# **Lesson 40 Isaiah 60 The Coming Glory**

## Introduction

#### Isaiah "He will lift up a standard for the natio ns...he will set a sign among the peoples." **Book of the Anointed Conqueror** The Coming of the Anointed Conqueror 59:14-63:6 Divine Commitment to The Covenant Mediator The Coming Glory Transforming Power, The Commitment of the The Day of Vengeance and Present and Future **Anointed One** Salvation and Vengeance Victory 60:1-22 59:14-20 59:21 61:1-9 61:10-62:12 63:1-6

Alec Motyer. The Prophecy of Isaiah (InterVarsity Press, 1996).

Isaiah 60 begins, "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you." The glory of God is inseparably connected to the glory of His people: not because God is dependent on His people, but because God chose to make promises. Promises like the one in Genesis 9:11, "I establish my covenant with you; and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood." And the one in Genesis 12:3, "I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." God has staked His fame, His reputation, His glory on the fulfillment of promises made to sinful people.

The vision of God as divine warrior in Isaiah 59 cannot be a vision of God bringing divine wrath on all sinful people. Who would be left? There must be someone left. God made promises to protect and provide for the children of Abraham. God comes as a divine warrior, not only to pour wrath onto the wicked but also to establish a holy and righteous people of His own possession.

But what does a holy, righteous, sinless people look like? Can the ideal of Zion be established on Earth? Can there be a people holy and pleasing to God? How so? When? Is the Kingdom now? Is the Kingdom future? Isaiah 60 explores the relationship between God, the Anointed Conqueror, and His people.

We've not yet considered the structure of this middle section of the Book of the Conqueror. So, let's do that before we get into the text of chapter 60. Our big picture structure of the Book has three sections. Motyer titled the first major section, "The Ideal and the Actual: the needs and the sins of God's People." We ended that section with a description of the depravity of Judah and a prayer of confession by Isaiah on behalf of his generation. "Justice is far from us and righteousness does not over take us...for our transgressions are with us, and we know our iniquities...speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving in and uttering from the heart lying words."

This actual reality is nowhere near the ideal. Following that section, Motyer titles the middle section of the book, "The Coming of the Anointed Conqueror." Motyer divides this middle section into six parts. We started last week with the vision of the divine warrior who girds himself with righteousness and truth. Motyer calls that first subsection in 59:15b-20, "Divine Commitment to Salvation and Vengeance." God surveys the nations and, seeing that there is no man to intercede for His people, He brings justice Himself.

Motyer separates off the lone verse 59:21 off as the second subsection. That is the odd prose verse we looked at last time that summarizes God's commitment to action by identifying a covenant mediator whose offspring will follow him as one anointed by the Spirit and speaking God's word. So, we have this curious interplay between God girding Himself to bring justice because there is no human intercessor and then the identification of a human intercessor who will establish covenant for God's people.

Motyer titles our third subsection in chapter 60, "the Coming Glory". That's our chapter for this lesson. We are going to see an inseparable link between God's own glory and the glorification of His people. The remaining three subsections are 61:1-9, which gives us another glimpse of the Messianic conqueror, then 61:10-62:12, which describes the commitment of the Messiah to bring God's glory

to His people, and finally 63:1-6, the closing subsection that parallels the opening one with a vision of God as divine warrior.

The text between the opening and closing divine warrior sections weaves together several themes. Oswalt summarizes the many themes under one main idea. These is the idea he believes to be central to the Book of the Conqueror. Quoting Oswalt,

"Isaiah has now moved beyond the issues raised by the exile to address the ultimate concerns of the book: the significance of Israel's experience with God for all of human history. These issues are implicit in the prophet's call. If it is true that Israel's God is the only Holy One, that it is his glory alone that fills the earth, and that he is King of the universe, then what does that mean for Israel both in relation to God and in relation to world? In many ways, the rest of the book is an exploration of those issues, and in chs. 60–62 they come to their broadest expression and resolution." <sup>1</sup>

I find Oswalt's insight very helpful in putting together the thought that connects the key players of chapters 60-62. What do these have in common? We have God, we have the Anointed One, we have the people of Zion, we have the nations. God does not come as divine warrior simply to wipe out sinfulness on the Earth. That would require another worldwide cleansing like the Flood. God will not wipe out all of human kind again. He made the promise. And He tied the well-being of His people together with His own glory. He promised to bless Abraham and his descendants. God's name, His glory, His justice is tied up with His own people because He made promises. And that's what we're going to see in the center of the Book of the Conqueror. We have the beginning and the ending sections that depict God as divine warrior girding Himself to conquer, and in between those two sections we now have the glory of God intertwined with the glory of His people. Oswalt breaks the pattern of these chapters down into eight themes.

