

Isaiah 62: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 0 0] Isaiah chapter 62. For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch.

The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no more be termed forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed desolate, but you shall be called, my delight is in her, and your land married.

For the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you. On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have set watchmen. All the day and all the night they shall never be silent. You who put the Lord in remembrance, take no rest, and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem, and makes it a praise in the earth. The Lord has sworn by his right hand, and by his mighty arm, I will not again give your grain to be food for your enemies, and foreigners shall not drink your wine for which you have labored. But those who garner it shall eat it and praise the Lord, and those who gather it shall drink it in the courts of my sanctuary. Go through, go through the gates, prepare the way for the people. Build up, build up the highway, clear it of stones, lift up a signal over the peoples. Behold, the Lord has proclaimed to the end of the earth. Say to the daughter of Zion, behold, your salvation comes. Behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. And they shall be called the holy people, the redeemed of the Lord. And you shall be called, sought out, a city not forsaken. Isaiah chapter 62 continues and concludes the chapters declaring the Lord's salvation that began in chapter 60. These chapters form the heart of the last section of the book. In many of the proposed orderings of the structure of this section, John Goldingays being one example, it forms a bookend with chapter 60 around chapter 61, which, with the proclamation of the day of the Lord's favour, lies at the centre. Chapter 61 ended with the following statement,

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord. My soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation. He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations. Discussing those verses, we considered who might be the speaker, considering the possibility, held by several commentators, that it might be Zion. However, it seemed more likely to me that the voice is that of the servant, with whose voice the chapter also begins. As the servant doesn't merely act on behalf of the people, but can also stand for them, he might be speaking not merely as an individual minister to the people, but also, particularly at the end of the chapter, as their representative. The identity of the speaker with whose words chapter 62 opens is also debated by scholars. Many are of the opinion that the Lord is the one speaking here, but others maintain that the words are those of the prophet. The way that we identify the speaker at the end of chapter 61 will influence us at this point. Goldengay, for instance, who identifies the speaker at the end of the preceding chapter of Zion, sees the speaker here as the Lord himself. If the speaker there were the prophet, it might be reasonable to read this as a continuation or another instance of his words, a reading which Prevord Charles, for instance, advocates, and which I find the more persuasive. The servant was commissioned and empowered by the Spirit to deliver the message of the Lord's salvation, a message that would be an effectual word. And now, for the sake of Zion, he will tirelessly and ceaselessly declare the good news of her redemption, until the message has taken its full effect and Zion is made radiant in the Lord's salvation. In these verses, we have a confirmation and

development of the promises of chapter 60, verses 1 to 3.

[4 : 25] The Lord's glory would be reflected in the restored city of Zion, and people from all nations would flock to her light. Zion is compared to a crown of beauty and a royal diadem in the Lord's hand.

The presence of these items in the Lord's hand is surprising, but the items themselves seem to symbolize royal authority. Their presence in the Lord's hand might represent his attention to and care for Zion. The Lord's sovereignty and his glory would be seen in his people and in the city of Jerusalem. Zion had come to be named for its ravaged and ruined condition, forsaken and desolate, however now it would be renamed for the Lord's loving concern for and commitment to her.

This invites comparisons with the use of the names of Hosea's children, for instance, as prophetic signs. Names that represented the sin and the fate of Israel were reversed with the expression of the Lord's renewed grace towards his rebellious people. The comparison of the young man marrying the young woman with the sons of Zion marrying Zion is a peculiar one to our ears, yet the imagery here is one of entering into possession of or dwelling in. The sons of Zion would enter into possession of Zion, commit themselves to her, and dwell within her. The Lord's relationship with his people as the divine bridegroom would also be expressed in his rejoicing over his restored people. Once again in verse 6, we face a difficult determination of the identity of a speaker. Scholars differ on this one too. Some understand it to be the Lord's voice, others that it is the voice of the prophet. Consideration of the identity of the watchman will likely play into our decision. The task that the watchmen are given is determined prayer and intercession for the good of the city. Their task seems to differ from that of the watchman who announced the return of the Lord to Zion earlier in the book, or the prophetic watchmen in Ezekiel who were called to warn the people of approaching danger. John Oswalt favours identifying these watchmen as angelic beings commissioned by the Lord to intercede for Zion. I am more inclined to see them with Brevard Charles as helpers for the prophet and appointed by him, the voice being that of the prophet once again. Persistent prayer would be made for the city, confident the Lord would hear their petitions. The Lord had brought bitter judgments on the people on account of their former unfaithfulness, but now all of that would be a matter of the past. The produce of the land would no longer be plundered, but would be enjoyed and feasted upon in the presence of the Lord. The chapter and the section that began with chapter 60 concludes in verses 10 to 12. Once more Jerusalem is assured of the nearness of its redemption. In chapter 57 verse 14 it was promised, and it shall be said, build up, build up, prepare the way, remove every obstruction from my people's way. Here the highway is being built up as promised. These verses also return to the language and imagery of places like chapter 40, with verse 10 of that chapter substantially repeated here. Verses 9 and 10 of chapter 40 read as follows. Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news. Lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news. Lift it up, fear not. Say to the cities of Judah, behold your God. Behold the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him. Behold his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. The preparation and clearing of the highway, and the raising of a signal to summon the peoples from the end of the earth, is a recurring motif in the book, as is the announcement of the advent of the Lord in salvation to Zion. The Lord's coming would herald Zion's redemption and glorification. It would also transform the identity of the city, which would be renamed as a result of its deliverance, and the Lord's steadfast love for her, and his seeking of her out in his grace.

A question to consider. How might Hosea's naming of his children, and Isaiah's naming of the children earlier in this book, help us better to understand the meaning of the renaming of Zion here?