

CHAPTER 61

INTRODUCTION TO ISAIAH 61

In this chapter both Christ and the church are introduced speaking, in their turns. It begins with the words of Christ, describing his work and office; his qualifications for it; the several parts and branches of it; and the ends to be answered by it; (²³⁰¹Isaiah 61:1-3), the reparation of the church; the feeding it by strangers; its being a holy priesthood; its enjoying the riches of the Gentiles; its having honour and joy, instead of shame and confusion; its prosperity in the work of the Lord, and the continuance of its spiritual offspring among the Gentiles, are prophesied of in (²³⁰⁴Isaiah 61:4-9), and then the church is represented as rejoicing in the Lord, on account of her being clothed with his righteousness, so ornamental to her, (²³¹⁰Isaiah 61:10) and the chapter is concluded with a promise of her righteousness and glory appearing before all the nations of the world; of which the following chapter is an illustrious prophecy, (²³¹¹Isaiah 61:11).

Ver. 1. *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, &c.*] According to the Targum, these are the words of the prophet concerning himself; and so say Aben Ezra and Kimchi; but the latter elsewhere says ^{f1201} they are the words of the Messiah, who should say, “because the Lord hath anointed me”, &c.; and another of their writers ^{f1202} is in a doubt about them; either, says he, they are the words of the prophet with respect to the Messiah, or the words of the prophet concerning himself; but there is no doubt but the Messiah himself is the person speaking, as appears from (⁴⁰¹⁷Luke 4:17-21), on whom the Spirit of God was; not his grace and gifts only, but the person of the Spirit, the third Person in the Trinity, equal with the Father and the Son; to whom several divine actions are ascribed, and to whom many things relating to Christ are attributed, and who is described as residing on him, and who, by the baptist, was seen upon him, (²³¹⁰Isaiah 11:2 ³⁰¹²John 1:32,33) the phrase denotes his continuance with him, whereby he was qualified, as man and Mediator, for his office:

because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek: not the Lord, the Spirit that was upon him, for Christ was anointed with the Holy Ghost; but Jehovah the, Father, he was the anointer of Christ, by

whom he was anointed in some sense from everlasting, being invested by him with the office of Mediator, (~~2182~~ Proverbs 8:21) and in the fulness of time, in the human nature, at his birth and baptism, with the Holy Spirit, his gifts and grace, without measure, (~~1957~~ Psalm 45:7 ~~4418~~ Acts 10:38), hence he has the name of Messiah or Anointed, and from him his people have the anointing which teacheth all things: and hereby he was qualified, as a prophet, to preach good tidings to the meek; such as are sensible of sin, and humbled for it; submit to the righteousness of Christ; ascribe all they have to the grace of God and have a mean opinion of themselves, and patiently bear every affliction: or “poor”, as in (~~1048~~ Luke 4:18), the poor of this world, and as to their intellectuals, and spirit, who are sensible of their spiritual poverty, and seek the true riches, to these the Gospel is “good tidings”; and to such Christ preached good tidings concerning, the love, grace, and mercy of God; concerning peace, pardon, righteousness, life and salvation, by himself; concerning the kingdom of God, and the things appertaining to it:

he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted; whose hearts are smitten and made contrite by the Spirit and Word of God, and are truly humbled under a sense of sin; who are cut to the heart, have wounded spirits, and in great pain; these Christ binds up, by speaking comfortably to them; by applying his blood; by discovering the free and full pardon of their sins; and for this, as Mediator, he had a mission and commission from his Father; he came not of himself, but he sent him:

to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening, of the prison to them that are bound; to such who were captives to sin, Satan, and the law, and as it were prisoners to them, shut up by them, and in them, and held fast there; but Christ, as he is the author of liberty; obtains it for his people, and makes them free with it, so he proclaims it in the Gospel; a liberty from sin, from the damning and governing power of it; a freedom from the curse and condemnation of the law; a deliverance from Satan, as of a prey from the mighty, or as of prisoners from the prison house. The allusion is to the proclamation of liberty, in the year of jubilee, (~~1850~~ Leviticus 25:10 ~~240~~ Isaiah 49:9). The Targum is,

“to the prisoners appear in light.”

