

Prayer

Heavenly Father, You are a God of mercy. Have mercy today on all who struggle day with work, with family, with life itself, and also with faith. Have compassion on all who are depressed, and save them from its cruel destructive web. Give us Your love and understanding as we walk alongside those who suffer in this way; and may they be drawn back to hope in You. In the name of Jesus, AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

(Offering alternatives that can broaden your experience of prayer)

Prayer ideas

Stay quiet before the Lord today and listen. Be ready to hear things when you least expect them, and be willing to receive what might surprise you.

On-going prayers

- **Pray for your family.** *Pray today for those who are older, and also those you remember who have already died. Pray that God will protect these people in their older years, and that they will be blessed with happiness in their later years.*
- *Pray for engineers who are searching for alternative fuels for the future. Pray that such research will be done to the glory of God*
- *Give thanks to God for your friends and for the many ways they bless you*

Meditation

Treasure your life, though it may seem hard at times;
For your courage is the starting point of greater things,
And the Lord delights to use a willing heart.

Enjoy your life, even if you have to work at it;
For perseverance brings the great prize of joy,
And the Lord will bless your love of life.

Be careful with your life, it has value beyond price;
For the Creator loves each one that He has made,
And the Lord has given His life for yours.

Give your life away, to friends as well as enemies
For as you do, you gain far more than you can ever lose
And the Lord will say to you at last; 'well done'!

Bible passage - Isaiah 60:1-5

- ¹ Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD has risen on you.
- ² For look! darkness covers the earth,
and thick clouds the peoples;
but the LORD will arise over you,
and His glory will be seen over you.
- ³ Nations will travel to your light,
and kings to the brilliance of your dawn.
- ⁴ Lift up your eyes all around and see;
they have all gathered together and come to you;
your sons will come from far away,

- with your daughters supported at the side.
- ⁵ Then you will see and be radiant;
your heart will swell with awe,
because the wealth of the sea will be brought to you,
the wealth of the nations will come to you.
-

Bible Study

Review

Chapter 60 begins the last section of Isaiah's prophecy, which describes the glory of God's work of redemption. The nature of the prophecy changes, and if you could read the Hebrew of the original text, you would find this part of it quite distinct. Just as Paul's great prayer of praise in Ephesians 1 is one long sentence, which repeats phrases and themes with phrases tumbling over each other and with no clear beginning and end, the same is true of Isaiah 60! The great prophet appears to have been caught up in a vision so glorious that his language bubbles over with loosely connected prophetic phrases with great expressive power. Such matters are not merely technical, they are perfectly understandable; for we all know that when people become excited, they forget themselves and tend to go 'on and on', as we might say! But few of us do so with prophetic power!

Isaiah was caught up in a vision of God's glory, and in attempting to describe it his words portray a range of very human emotional response to such wonders. Psalm 72 is an Old Testament passage that contains many themes similar to those found in Isaiah 60, speaking of justice, prosperity, peace, worldly rule, blessings and abundance. Its theme is that of the glory of God given to a king, and it is ascribed (see verse 1) to Solomon. It is tempting to wonder whether Isaiah's prophecy was written with Psalm 72 in mind (and perhaps other scriptures), but applied by him to the Servant! Most Christians know what it is like to have related scripture come to mind when speaking about things of spiritual importance.

Here in this great passage, Isaiah is inspired to describe the Lord's glory in several distinct ways; each of these are highly significant and the first of them is the theme of 'light'. Earlier in Isaiah we heard the Lord declare that He intended His people to be a '*light to the nations*' (42:6, 49:6), but they had failed in their task. However, the Servant was the One who brought the light of God's redemption. Isaiah prophesied earlier, '*Then Your light will break forth from the dawn and your healing will quickly appear ...*' (58:8), but he now prophesied as if seeing that light directly. The long awaited light that had appeared to shine so dimly in the past was now unmistakably visible; '*Arise, shine, your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen on you*' (60:1)!

On earth, of course, it is only possible to see this light against the dark clouds of God's judgement (60:2), but nothing could stop the progress of God's glory; Isaiah continues, '*nations will travel to your light, and kings to the brilliance of your dawn!*' (60:3). Having said so much previously about how God's people reacted to the coming of the Servant (chs. 54-59), Isaiah now prophesies quite differently. His vision is of God's glorious re-creative work bringing His people together and fulfilling God's intention to draw not just the Jewish people together, but all who respond to the Servant. For the light has been revealed by the Servant!

Isaiah prophesied on a number of occasions about the gathering together of God's people. He undoubtedly believed that it was always God's intention to gather and unite His people (see 11:2, 40:11, 43:5 etc.) in Zion and provide for them (see also 59:20). However, in describing Zion, Isaiah seems sometimes to be speaking about Jerusalem as a real place, but he mostly speaks about Zion as God's place of spiritual dwelling with His people. In this way, Isaiah talks of Zion in rather the same way as Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God.

It is very important for Christians to spot this and avoid a certain amount of misunderstanding. For if we think this passage is only about the Jews and their return to Jerusalem, then we limit what God reveals. The glory of God is shown not merely in the salvation of Jews in any time or place, however impressive this might be. It is shown in His salvation of all who have faith in the Servant, and His ultimate gathering of these people in His glory!