- (1) God will save His people.
- (2) He will give light to them.
- (3) He will share His glory with them.
- (4) The nations will be drawn to what they see of God in Israel.
- (5) The nations will restore Zion's children to her.
- (6) They will bring their wealth to give to Israel's God.
- (7) Those who had oppressed Israel will be brought low and she will be exalted over them.
- (8) And Israel will both experience and exemplify the righteousness of God.<sup>2</sup>

These eight themes don't occur chronologically. All eight themes are present in chapter 60. But since Isaiah has woven the themes together, it's difficult to make out one clear structure for the chapter. Motyer sees a ten-part chiasm. I'm going to go with a five-part structure that is loosely chiastic. At the beginning and end, the themes of light and glory are dominant. In the center, the rebuilding of Zion and the punishment of rebellious nations is dominant. And in the two inner frames, the tribute from the nations is dominant.

The passage opens in 60:1-3 with light and glory.

## Isaiah 60:1-22 The Coming Glory

Light and glory (1-3)

- <sup>1</sup> "Arise, shine; for your light has come,
- <sup>2</sup> "For behold, darkness will cover the earth But the LORD will rise upon you
- <sup>3</sup> "Nations will come to your light,

And the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. And deep darkness the peoples; And His glory will appear upon you.

And kings to the brightness of your rising.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> J. N. Oswalt. *NICOT: The Book of Isaiah, Chs 40-66.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998) 535.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Oswalt 535.

Isaiah depicts the coming of God's glory to Israel as the sun rising to dispel the darkness of the night. The light is not worldwide. The light illuminates the people of Israel, and is illuminated from the people of Israel. The peoples of the Earth see the light and attribute the light to Israel. The "your" in verse three is feminine singular. That's Israel, not God. Nations come to your light, Israel, and kings to the brightness of your rising. It makes me think of Jesus' words in Matthew 5 in the Sermon on the Mount, that we're to be a light on a hill, that we are to shine and reflect the goodness of God.

Moses told the second generation out of Egypt long before this that the Law of God will cause them to stand out. They will be noticed by the nations. He says this in Deuteronomy 4:5-6.

See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. So keep and do *them,* for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people."

Light carries this double meaning of truth and goodness. Light as truth or understanding fits these words from Moses. The peoples notices their wisdom and understanding. Light also suggests moral goodness or righteousness character. That was part of Isaiah's description of the people who please God just two chapters back in 58:10. He wrote,

And if you give yourself to the hungry
Then your light will rise in darkness

And satisfy the desire of the afflicted, And your gloom will become like midday.

This is light that shines from the people. And the light is connected to moral action in society, to caring for those who are in need. When the people of Judah seek the desires of God, to live according to His will, society becomes an example of moral truth and goodness. But that's not the reality, that's not the actual of Judah. It's God's desire. But this generation does not live to please God. They do not shine at midday. Isaiah describes them like this in 59:9-10,

- Therefore justice is far from us, We hope for light, but behold, darkness,
- We grope along the wall like blind men, We stumble at midday as in the twilight...

And righteousness does not overtake us; For brightness, but we walk in gloom. We grope like those who have no eyes;

There is no light in Judah. There is no justice. God looks around and sees no man or woman who are willing to intercede. No man or woman who can act as Covenant mediator. No man or woman who can effect lasting justice in society. So, God arms Himself to bring about justice and salvation. Isaiah describes the effect of God's action in 59:19.

<sup>19</sup> So they will fear from the west the name of the LORD And His glory from the rising of the sun,

Glory and name are connected in this vision of God's coming in chapter 59. Glory and light are connected at the beginning of chapter 60. The three terms - glory, name, and light - work together conceptually. The name of God is His true character. The glory of God is the display of His true character. Light is a physical manifestation of glory that works as a metaphor for both goodness and truth. This has been a constant interplay of terms through Isaiah highlighted early with Isaiah's vision of God's glory in chapter 6.