It may be rendered, “open clear and full light to the prisoners”^{f1203}, so Aben Ezra interprets it; (see Gill on “~~1048~~ Luke 4:18”).

Ver. 2. *To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, &c.*] Not an exact year, but time in general; for such are wrong, who from hence conclude that Christ's public ministry lasted but a year, since it is certain, by the passovers he kept, that it must be at least three or four years; the whole time of Christ on earth was an acceptable and desirable time, what many great personages desired to see, and did not: this time may take in the whole Gospel dispensation, which was ushered in by Christ: the allusion, as before observed, is to the year of jubilee, when there was a proclamation of liberty; of release of debts; of restoration of inheritances, and of cessation from work; all which must make it an acceptable year: and this proclamation was made on the day of atonement; and Jarchi interprets the phrase here of a "year of reconciliation"; or "the year of atonement to the Lord", as it maybe rendered^{f1204}; this was made by the sacrifice of Christ, and is proclaimed in the Gospel, and makes a most considerable part of it. It may be rendered, "the year of the good will of the Lord"^{f1205}; and such was the time of Christ's coming on earth, to save men, and make peace and reconciliation for them, (^{424}Luke 2:14) and was an "acceptable time" indeed; acceptable to the Lord himself; as were the incarnation of Christ, his obedience and righteousness, his sufferings and death, his sacrifice and satisfaction; since hereby the perfections of God were glorified, his purposes fulfilled, his covenant confirmed, and his people saved: acceptable to men; as were the birth of Christ; the things done by him; peace made, pardon procured, righteousness brought in, and salvation wrought out; all which must be acceptable to such who are lost, and know it, and are sensible that nothing of their own can save them; (see ^{5015}1 Timothy 1:15)

the day of vengeance of our God; when vengeance was taken on sin, in the person of Christ; when he destroyed the works of the devil, the devil himself, and spoiled principalities and powers; when he abolished death, and was the plague and destruction of that and the grave; when he brought wrath to the uttermost on the Jews for the rejection of him, who would not have him to reign over them; and who will take vengeance on antichrist at his spiritual coming, and upon all the wicked at the day of judgment. Kimchi understands this of the day when God shall take vengeance on Gog and Magog.

To comfort all that mourn: that are under afflictions, and mourn for them; and under a sense of sin, and mourn for that; who mourn for their own sins, indwelling sin, and their many actual transgressions; and for the sins of others, of profane persons, and especially professors of religion; these

Christ comforts by his Spirit, by his word and ministers, by his promises, by his ordinances, and by the discoveries, of pardoning grace and mercy,

Ver. 3. *To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion*, &c.] Or, “to the mourners of Zion”^{f1206}; such who are of Zion, belong to the church of God, and mourn for the corruptions in Zion’s doctrines; for the perversion, abuse, and neglect of Zion’s ordinances; for the disorders and divisions in Zion; for the declensions there, as to the exercise of grace, and the power of godliness; for the few instances of conversions there, or few additions to it; for the carelessness, ease, and lukewarmness of many professors in Zion; and for their unbecoming lives and conversations. Now one part of Christ’s work is to “appoint” comfort to such; he has appointed it in counsel and covenant from eternity; made provision for it in the blessings and promises of his grace; he has “set”^{f1207} or put it in the ministry of the word; he has ordered his ministering servants to speak comfortably to his people; yea, by his Spirit he “puts” comfort into the hearts of them, who through their unbelief refuse to be comforted; and he has fixed a time when he will arise and have mercy on Zion, and bring her into a better state than she is now in, when there will be none of these causes of complaint and mourning:

to give unto them beauty for ashes; in the Hebrew text there is a beautiful play on words, which cannot be so well expressed in our language, “to give peer for epher”^{f1208}; in times of mourning, it was usual to put on sackcloth and ashes, (¹⁷⁰⁰Esther 4:1,3 ¹⁸⁰⁰Job 2:8,10 ¹⁹⁰⁰John 3:5,6), instead of this, Christ gives his mourners the beautiful garments of salvation, and the robe of his righteousness, and the graces of his Spirit, and his gracious presence, together with his word and ordinances, and sometimes a large number of converts; all which, as they are ornamental to his people, they yield them joy, peace, and comfort: and this is a beauty that is not natural to them, but is of grace; not acquired, but given; not fictitious, but real; is perfect and complete, lasting and durable, and desired by Christ himself, who gives it:

the oil of joy for mourning; oil used to be poured on the heads of persons at entertainments and festivals, and at times of rejoicing; and so is opposed to the state of mourners, who might not be anointed, as the Jewish commentators observe; (see ¹⁴²⁰Psalms 23:5 ²⁰⁰⁰Ecclesiastes 9:7 ⁴⁰⁰⁰Matthew 6:17) the grace of the Spirit without measure, with which Christ was anointed, is called “the oil of gladness”, (³⁹⁰⁰Psalms 45:7) and of the same nature, though not of the same measure, is the grace which saints have from Christ; the effect of which is joy and gladness, even joy

unspeakable, and full of glory; which is had in believing in Christ, and through a hope of eternal life by him; hence we read of the joy of faith, and of the rejoicing of hope: this oil is Christ's gift, and not to be bought with money; this holy unction comes from him; this golden oil is conveyed from him, through the golden pipes of the word and ordinances; is very valuable, of great price, and to be desired; and, being had, cannot be lost; it is the anointing that abides:

the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; such as is in persons under afflictions, or under a sense of sin, a load of guilt, and expectation of wrath; such as have heavy hearts, contrite and contracted^{f1209} ones, as the word is observed to signify; for as joy enlarges the heart, sorrow contracts it; instead of which, a garment of praise, or an honourable one, is given; alluding to persons putting on of raiment suitable to their characters and circumstances, at seasons of rejoicing, such as weddings, and the like, (²³⁰⁷Ecclesiastes 9:7,8 ⁴²²¹Matthew 22:11,12) by which may be meant here the robe of Christ's righteousness later mentioned, (²³¹⁰Isaiah 61:10) so called because worthy of praise, for the preferableness of it to all others, being the best robe; for its perfection and purity; for the fragrancy and acceptableness of it to God, and for its eternal duration; also, because it occasions and excites praise in such on whom it is put; and such likewise shall have praise of God hereafter, when on account of it they shall be received into his kingdom and glory:

that they might be called trees of righteousness; that is, that the mourners in Zion, having all these things done for them, and bestowed on them, might be called, or be, or appear to be, like "trees" that are well planted; whose root is in Christ, whose sap is the Spirit and his grace, and whose fruit are good works; and that they might appear to be good trees, and of a good growth and stature, and be laden with the fruits of righteousness, and be truly righteous persons, made so by the imputation of Christ's righteousness to them: "the planting of the Lord"; planted by him in Christ, and in his church, and so never to be rooted out:

that he might be glorified; by their fruitfulness and good works, (⁴¹⁵⁸John 15:8 ⁴⁰⁵⁶Matthew 5:16) or that he might glorify himself, or get himself glory by them; (see Gill on "²³¹²Isaiah 60:21").

Ver. 4. *And they shall build the old wastes, &c.*] The captives set at liberty, and who are called trees of righteousness, and the planting of the Lord; righteous and good men, who shall be employed in the spiritual

building of the church in Gospel times, and especially in the latter day; for here begins an account of the benefits and blessings the church of Christ should partake of, particularly at the time of the calling and conversion of the Jews: after having described the work and office of the Messiah, and his fitness for it, the Holy Ghost returns to the same subject with the preceding chapter, and which is carried on in the next. What is here said was literally true, when the Jews returned from Babylon, and built their ruined houses and cities; or, at least, there is an allusion to it: but it respects either the setting up of the interest of Christ, and forming churches in the Gentile world, where nothing but blindness and ignorance reigned; where there were no preaching nor ordinances, but all things were in ruin and confusion; as they were before the ministry of the Gospel by the apostles, who were wise master builders, and instruments of converting multitudes, and of raising churches to the honour of the great Redeemer there: or rather it respects the building up of the tabernacle of David, that is fallen down, or the church of God among the Jews, which will be in the latter day, when they are turned to the Lord, (^{<A0B>}Amos 9:11) and the same sense have all the following expressions,

they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations; setting forth the desolate state and condition of the Jews; their long continuance in it, age after age; and their recovery and restoration, when they shall become a flourishing people again, both in civil and spiritual things.