Going Deeper

The Bible study goes deeper to look at:

- The light (60:1-3)
- The gathering (60:4-5)

Notes on the text and translation

V1 **'Arise, shine'**

When the Hebrew language uses two 'imperative' commands in this fashion, it always indicates the powerful will of God (see, for example, the first two words of Jonah 'Get up and go ...') In the context of prophecy, it probably indicates something that is 'absolutely certain' to happen.

V2 **'darkness covers the earth and thick clouds the peoples'**

This sentence is often translated 'and thick darkness the peoples.' However, the word for darkness refers to the thick clouds within which God dwells in judgement. This is the darkness of God's justice and wrath, rather than a cloud of darkness of evil (see Ezekiel 34:12

V3 **'kings to the brilliance of your dawn.'**

You will be used to the phrase 'kings to the brightness of your dawn.' However, the Hebrew word used here, 'nogah', means 'clarity' as well as 'intensity' of light and the lord's intention is that people should be able to see not blinded!

V4 **'with your daughters supported at the side'**

This is my rendering of the Hebrew which is fairly close the Hebrew. Some translators feel that this is rather incomprehensible and infer from this that children are 'carried on the hip' (ESV), or perhaps 'carried on their nurses arms (NRSV). I have left it as it is, and we will look at what it means in the study.

V5 **'the wealth of the sea will be brought to you'**

The is a fairly literal translation of the Hebrew, but the word for 'brought to you' could equally mean 'turned to you'. This makes us think that Isaiah prophesies the returning to God's people something they previously benefitted from (see notes)

Going Deeper

We will have to study this passage further to discover whether there are any specific secrets and revelations to be found within this prophecy. However, we must start with the bold picture of wonder and awe at a God who intervenes in human history to bring the light of His redemption and glory, and the anticipation of the return of all people to their Creator.

The light (60:1-3)

What does Isaiah mean by talking about the coming of the Redeemer to Zion (as announced in 59:20 just prior to our passage), as being like light? We have already noted that Isaiah talks about the blessings of God as a 'light to the Gentiles' (see above), but is that all it means? In a few places in the Old Testament, there is a hint of an idea more common in the New Testament, of light which demonstrates the powerful work of God in the individual. Jonathan ate some honey, his eyes 'brightened' and he subsequently showed inner strength to stand against the inconsequential stupidity of his father Saul who had forbidden his troops to eat on the day of battle (1 Sam 14:27f.) Job's friend Zophar recommends Job to confess his sin so that his life might shine 'brighter' in comparison to its 'darkness' (Job did not accept that he had sinned, but the illustration is still relevant); and Proverbs also uses 'light' to speak of inner 'righteousness' (Prov 4:18) set against the darkness of wickedness. Lastly, most people know about the famous occasion when Moses' face 'shone' after he had been with the Lord God on the mountain (Exodus 34:29)

Because of these and other Old Testament references it is possible to say that the Old Testament supports the idea that 'light' is a reference to the spiritual work of grace and blessing within people as individuals or as a group, which expresses their righteousness in God's eyes. Of course, this righteousness is something experienced only occasionally in the Old Testament as the promise of a greater thing to come. In his vision, Isaiah perceived that it was the Lord's intention to make the light of His righteousness available to all.

The prophecy emphatically describes the rising of God's light like the dawn of a new day, or the sunlight breaking out from behind dark clouds (60:2,3). It is easy for us to understand these natural images, but spiritually, the light has come in the Redeemer, announced in the previous verses in chapter 59 (59:20). In addition, this revelation has come to all those who are willing to receive the Redeemer and His work of redemption. If you read the first three verses carefully, the picture you gain is like this. God's people can shine because God has come in the form of the Redeemer. The glory of God in the Redeemer shines above and beyond the dark clouds of judgement on earth, and because it continues to shine 'on' His people, they too begin to shine, creating a new dawn on earth of the reflected glory of God in the life of His people. This

is what is seen by 'nations and kings' (60:3), a phrase typical of Isaiah describing all human authority on earth; and the world is drawn to the Redeemer by the reflected light of His glory in the life of His people.

The gathering (60:4-5)

The Lord God does not display His glory simply to show off! In verse 4, an emphatic command is issued; 'lift up your eyes ... and see' because the result of the revelation of God's glory is becoming evident on earth. Throughout the Old Testament there are descriptions of ingathering, and the idea begins with the long held desire of God's people ever since the dispersal of Israel by Assyria for its reunification (Nehemiah 1:9, Isaiah 11:4, Psalm 106:47). Isaiah began with this picture, but almost throughout his prophecy, the picture of ingathering reaches out beyond this to picture a time when God will do a new work (40:11, 43:5,9 etc.), gathering not the twelve tribes of Israel, but 'the nations'. In addition, He does not gather them to Zion simply to judge them and receive their allegiance (see Psalm 2, for example), Isaiah perceives that the word of God's redemption will become available to them, and their gathering will come as a result of His redeeming work by means of the Servant (54:7, 56:8).

