



Isaiah – Light to the World

Background Notes 2

Use in conjunction with published notes.

Both passages in this week's study are from the later writer.

Passage 1 - Isaiah 56. 1-8

(WB2) Once again, in verse 1, we see important word pairs, justice and right, salvation and deliverance. In Isaiah 5:7, Israel is severely judged because it failed in justice and righteousness. In Isaiah 9:7, echoing Psalm 72:1, it is anticipated and insisted that Davidic power will be devoted to justice and righteousness for the poor and needy. Verse 2 states the consequence of enacting justice and righteousness and receiving Yahweh's salvation and deliverance, good fortune. Positively, the ground of fortune is sabbath observance, an observance that becomes definitional and urgent in the postexilic period as a distinctive mark of serious Judaism.

As God prepares the Jews to return from Exile, he tells them that more will be added to their number when they are all gathered in Jerusalem. Foreigners and eunuchs, two groups that were thought to have no place in the Temple, will soon be acceptable to God.

(JG)

Keeping sabbath now becomes the key marker of keeping the covenant of attaching oneself and ministering to Yahweh, of loving Yahweh, and being Yahweh's servants. It thus qualifies foreigners to bring their offerings and prayers in Yahweh's house, for Yahweh, who gathers the dispersed of Israel, intends to gather yet more in addition to the people already gathered. Foreigners and exiles have the same status; they are all people whom Yahweh is "gathering." Foreigners need not feel that just because of their ethnicity, they are the victims of the separation or distinction that Yahweh expects of the holy over against the ordinary or the clean over against the taboo. The fact that eunuchs cannot contribute to Israel's future growth as a people does not disbar them; for foreigners, the prophet declares, Yahweh's house is called a prayer

house for all peoples. Any group that wishes to commit itself in covenant to Yahweh can come there.

Passage 2 - Isaiah 60. 1-6

The end of Exile is at hand, and the Jews are to head home to Jerusalem with hope for the future.

(WB2) The poem appears to be a divine oracle, an assertion of promise in Yahweh's own mouth, even though, at times, Yahweh is spoken of in the third person. The oracle asserts Yahweh's unmitigated resolve to work goodness for Jerusalem that will feature safety, well-being, prosperity, abundance, and preeminence among the nations.

Verses 1-3 dramatically announce the primary theme that is to follow. Double imperative summoning Jerusalem to arise out of despair and lethargy into hope and buoyancy, in fact, the imperative is an assurance from Yahweh. The double imperative "arise, shine" is grounded in the assertion that "your light, the glory of Yahweh" has arisen. Jerusalem shall arise because Yahweh has arisen to power.

In the broader section, chapters 60-62, the poet looks toward a time when Jerusalem will be as God wants it.

(JG) The picture is gloriously developed in Isaiah 60-62. The world is in darkness, but Yahweh's light has dawned on Zion so that nations can walk by it. Its children are coming from afar. The wealth of the nations is coming from afar, too, for Zion's sake, to declare Yahweh's praise and bring offerings. The coming of that wealth benefits the city and glorifies Yahweh. These foreigners will build the city's walls, and the city will be splendidly appointed. All nations and kings are to serve it. This is "Zion of the Holy One of Israel." It will know Yahweh as its deliverer and restorer. It will be characterised by well-being and faithfulness rather than violence and ruin.