So in 59,19 God's name and glory are feared from east to west, but Israel does not reflect that glory. So, God girds Himself for action. Because of that action God's glory dawns on Israel, and then the light of His glory made visible in Israel attracts the nations. The light is God's light, not Israel's light. And yet, there is a connection. The light of God is seen in God's people. As Jesus later said, "They will know you by your love for one another." They will see something special. The nations will see the light of God in the people of God in their moral goodness, in their wisdom, in their societal order. It is God's light and, in a derivative way, it is Israel's light.

It's like the light of the Sun and the Moon. When we look at the Moon brightening the night with a glorious soft-white light, we give credit to the moonlight. But we also understand that the Moon,

without the Sun, is a dark rock. It has no light of its own. The Moon reflects the light of the Sun. The light of Israel is not her own light. God is the source of light. The light seen by the nations in Israel is the light of God that shines on, transforms, and is reflected through His people. He is the Sun. Israel is the Moon.

In these verses, we have these two ideas. God shines on Israel in such a way that His people are transformed, and the nations see and respond to that transformation by coming to Israel. Our next section develops these two ideas with the idea of tribute from the nations. This is Isaiah 60:4-9.

Tribute from the nations (4-9)

4 "Lift up your eyes round about and see; Your sons will come from afar,

<sup>5</sup> "Then you will see and be radiant, Because the abundance of the sea will be turned to you,

<sup>6</sup> "A multitude of camels will cover you, The young camels of Midian and Ephah; All those from Sheba will come;

They will bring gold and frankincense,

<sup>7</sup> "All the flocks of Kedar will be gathered together to you,

They will go up with acceptance on My altar,

- 8 "Who are these who fly like a cloud
- <sup>9</sup> "Surely the coastlands will wait for Me; To bring your sons from afar, For the name of the LORD your God,

They all gather together, they come to you. And your daughters will be carried in the arms. And your heart will thrill and rejoice; The wealth of the nations will come to you.

And will bear good news of the praises of the LORD. The rams of Nebaioth will minister to you;

And I shall glorify My glorious house. And like the doves to their lattices? And the ships of Tarshish will come first, Their silver and their gold with them, And for the Holy One of Israel because He has glorified you.

Verse 3 speaks of nations and kings coming to Zion. Verse 4 now includes the scattered sons and daughters of Israel returning. In the poetic movement from verse 4 to verse 5, the people of Israel are told to lift their eyes to see the incoming. And when they see, they will be radiant. That's a description of joy, "your heart will thrill and rejoice." Why? Because of the abundance pouring in to Israel? Well, yes and no. They thrill and rejoice because scattered Israel and the peoples of the world are now giving homage to the one true God, to Yahweh. Israel does not just rejoice in the riches for the sake of riches. They rejoice in the worship of Yahweh and in their role in that worship. The last phrase of verse 6 makes this point. The peoples will not come in chains forced along in some kind of Roman triumph. They will come freely, "and will bear good news and praises of the Lord."

Verse 7 says, "They will go up with acceptance on my altar, and I shall glorify my glorious house." The significance of that first phrase is easy for us to miss: that Gentiles can go into the Temple. Now, we live post-Jesus. The veil has been torn down. But this is something exceptional that Isaiah is saying. These Gentile peoples will bring their tribute to the holy altar of the Temple of God. They will "go up with acceptance." Not only do they praise God: their praise is fully accepted by God. Verse 8 describes the incoming of these peoples as birds flying in a flock like a cloud and as doves returning to their lattices. The incoming is a homecoming. Scattered Israel and all the nations are like birds returning to their natural roost.

Did you notice that, along with tribute of camels and flocks and silver, that verse 7 also specifically mentions gold and frankincense? Yeah, it's hard not to think of the wise men who brought gifts to Jesus. I have heard this particular passage referenced to challenge the idea that the men came from Persia because Sheba and Midian are in the south, not the northeast, where Persia is going to be. But that argument misses two points.

