10 is connected with "the oil of gladness" in verse 3 and the "everlasting joy" in verse 7; the "robe of righteousness" in verse 10b with the "oaks of righteousness" which are the "planting of the Lord" in verse 3; the "praise" of verse 11 with the "mantle of praise" in verse 3; the "nations" of verse 11 with the "foreigners" of 5 and the "nations" of 6 and 9. The bridegroom's headdress mentioned in verse 3 similarly reoccurs in verse 10.

Two differing verbs denotative of joy serve as predicates in the first two clauses of Isaiah 61:10. The first clause (and so the verse) begins, indeed, with two forms of the same hollow verb, sws or sys. The first word in the verse is the qal infinitive absolute of sws, which in its position preceding a finite form of the same verb serves to intensify the conception of the finite form itself. Such an infinitive is, in consequence, usually rendered into English as "greatly" (as in the translation above) or "exceedingly" or in some equally or even more idiomatic fashion.

The conception of sws or sys goes beyond joy to exultation, which is to say the enthusiastic expression of joy ("exult, display joy") [BDB, 965a]. Here, indeed, the native significance of sws is given even more force by the position, as just noted, of the infinitive absolute before the qal imperfect. The first person (common in gender) of the imperfect aspect assumes the church of the new testament as uttering the thoughts of its innumerable members.

In the second clause the predicate is the verb *gyl*. Of all the words in Classical Hebrew denotative or connotative of joy, *gyl* is perhaps the one which "rejoice" fits most distinctively and uniformly as a definition [BDB, 162a]. The feminine gender of the third person singular agrees with the feminine gender of the subject, *nephesh* ("soul").

The "righteousness" (*tzdhaqah*) of the fourth clause of the verse does not refer to the righteous acts which, to be sure, believers in the Messiah do in the course of a life of sanctification [BDB, 842]. The "righteousness" here, on the contrary, is a "robe" {*m^Ñiy*l [BDB, 591]) with which we are simply "covered" [BDB, 418]. The *qal* perfect of *y^Ñt* [with final teth] is here employed with the force of a present perfect explaining the basis of the future joy of the church.

This "righteousness" stands, likewise, in parallel position to the "salvation" of the previous clause. There, again, the salvation to be achieved by the Messiah is metaphorically portrayed as "garments" (*bigdhey-yesha^Ñ* [BDB, 447]) with which He has simply "clothed" us [BDB, 527]. The *hiphil* perfect of *lbshis*, here likewise, employed with the force of a present perfect explaining the basis of the future joy of the church.

Thus, this *tzdhaqah* is the alien righteousness of Christ Himself which derives from His vicarious obedience and satisfaction and which is now imputed to men who in themselves are sinful. The reference, in other words, is to the justification of sinners by the grace of God through faith in the Messiah. Here, then, we see again, as in so many places, the central theme of the Old Testament, justification by grace through faith in the Messiah to come.

The bridegroom's headdress *^x* symbolic of joy *^x* was, as previously mentioned, already introduced into the contextual vocabulary in the third verse of Isaiah 61. The word *p'er* is rendered "beauty" in verse 3 and "ornaments" in verse 10 by the Authorized Version. The Revised Standard Version and New American Standard Bible with more consistency use "garland" in both cases, but "turban" would be a more precise translation [BDB, 802b]. Thus, the first clause following the *'athnach* in verse 10, if translated literally, would read "as a bridegroom acts as a priest with regard to a turban" (verse 10b1). For *khnin* the *piel* signifies "act as a priest" [BDB, 464]. The meaning is that the bridegroom on his day of joy wore a special sort of turban usually reserved to priests (Exodus 39:28 and Ezekiel 44:18), just as today bridegrooms and brides usually wear special garments which they never wear otherwise.

11. For as the earth brings forth its sprouting, Yea, as a garden makes that sown in it sprout forth, So will my Lord, the LORD, make righteousness and praise sprout forth in the presence of all of the nations.