Ver. 5. *And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks,* &c.] The several congregated churches of Christ, which shall be set among them, compared to flocks of sheep, as they often are; and which shall be fed with knowledge and understanding, with the words of faith and sound doctrine, by pastors of the Gentile race; who shall be raised up by Christ, and shall freely, and faithfully, and constantly perform the office they are called unto; (see ^{<A0B>}Acts 20:28):

and the sons of the alien shall be your ploughmen, and your vinedressers: the sons of Gentiles, who were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, (^{<A0B>}Ephesians 2:12), but now being converted and brought to the knowledge of Christ, and gifted by him, will be of eminent service in his church; which, as it is “God’s husbandry”, (^{<A0B>}1 Corinthians 3:9) shall be filled and cultivated by them; the fallow ground of men’s hearts shall be ploughed up by them, with the

plough of the Gospel the Lord succeeding their labours; and the seed of the word sown in them, which, by the blessing of God, shall take root, spring up, and bring forth fruit. And whereas the church of God is compared to a vineyard, and particular churches of Christ to vines; such men as are called by grace from among the Gentiles, and have received gifts from Christ, shall be the keepers and dressers of these vines, plant, and prune, and water them, and do everything requisite unto them; (see ²⁰¹⁵Song of Solomon 2:15 7:12 8:11,12).

Ver. 6. *But ye shall be named the priests of the Lord,* &c.] Or, “and ye shall be named”, &c. which Jerom understands of the builders of cities, pastors of flocks, the ploughmen and vinedressers, the strangers and the sons of the alien, that these also should be called priests: but rather it designs the Jews, when they shall be called and converted, and when there will be no more the distinction of priests and common people, but they shall all be kings and priests unto God, a royal priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices to him, all ceremonial ones being at an end:

men shall call you the ministers of our God; Christian men shall call, own, and acknowledge you to be the servants of Christ, of Immanuel, God with us, having professed faith in him, and submitted to his ordinances:

ye shall eat the riches of the Gentiles; converted Gentiles, who shall join themselves with Jewish converts in the same church state; who shall bring their wealth with them, and with it support the interest of Christ; (see ²⁰¹⁵Isaiah 60:5,9,11,16,17), or this may be understood of their spiritual riches, the unsearchable riches of Christ revealed in the Gospel, which the Gentiles have long possessed, but now the Jews shall have a share with them:

and in their glory shall you boast yourselves; not in being the seed of Abraham, as formerly; in birth privileges, in carnal rites and ceremonies, such as circumcision and others; but in what is the glory of the Gentiles, Christ himself, who is their glory, and of whom they glory; as also his Gospel, and the ordinances of it, which are the glory of every nation possessed of them: or, “ye shall delight yourselves”^{f1210}; in the Lord; in communion and conversation with his people, and in the enjoyment of the privileges of his house with them: or, “ye shall lift up or exalt yourselves”, or “be exalted”^{f1211}; to the same degree of honour and glory, being all kings and priests unto God.

Ver. 7. *For your shame you shall have double*, &c.] Or, “for your double shame”^{f1212}; instead of being a reproach, a proverb, a taunt, and a curse, as the Jews now are everywhere; being converted, they will have double honour, both in things civil and religious, be in great esteem with Christ, and all his people:

and for confusion they shall rejoice in their portion; instead of the confusion and reproach they have long lain under; or of that they shall be thrown into, when first awakened and convinced of their sin, of unbelief and rejection of the Messiah; they shall rejoice in Christ their portion, and in all those spiritual blessings they will see themselves blessed with in him; they will now have the double portion of the firstborn, they once were, and to which there may be an allusion, as some think; or, as others, to the double portion of the spirit of Elijah on Elisha; they shall now have the spirit of grace and supplication poured upon them, and all the gifts and graces of the Spirit bestowed on them, all which will be cause of joy and rejoicing to them:

therefore in their land they shall possess the double; not only in the land of the Gentiles, where they have suffered reproach, shall they have double honour; but in their own land, the land of Israel, to which they shall be restored; they shall enjoy great plenty of all kind of blessings, temporal and spiritual:

everlasting joy shall be unto them; for after this they shall no more be carried captive, or be dispossessed either of their civil or religious privileges; (see ²³⁵¹⁰ Isaiah 35:10).

Ver. 8. *For I the Lord love judgment*, &c.] To do that which is right and just himself, and to see it done by others, and therefore he will right the wrongs of his people; and whereas the Jews, though they have justly suffered his vengeance for their sins, yet being reproached and abused beyond measure by the Gentiles, among whom they are dispersed; the Lord will look in mercy upon them, and will deliver and save them, and bestow favours plentifully on them, as in the preceding verse: or the Lord loves strict justice and real righteousness, and will not be put off with an imperfect righteousness in the room of a perfect one, and much less an insincere and hypocritical one, such as that of the unbelieving Jews, the pharisaical sect of them; nothing less is acceptable to God than a perfect righteousness, which is adequate to the demands of law and justice; and

such a righteousness is not to be found among men, only in his Son Jesus Christ, and with which he is well pleased, (^{2302b}Isaiah 42:21):

I hate robbery for burnt offering; that which is stolen, though it be converted into a burnt offering: or, “with a burnt offering”^{f1213}; all immorality, this being put for the whole, along with ceremonial sacrifices; as if it could be atoned for by them, or would be connived at on account of them: or,

by burnt offering; expiation of theft, or any other sin, by the sacrifices of the law, being offered up without faith in Christ; and especially since the great sacrifice, the antitype of them, is offered up; and therefore God will have no more offered up, they are displeasing and hateful to him, (^{2301b}Isaiah 1:12,13 ^{3801b}Hebrews 10:5-8):

and I will direct their work in truth; appoint them work and service of a spiritual nature, and direct them, and enable them to perform it in spirit and in truth, in opposition to the carnal and shadowy ordinances of the ceremonial law; (see ^{404b}John 4:23,24):

and I will make an everlasting covenant with them; that is, renew the everlasting covenant of grace with them, make it manifest unto them; apply the grace and bestow the blessings of it to and on them, (^{612b}Romans 11:25-27).

Ver. 9. *And their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people, &c.*] Not only the Jews will be converted as a body in the latter day, but there will be a succession of converts among them in later ages, and will be known among Christian Gentiles by their faith and love, and good works and holy conversation; and will be taken notice of and acknowledged by them as brethren, and will be famous among them for religion and godliness:

all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed; that they are the spiritual seed of Abraham, as well as his carnal seed, and are blessed with him; blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ, with faith in him, and with every other grace.

Ver. 10. *I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, &c.*] These are not the words of the prophet spoken in his own person, rejoicing in the goodness of the Lord to his people and countrymen; nor of Christ; but of the church,

especially the Jewish church, expressing her joy for benefits received, as declared in the preceding verses. The Targum is,

“Jerusalem said, rejoicing I will rejoice in the Word of the Lord;”

not in his word of promise, but in his essential Word, his Son the Messiah; in his person, offices, fulness, righteousness, and salvation:

my soul shall be joyful in my God; in Christ, in that he is God, and so able to save to the uttermost, and keep from a final and total falling, and to preserve safe to his kingdom and glory: hence his person is excellent; his blood precious; his righteousness valuable; and his sacrifice efficacious; and all matter of joy to the believer: and who also rejoices in that he is his God, “my God”; God in our nature; Immanuel, God with us; the God-man and Mediator, through whom there is access to God and acceptance with him; and who stands in near relation to his people, and has all fullness to supply their wants, and makes all he has theirs; so that, they have great reason to rejoice in him indeed. The Targum is,