First, the nations mentioned here are described coming from all directions, Sheba and Midian to the south; Ephah to the east of the Persian gulf; Kedar and Nebaioth to the east in the Arabian desert; the coastlands to the west; and Tarshish further west in modern day Spain. The "where" of the

tribute is from all points of the compass. The "when" is another question. This is the second point, and we will address the "when" more fully after we have considered the whole chapter. I am going to say that we are looking towards the second coming of Jesus, not the first coming of Jesus. So don't let the bringing of gold and frankincense throw you off. The bringing of gold and frankincense by Gentile wise men at the birth of Jesus affirms the future fulfillment this prophecy. Jesus' first coming is a preliminary establishment of His Kingdom that will reign on Earth, but it is not the completed establishment of a New Heaven and New Earth. That happens after His second coming. So just as the miracles of healing done by Jesus at His first coming pointed ahead to and eventual removal of all illness, all sickness, all sin, all death in the eternal Kingdom, the coming of the wise men with frankincense and gold is an instance of the in-gathering that is going to come from all nations of the globe when Jesus returns as the Anointed Conqueror.

Verse 9a brings us back to the theme of God's glory shining through Israel as the cause of this worldwide incoming. The nations bring tribute...

For the name of the LORD your God,

And for the Holy One of Israel because He has glorified you.

God's people are central to God's agenda, to His mission to redeem peoples from every nation. He is not satisfied to establish justice by wiping out all of humankind – which would be just. It would be good, but He has made promises. He will purify for Himself a people that shine with the light of His glory. The importance of His people - of Zion - is emphasized in the middle of the passage. This is 60:10-14.

Centrality of Zion (10-14)

"Foreigners will build up your walls, For in My wrath I struck you,

"Your gates will be open continually; So that men may bring to you the wealth of the nations, And their kings will minister to you; And in My favor I have had compassion on you. They will not be closed day or night, With their kings led in procession.

- <sup>12</sup> "For the nation and the kingdom which will not serve you will perish, and the nations will be utterly ruined.
  - "The glory of Lebanon will come to you, To beautify the place of My sanctuary;
  - "They will come bowing to you,
     And all those who despised you will bow themselves
     And they will call you the city of the LORD,
     Zion of the Holy One of Is

The juniper, the box tree and the cypress together, And I shall make the place of My feet glorious. the sons of those who afflicted you at the soles of your feet; Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

There is a positive response to God, expressed through tribute to Israel. The foreigners building the walls of Zion are not slaves. They contribute voluntarily to the rebuilding. And that is playing on the image of exile. The walls need to be rebuilt for this reason, "For in my wrath I struck you." One possibility for the "when" of this passage is the return of Israel from the Babylonian exile. But the latter half of the chapter strongly points to a reality beyond the physical rebuilding of Jerusalem. This principle stated in 10a, "for in my wrath I struck you, and in my favor I have had compassion on you," does fit with the whole idea of the exile. But it also extends past the exile. It can be summed up by Paul in Romans 11, where he describes a giving over to the Jews because they reject Jesus until the time of the Gentiles is complete and the Jews experience an incoming of their own. So that's another instance of this principle of God's wrath disciplining His people but then followed by favor on His people. So this passage doesn't have to be about the Babylonian exile. It has a broader application. And it fits very well with God's judgment on the Jewish people after the coming of Christ, which is going to be followed by favor.

And this principle that favor will follow wrath is deeply rooted in Old Testament promise. God told Abraham, "I will bless those who bless you. I will curse the one who curses you.") And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed. (Genesis 12:3)." That must happen. He also told Abraham, "I will

greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed will possess the gate of their enemies (Genesis 22:17)." That must happen. So far, the vision of chapter 60 has focused on Israel being a blessing and Israel being blessed. They are a blessing because the glory of God is reflected out of them as a witness to peoples who come to praise Yahweh and bring tribute that then blesses Israel.

Not all nations respond that way. There will be those who curse Zion and so are cursed themselves. That point is set in the center of the whole passage and is even written out as prose instead of poetry to give it particular emphasis. It is in verse 21.

For the nation and the kingdom which will not serve you will perish, and the nations will be utterly ruined.

Salvation is within the walls of Zion. These people are not punished for rejecting Israel per se. As Jesus said, "they are not rejecting you, they are rejecting me." They are punished for rejecting the God of Israel. Israel is the light that shines as a witness. In rejecting the truth and goodness of that light, they reject the reflection of God's nature. This is the unforgivable sin. If you reject the witness of salvation, you cannot be saved. You have made the choice to continue in rebellion. You have chosen the city of man over the city of God; the tower of Babel instead of the Covenant with Abraham. This choice of self-definition and control against submission to God is a choice for evil against good. These peoples that choose to not serve God are going to mock and denigrate the light that shines from the people that God has transformed. But in the end, when God's patience against wickedness, injustice, and rebellion are over those people who have rejected the light of God are going to be utterly ruined.