What Isaiah says is extraordinary because it clarifies the worldwide vision of redemption already hinted at in more ways than one. It is difficult for us to understand the sheer amazement that must have greeted such prophecies. It simply does not do justice to this passage of scripture for people to suggest (as many do) that the in gathering referred to in this passage of scripture is simply an exaggerated description of the re-gathering of the remnant of Israel after the Exile. We know for a fact (through the reports of Ezra and Nehemiah) that the reality of this ingathering was a slow a painful process and one which was deeply controversial in its own day. Isaiah's prophecy, however, may have influenced what happened, but stands above it, appealing to us to see that this is God's eternal purpose.

What the prophecy reveals is that the Lord God will bring people together in peace and in the light of His redemption. One of the pictures presented within Isaiah's prophecy is not well understood to this day, and this can be seen in the way that it is mis-translated in many Bible versions; this is the second half of verse 4, 'your sons will come from far away with your daughters supported at the side.' As I have pointed out above, this is a quite literal translation of the Hebrew, but many translators believe that this refers to the carrying of children or nursing infants! The evidence for these interpretations is slim, hence the disagreements between Bible versions. If, however, you look carefully at the words themselves, is it not possible to suggest that this refers to men and women coming to the Lord in the full unity of the image of marriage, i.e. man and wife? Remember that in Genesis 2, Eve was made 'from the side' (from a rib) of a man, so if the Lord's daughters are described as 'at the side' of the sons, could this represent the proper unity of marriage in the image of God (Gen 1:27)?

It is possible that there are other explanations of this text, but I suggest that a vision of men and women coming to the Lord in their God-given partnership and equality as the image of God is a spiritually awesome sight. How we long for men and women today to be renewed in the image of God within marriage? The traditional understanding of the words 'then you will see and be radiant; your heart will swell with awe ...' are that they refer to the wealth brought to God's people (see v5); but as we will see in the coming verses of chapter 60, many phrases overlap and meanings are carried over from one phrase to another. Isaiah's great visionary poem of the glory of God is profoundly hard to 'pin down' in places because of the sense of amazement and spiritual insight.

Application

There are times when each of us become overwhelmed by the immensity of something wonderful; and if this something is the glory of God, then how incredible the vision must be! In addition, if the wonder and the vision is far beyond anything anyone has ever seen of the things of God, then surely our words would become almost over-expressive, as these words are. On the one hand, they are inspirational, for people of all ages and times can read 'arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen on you!' and the words mean something spiritually powerful which one can hardly express in any other way. On the other hand, these words pick up themes from God's Word which can be researched and studied, often (but not always) to great benefit.

Even as we struggle to understand how Isaiah could have perceived and entertained such a vision in his mind, let alone written it down or persuaded others of its value so that they kept it for centuries until it was fulfilled, we still struggle with it now. It has been partly fulfilled in the life of Christ, but only in the sense that in the coming of the Redeemer, we know that this is a true vision of God's will. In God's church, we are called to reflect the glory of God; 'and all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another ...' (2 Cor 3:18). In other words, this great vision of Isaiah is partly true today, but its completion is still ahead of us. The day when all nations will truly see the glory of the Lord's light and authority is yet to come. In

addition, the day when men and women stand side by side without the dire domination and harassment that has determined male/female relationship for centuries, is also yet to come, and the day when God's people enjoy the 'wealth of the nations' is still something to which we can look forward!. If we read the Revelation of John in the New Testament, we can find parallels with most of these pictures within this great vision of God's eternal future, so we pray for the day of its sure and certain coming. This is God's plan for His world.

Discipleship

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. In this passage, what do you think is meant by the expressions 'darkness' and the 'thick clouds'? What does this mean to people today?
2. What does this passage of Scripture tell us about the glory of God, and what does this mean to you?
3. Why should the wealth of the nations be 'brought to you', as suggested by this passage? What does this mean, and what should the church do with the wealth of the nations if it had it?

Personal comments by author

There are times when I need to stop thinking, writing, reading and doing, because each day can become too full and cease to be a gift of God. I know that need to take in something of the glory of God, for He has enabled me to do what I do and be the person that I am, and for this I must stop and just receive of God. I find that the best way to do this is to turn to a great passage of scripture and let it feed my soul; this is one such great passage of scripture.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- **Something to do:** *Read this passage over a few times and meditate on the glory and grace of God. Ask yourself whether your life reflects this glory, and whether there are things you can do to show your love of God more fully. Do not fear change, embrace the change that brings life!*
- **Something to share:** *Make a promise to yourself to speak to other people about your faith, and look for opportunities to do this. You do not have to find special people to do this, you just need to ask the Lord to give you the confidence to open up to others, especially those who love you.*

Final Prayer

As this day unfolds, Lord God, Your love unfolds like an opening flower; revealing ever more depths of colour, hue and saturation. May we not benefit from a mere snapshot of Your faithful loving-kindness, but from a high-definition movie of Your magnificent grace! Through Jesus Christ we pray, AMEN