“my soul shall rejoice in the salvation of my God;”

the nature of this joy may be collected from the text itself: it is not a carnal one, or the joy of a carnal man in carnal things, it is spiritual; nor a pharisaical joy, a rejoicing in a man’s self, in his own works of righteousness, for this “is in the Lord”; nor is it a hypocritical one, or only externally, for it is the soul that rejoices; and it is the joy of faith, or in the Lord, as “my God”; and a very great one it is, joy unspeakable, and full of glory; and is what continues, as the matter and ground of it always does, as follows: “for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation”; with salvation as garments; the salvation of Christ, which, like garments, is without men, being wrought out by Christ; and is brought near, and applied by the spirit of Christ; and is all around, and encompasses the saints as such, and like them beautifies and adorns them, and keeps them warm and comfortable, when they have the joys of it; and which secures them from the storms of divine wrath and vengeance; and the plural number being used may denote the fulness and completeness of this salvation, from all sin, from wrath, hell, and damnation, and from every enemy: and this is matter of joy to the believer interested in it, and clothed with it; since it is a salvation so great; a garment so fitting and suitable, and had at free cost; and in which the glory of all the divine perfections is so conspicuous, as well as it being so full, complete, and perfect, and an everlasting one:

he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness: not with her own, that is a rag, and not a robe, and a filthy one too, (^{<2616>}Isaiah 64:6) and no covering, and is indeed no righteousness, properly speaking; but the righteousness of Christ, the best robe, the wedding garment, and change of raiment, which, like a robe, is upon believers, but not in them; it in Christ, and imputed to them; it covers their persons and their nakedness, and all their sins, so as not to be seen with the eye of avenging justice: to clothe and cover with it is God's act of imputation, and Christ's application of it by his Spirit, (^{<3814>}Zechariah 3:4), which, perceived by the believer, causes great joy; it being all of a piece, like Christ's seamless robe, and so pure and spotless, so perfect and complete, and so rich and glorious:

as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments; or, "adorns" himself

in a princely or priestly manner^{f1214}; for the word used signifies both. The sense is, as a bridegroom puts on the best clothes he has on his wedding day, and makes the appearance of a prince in his richest robes, or as the high priest when he had on all his sacerdotal garments; so the Targum,

"as a bridegroom that flourishes in his bridechamber, and as the high priest who is adorned with his garments:"

and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels; or "implements"^{f1215}; and makes herself as fine as she can, to recommend herself to her spouse and her friends: thus richly and magnificently arrayed is the church of Christ, and every believer, being clothed with his righteousness; he and they are in the same relation; he is the bridegroom, they the bride; and they are clothed alike with the garment down to the foot; and are righteous as he is righteous; and are herewith as a bride adorned and made ready for her husband; and the joy at such a solemnity fitly expresses the mutual joy of Christ and his church; (see ^{<6607>}Revelation 19:7,8 21:2 ^{<2515>}Isaiah 62:5) so Christ's righteousness is compared to a wedding garment, (^{<4112>}Matthew 22:12).

Ver. 11. *For as the earth bringeth forth her bud*, &c.] Of tender grass in the spring of the year, after a long and cold winter, being well manured:

and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth being enclosed, and better taken care of, and well watered, and dunged, and cultivated; seeds sown in such a rich soil spring up freely, strongly, and constantly:

so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations; that is, the righteousness and salvation of his people through Christ, by which they shall be justified and saved; and on account of which they shall praise the Lord, and shall be to honour and praise themselves, being interested in those blessings in the sight of all the Christian nations around them. It respects the conversion of the Jews, and their justification and salvation, and the suddenness of it, and the large numbers of them converted, who should rise up at once like the buds of grass out of the earth; and denotes the flourishing condition in which they shall be, like a garden abounding with all manner of flowers and fruit; and suggests how full of joy, thankfulness, and praise to God they should be, and how honourable in the sight of men; and all this will be the Lord's doing, and owing to his efficacious grace. The Targum is,

“so the Lord God will reveal the righteousness and praise of Jerusalem before all the people.”