I noted at the outset that chapter 60 is arranged chiastically. We have moved from light and glory, to the tribute of the nations, to the centrality of Zion. Now we move back out from the centrality of Zion to the tribute of the nations, and then to light and glory. The second tribute passage furthers the description of God's blessing on His people, verses 15-18.

*Tribute from the nations (15-18)* 

<sup>15</sup> "Whereas you have been forsaken and hated I will make you an everlasting pride,

<sup>16</sup> "You will also suck the milk of nations

Then you will know that I, the LORD, am your Savior And your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

<sup>17</sup> "Instead of bronze I will bring gold, And instead of wood, bronze, And I will make peace your administrators

<sup>18</sup> "Violence will not be heard again in your land, But you will call your walls salvation,

With no one passing through, A joy from generation to generation.

And suck the breast of kings;

And instead of iron I will bring silver,

And instead of stones, iron.

And righteousness your overseers.

Nor devastation or destruction within your borders;

and your gates praise.

While I have to admit to being uncomfortable with the image of Israel as a baby sucking the breasts of kings, if I step back from what feels uncomfortable to me, the poetic imagery is classic Isaiah. It's striking, it's articulate, and it's memorable. A mother's milk is fatty and rich, sustaining food. The baby at a mother's breast is an intimate image of motherly care that contrasts the initial idea of abandonment in verse 15. Because of her depravity, God forsakes Zion and the majority of Israel. He saves only a remnant in a foreign land. His city and His people have been abandoned. They have experienced God's hatred in the sense of righteous wrath, of just punishment for sin.

But some great reversal has now lifted Israel from this desolate state into the arms of God. As a favored child, she will become an everlasting pride, a joy to God. She will be cradled and fed in His loving arms. The nations, formerly God's tool for just wrath, are now God's instrument of care and blessing. And this experience, this intimate experience of God's protection and provision is going to affirm Israel in her relationship with God. Verse 16b,

Then you will know that I, the LORD, am your Savior And your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

Wealth will flow into Israel on an unforeseen level. Everything is bumped up a notch. Iron is as plentiful as stones used to be; bronze on the level of wood; silver on the level of iron; and gold on the level of bronze. God's blessing is seen in abundance, not only materially. In fact, I would say the material only emphasizes the deeper well-being of goodness and orderliness in the transformed society. This is not geo-politics as we have ever experienced it. There is a utopian quality to this vision.

<sup>17b</sup> And I will make peace your administrators

Violence will not be heard again in your land, But you will call your walls salvation, And righteousness your overseers. Nor devastation or destruction within your borders; and your gates praise.

A complete peace or well-being oversees the administration of this new Zion. There is no need for police, or judges, or bosses to make people work together. They are motivated internally. Righteousness has become their overseers. There is no violence: not at the top of society, not on the streets. There is no devastation or destruction within the borders of Zion and God's walls provide protection from without. They are walls of salvation, but the gates are not closed. Peoples stream in. The gates are open gates of praise.

This language of peace and righteousness, the elimination of violence, and of salvation and praise, elevates this society to something unrealized for any length of time in human history. The elevated language continues as Isaiah closes the passage using the same terms of light and glory we encountered at the opening of the chapter, verses 19-22.

Light and glory (19-22)

"No longer will you have the sun for light by day, But you will have the LORD for an everlasting light,

"Your sun will no longer set,
 For you will have the LORD for an everlasting light,
 "Then all your people will be righteous;

"Then all your people will be righteous; The branch of My planting,

<sup>22</sup> "The smallest one will become a clan,

Nor for brightness will the moon give you light; And your God for your glory. Nor will your moon wane; And the days of your mourning will be over. They will possess the land forever, The work of My hands, that I may be glorified.

a clan, And the least one a mighty nation. I, the LORD, will hasten it in its time."