The idea of sprouting is stressed in the verse before us by employing both the verb denoting the action and the noun derived therefrom. The verb, indeed, occurs twice here, once on each side of the simile comprising the two halves of the verse, both times in the imperfect of the *hiphil*. The *qal* of *tzmch* means "sprout, spring up" and is used literally in this way of plants and trees [BDB, 855a-b]. The *hiphil*, with its causative significance, is likewise employed in a literal sense of plants and especially of grass [BDB, 855b]. The noun *tzemach*, correspondingly, means "sprout" (or in some places the "growth" of a vine, which grows by sprouting) [855b]. A

tzemach, then, is never a mere branch, much less a twig, of a tree, but is rather a fresh sprout springing newly from ground or root, so as to form a new plant of some kind. Here this connotation emphasizes the divine newness of the "righteousness" which the Messiah was to produce by His vicarious humiliation and then impute to "all nations" in the justification of the world. This justification would then redound to His "praise in the presence of all nations" in the grateful response of all those sinners who would appropriate the righteousness of the Messiah through faith in Him.

## II. Isaiah 62: Words of the Messiah

1. For the sake of Zion shall I be not still, Yea, for the sake of Jerusalem shall I rest not, Until her righteousness go forth as the brightness of the day, yea, her salvation burn as a torch.

The phrase "as the brightness of the day" in the translation above renders the single word kannogah (with mappiq) in the final he) in the original text. The feminine noun is definite by virtue of the pathach under the kaph, the prepositional prefix denoting comparison ("as"), and the dagesh in the nun, indicating the doubling of the initial letter of the noun itself. The noun nogah (with innate mappiq) receives, in fact, the accouterments of the definite article only here and in Ezekiel 1:28 [BDB, 618a]. The reason here, evidently, is the comparison of the proclamation of justification by the church to, specifically, the most basic application of nogah, which is to say the "brightness of a (clear ...) day" full of sunshine [BDB, 618a].

2. And nations shall see thy righteousness, Yea, a totality of kings thy glory; And a new name shall be called to thee Which the mouth of the LORD will designate.

The phrase "will designate" in the translation above renders the masculine singular of the third person of the qal imperfect of the pe-nun verb nqb [BDB, 666a]. Brown-Driver-Briggs distinguishes two roots with these same three letters, but the need to do so on the basis of two passages relating to cursing is questionable in view of the lack of etymological evidence [BDB, 666b]. The basic idea of nqb is, in fact, "pierce" or "bore" through something [BDB, 666a]. This original conception, however, gives birth quite early to the idea of being "pricked off" (as we should say "checked off") a list of names and so "designated" by name [BDB, 666a]. This significance is associated especially with forms of passive reference. It is, thus, the uniform meaning of the niph'al (Numbers 1:17; 1 Chronicles 12:32; 16:41; 2 Chronicles 28:15; 31:19; Ezra 8:20) [BDB, 666a]. The same direction is taken by the passive participle of the qal in Amos 6:1, which can still be translated as "designated" (as opposed to the more periphrastic "noted, distinguished" suggested in Brown-Driver-Briggs) [BDB, 666a]. The idea of designation is, on the other hand, attached only twice to the active forms of the verb, here and already in Genesis 30:28. There the qal imperative is applied to the fixation of the wages which Laban urges Jacob to name as his future remuneration.

3. For thou shalt be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, Yea, a turban of kingship in the palm of thy God.

The two constructs translated above as "crown" and "turban" hark back to the p'er (also translated as "turban") which surfaced twice in the preceding chapter, firstly in verse 3 of Isaiah



61 and then again in verse 10. In the latter case the headdress intended was more specifically identified as a form of turban worn uniquely by priests and bridegrooms.

The predicate genitives, however, in the verse before us innately denote more distinctive forms of headdress than does p'er in itself. Thus, ^Ñatarah [with medial teth] specifically denotes a "crown" worn only by monarchs and the prime ministers, secular or sacerdotal, of such monarchs [BDB, 742b]. The material of a literal ^Ñatarah is specified in some passages of the Old Testament as gold or silver and gold together (Psalm 21:4; Esther 8:15; Zechariah 6:11 and 14) [BDB, 742b].

The basic reference, secondly, of tzaniph is the "turban" which was wound around the head of the high priest [BDB, 857a]. For of special importance is its double occurrence in Zechariah 3:5, which provides two of the total of five in the whole TaNaK. Of equal relevance is the virtually uniform significance of the close cognate mitznepheth, which refers eleven times (out of twelve) specifically to the linen turban of the high priest [BDB, 857a].