Is this hyperbole or is this a new kind of reality? The light of God's own glory will shine in Zion. And that light will be eternal. It will never set. It will never wane. God's presence will be everlasting. And the mourning of God's people will be over. Everyone in the land will be righteous. There will be no possibility of rejection. They will possess the land forever, secure from outward evil. More importantly, saved from internal rebellion. There will be no cause for mourning. They will be fully comforted. Their past sin will be paid for, and the presence of sin removed.

The people are described as the branch of my planting. They are a new kind of vineyard that God plants. The word used here for branch is rare in the Old Testament, occurring once outside of Isaiah (Daniel 11:7) and only three times in Isaiah. In 11:1, the branch is the Messiah that comes from the line of David. In 14:19 the king of Babylon is a rejected branch cast out of his tomb, thrown into the pit of death.

Here, the branch refers to the people of Israel. They are the works of God's hand. These three different images connected to the word, "branch," remind me of John's language in John 15. Jesus is the initial branch, He is the vine and we are the branches that come out of Jesus. God is the vinedresser who prunes. The descendants of the king of Babylon who refuse God are like those branches that are broken off and thrown into the fire and burnt. And carrying this word, "branch," for the corporate people of God connects us back to "branch" as the Messiah. He is their head. He is the fountain of spiritual goodness and of glory. This use of one word to specify the Messiah and also to specify corporate Israel we've seen before. We see it in the word, "servant." Whereas Israel is to be a servant, Jesus is the true servant. We also saw in the word, "Emmanuel," where Jesus is THE

Emmanuel, THE "God with us," but the people of God are also called, "Emmanuel." So there's this tight connection between the head - the Messiah – and His people. So He is the true branch. But because of Him, God is able to plant a branch: a whole new kind of vineyard in Zion.

So the abundance of blessing on Zion has been communicated materially as a bringing in of tribute, but it's also blessed in this new transformed reality of a righteous people. And here, at the end of the passage it's expressed in the scale of the people. The smallest will become a clan and the least, a mighty nation. This affirms the promise to Abraham that his descendants will be numbered as the stars in heaven and the sand on the seashore. This will all be hastened by the Lord in its time. God stakes His reputation on the fulfillment of this vision. And when it comes, it will come about quickly but not until its time, according to God's plan for human history.

The second to last verse of the poem returned us to the overriding theme. God declares over Zion, "[All your people will be] the works of my hand that I might be glorified." God will take it upon Himself to do a transformative work among His people, who will then become a true reflection of His truth and goodness in their individual lives and in the whole of their society.

### Conclusion

Okay, having finished the passage, I want to return to one critical question: the question of "when." When does this glorious vision take place? It has not taken place with Israel. Is this a vision of the Church, the Kingdom of Jesus on Earth?

It's hard not to connect the imagery of light dawning back to the prophecy in chapter 9, verse 2.

<sup>2</sup> The people who walk in darkness Those who live in a dark land,

Will see a great light;
The light will shine on them.

That dawning light was connected to the familiar promise of the divine child born of the line of David, 9:6-7.

<sup>6</sup> For a child will be born to us,

a son will be given to us;

And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal

Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

<sup>7</sup> There will be no end to the increase of *His* government or of peace,

On the throne of David and over his kingdom,

government or of peace,
To establish it and to uphold it

with justice and righteousness from then on and

forevermore.

The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

This language of a dawning light is so close to 60:1-2.

<sup>1</sup> "Arise, shine; for your light has come,

And the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

<sup>2</sup> "For behold, darkness will cover the earth But the LORD will rise upon you

And deep darkness the peoples; And His glory will appear upon you.

That sounds like the birth of Jesus. The light has risen on us, especially when we read 60:6.

<sup>6</sup> "A multitude of camels will cover you, The young camels of Midian and Ephah; All those from Sheba will come;

They will bring gold and frankincense,

And will bear good news of the praises of the LORD.

Is the "when" of this prophesied light the first century AD. As John writes, "the true light was in the world... the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory." Certainly, the birth of Jesus was the dawning prophesied in Isaiah 9:1!

There will be no *more* gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make *it* glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.

And yet, with all this connection to the birth and life of Jesus, the rest of the vision has not come true at that point so far in salvation history. The birth of Jesus did not transform Israel to reflect the

goodness and truth of God. Israel largely rejects Jesus. The nations do not stream towards the light of Zion with praise and tribute to God. Peace and righteousness do not replace government administration. Violence does not cease. God does not dwell physically with His people to replace the light of Sun and Moon, and mourning over sin and death is not eliminated.

So if the "when" is not during the life of Jesus Christ, is the "when" at Pentecost when the Church is born? Well, it is not clear that this prophecy intends for the church to replace Zion. That's not the language Isaiah uses. While all peoples are welcome, he maintains a distinction between Israel and the peoples of the world. But let's grant that perspective for the moment and say that we are supposed to interpret this chapter in light of the New Covenant people of God. The Church is Zion. The sons and daughters brought home to Zion are men and women of any race who have become children by faith in Jesus Christ.

Even so, the day of Pentecost gives only a tiny taste of that reality. Representatives of the nations respond, lives are transformed, but God's presence is not among us visibly as light. Violence has not ceased. And the letters of the New Testament do not show a state of transformation among Christians that suggests righteousness and peace alone are adequate for government administration.

So if this vision has not been realized during the life of Jesus or in the early Church, is this a vision that can be realized by the Church or by a particular expression of the Church at some point in time? Should this be our mission, our agenda to create a society like the one pictured here? Should we be striving to establish a society where there is no violence, where righteousness reigns, where everyone believes?

I would say "yes" and "no," a little more "no" than "yes."

This is a vision of the New Heaven and the New Earth. There is no mourning over sin. No need for courts and prisons. Righteousness and peace rule our hearts and behavior. Violence and oppression do not exist. There is complete security. God dwells among His people in physical presence. This is a radically transformed society. Can any community live up to this ideal in our present human reality?

It's important to note that we have the same problem with Isaiah's language about Zion as we do when the New Testament speaks about the Kingdom of Heaven. Present reality in some ways echoes a future reality. The Kingdom of Heaven really was present on Earth in a preliminary way when Jesus Christ was here Himself. That was a period of transition from Old Covenant to New Covenant. That is when the light of Isaiah 9 rose on Galilee of the Gentiles. That is when the son was born whose government would ever increase. Then He died, He rose, and He ascended into Heaven. Fifty days later the Church was born as a spiritual expression of that Kingdom, but not as a complete, physical manifestation of that Kingdom. His Kingdom is now and not yet. And just as our individual salvation is now and not yet - we wait for the redemption of our bodies so that we might live in a sinless state we also wait for the redemption of the Earth, so that the Kingdom of Heaven might exist on Earth in a sinless state. The full consummation of Heaven on Earth is future. There must be a radical transformation of individuals and a radical transformation of our physical environment - sin must be completely removed - for mourning to cease, and righteousness to reign, and Jesus to dwell with us. That will come about when the Conqueror returns a second time. Jesus comes as the Anointed Conqueror twice. He conquered death and sin on the cross as the Suffering Servant. He will come again to conquer all continuing forms of resistance, human and spiritual. More about Jesus as Conqueror in chapter 61. back to my "yes and no" answer.

In light of the first coming of Jesus, should we now try to realize this vision of Zion on Earth? Or, if this vision is future, after the second coming, does that let us off the hook? Are we free from any obligation to pursue this reality? My "yes" is that, yes, we should pursue this reality in a way that makes sense for our not-yet-redeemed state. Isaiah meant it when he wrote in 56:1, "preserve justice and do righteousness," and in 58:7-8, "divide your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into the house; when you see the naked, cover him, then your light will break out like the dawn." Jesus also meant it when He said, turn the other cheek, love your enemy, forgive as I

have forgiven you, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:16)."

God has begun to transform us in a very real way that enables us to be a light that will attract some to Him, to His glory because of what they see in us. And this future vision of Zion should work to motivate us to be the Moon that reflects the light of the Sun; to live in truth and goodness; to let the image of God in us shine forth, so that people will see His character. This vision does motivate us. This is our future inheritance. This is what will be, so we should embrace it as we can now.

At the same time, it is important to understand that the full realization of this vision is not possible now on Earth. People are sinful. Believers and non-believers both. The utopian dream of a society where there is no government, no police force, no courts, where righteousness and peace reign, that kind of society is not possible. That's a rejection of the reality of sin nature. If we can imagine a kind of society where all human beings, who are rebellious at heart, believe in God and try to live for God, that kind of society is only accomplishable through strict totalitarian rule. That's the only way to guarantee that everybody believes, is if we make them. A place where all human beings believe the same thing is a place where no dissent is tolerated, a place where contrary ideas are forbidden. There is only no violence in the streets when there is the threat and practice of extreme violence at the top. In our current reality, righteousness and peace can reign in a society only by name. We can call it righteousness and peace but it's imposed righteousness, it's an imposed peace. It's not an internal state of well-being.

The Puritan settlers of America believed in some sort of New Heaven in the New World. But if they wanted the native Americans to participate in a new Zion, they would have to force them to believe and act according to God's Word. It would not come naturally just by the light of Puritan life. And even if they closed native Americans outside the walls of a new Zion, they still brought their own sin with them. That is true of the first generation, but it becomes more and more apparent as their children reach adulthood. Some embraced the vision of their parents, but some not. Likemindedness in any nation is an illusion only mimicked by force.

Communism shares the same problem. The Marxist vision of an inevitable overturn of the capitalist middle class by the working class fails to understand the basics about the sinful human nature. Utopia is not inevitable, quite the reverse. People will go their own way. They will not be motivated to share everything they have. They will want to keep what they have earned. People are not going to give up their vacation home out of the goodness of their own heart. Lenin faced this problem by arguing for an elite ruling class that would bring about the vision of Marx by force. This elite would enforce the ideology. They would make everyone share. And then, theoretically, they would give up their power to the working class at the appropriate time, but that giving up of power has never happened in a Communist society. The people will never be ready for a natural Utopia.

Tom Holland, not Spiderman Tom Holland, but English historian Tom Holland, made this point on a history podcast I enjoy listening to called, "The Rest is History." Keep in mind as I read the quote that, even though Tom Holland believes Christianity has made a huge impact on human society, neither he nor his co-host Dominic Sandbrook are Christians. Still, they agree on this point. I am quoting Tom Holland from the Communism episode, March 28, 2021. He says,

"I think it is impossible to build Jerusalem on earth. I think Augustine is right that we are fallen, however you want to put it. Humans are not capable of living like that. And it is true of Communists. It's true of Christians. It's true of Muslims. Wherever you try and build the ideal state without acknowledging the fact that humans are humans and things are going to go wrong, you end up with disaster."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Tom Holland and Dominic Sandbrook. "Communism," The Rest Is History (podcast), March 28, 2021, accessed April 16, 2023. 33:53.

That's from non-Christian historians looking at the history of the world and why utopia will not work. The whole of the Old Testament reveals an inability of God's people to establish a righteous and just kingdom on earth. External law does not make good human beings.

This is why I say "yes" and "no" to the question of whether we should pursue this particular vision of Zion, and I am saying mostly "no."

I would say that our primary aim as Christians is not to establish a new Israel in the sense of a geopolitical nation that enforces belief in Jesus. I would say the fundamental expression of God's Kingdom on Earth is not a political community. It is a spiritual community, a voluntary community. It is the Church, made up of all those who truly believe in Jesus. Our aim should bring about the existence of spiritual communities made up of believers in Christ in every nation on Earth. And we should strive to make an impact in every society, influencing law and government, education and entertainment, caring for the poor and needy, giving witness to the goodness of God. We hold to a closed set of foundational beliefs centered on Jesus Christ. But we do not require others to agree with our beliefs. We respect those disagree with us. We see the image of God in them. We yearn for them to know Jesus. We also understand that people cannot be forced into faith. We want freedom of religion, freedom of speech in our society so that people can investigate beliefs sincerely and honestly. We also want some kind of checks and balances in government because we believe in the depravity of man, and that power corrupts. We want a police force because we do not believe in the natural goodness of man. We can't live as though this vision of Zion is possible until Christ comes back to remove evil, the demonic, sickness, sin within us, and death.

We do seek to be a light, a city on a hill, according to the fallen reality we live in. And we are strengthened by our firm hope in a future reality where sin and evil will be completely removed and the people of God will be fully transformed into the kind of people whose hearts and minds fully recognize and embrace the goodness and truth of God. This is our future, and it gives us great hope.

I'll end with Revelation 21:1-4, a sister passage to Isaiah 60. The two communicate the same reality: our hope for new Jerusalem.

<sup>1</sup> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, <sup>4</sup> and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."