The Gospel of the Kingdom
An Exposition of Isaiah 61:1-11

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Synthesis and Outline of Isaiah 61:1-11

Summary: Salvation for Israel, the Gentiles, and the earth will be fully realized during the eschatological kingdom of God.

Outline:

1. The will of the Lord is deliverance for His people and will be realized through His Servant during the millennial kingdom (61:1-3)
   a. The Servant of the Lord is Spirit led and anointed to proclaim the glorious message of God to His people (61:1a)
   b. The message is deliverance from past trials and tribulations and the proclamation of God’s plan (61:1b-3)
      i. The message is good news to those who trust the Lord and are currently in need of deliverance (61:1b)
      ii. The message consists of blessing and judgment; it will comfort those who are desirous of God’s will (61:2)
      iii. The message proclaims Israel’s restoration from past trials and tribulations to a place of prominence upon the earth (61:3)

2. Salvation for all of mankind will be fully realized when Israel is restored and given a regal position as the head of all nations in the millennial kingdom (61:4-11)
   a. The land of Israel will be restored from years of destruction and judgment (61:4)
   b. The Gentiles will serve the nation of Israel by shepherding and farming for them (61:5)
   c. Israel will be elevated to the position of Priest and Minister of God for all nations; all blessings for mankind will flow through the nation of Israel (61:6)
   d. Sorrow will be eliminated and abundant blessing will result for Israel and the Gentiles (61:7)
   e. The new covenant will result in a righteous nation of Israel who will rule in the kingdom with benevolence and justice (61:8-9)

3. The Servant of the Lord rejoices in song over the salvation, blessings, and praise abounding during the millennial kingdom (61:10-11)
   a. The Servant declares the goodness that flows from God; joy is the result of the blessings of God (61:10a)
   b. The righteous character and love of God are displayed by the Servant to all mankind (61:10b)
   c. The millennial kingdom will be a time of unprecedented virtue and honor among all nations upon the earth (61:11)
Exposition of the Text

Introduction

Isaiah the prophet speaks of salvation and judgment throughout his entire book. Judgment for both Israel and the Gentiles is found within the pages of Isaiah’s writings. Salvation is also found for Israel and the Gentiles. Both of these subjects represent the character of God. He is a loving God who wants to show His love to all mankind. He is also a Holy God who must judge sin.

The good news of salvation will ultimately be realized in the eschatological kingdom of God. As early as chapter two, Isaiah reveals the deliverance for Israel and the nations. This salvation is to be realized during the coming kingdom (cf. 2:1-5). The gospel of the kingdom is prominent throughout Isaiah. In fact, the message of the kingdom is prominent all through the scriptures. The theme of the kingdom is seen by some as the overarching theme of the entire Bible. This emphasis upon the kingdom in the scripture is immense. Its importance is outlined by Paul in 1 Cor 15:20-28. In this passage, Paul points out Christ “must reign” in order to defeat all enemies. Thus, the final part of Christ’s redemptive work will occur during His coming millennial kingdom. The ultimate focus of prophecy points to this coming kingdom of the Messiah with His kingdom as paramount in scripture. Christ’s work on the cross is by no means negated or forgotten, but the kingdom of which He is the divine center is the focus of the revelation from God to man. For it is in this coming kingdom that the will of God will be completely and fully realized (cf. Matt 6:10).

Isaiah especially emphasizes the coming kingdom of God. Israel, led by its Servant (the Messiah), will be the head of the nations during the kingdom age. The Gentiles will be blessed through Israel and its Servant-King. The following chapters in Isaiah all speak about the kingdom in numerous and various aspects: 2, 9, 11, 12, 19, 25, 26, 27, 29, 32, 34, 35, 49, 52, 56-66. Chapters 56-66 conclude the book of Isaiah; and the overarching theme of these chapters is the salvation realized in the kingdom of God—an eschatological salvation.

Chapter 61 is particularly focused upon the Servant of the Lord and His message concerning the gospel of the kingdom. Written from the first person perspective, the prophetic message in Isaiah 61 is a description of the salvation inherent of the coming kingdom of God. The use of figures of speech is abundant to describe the scene of blessing and judgment. Instead of an allegorical interpretation, a literal interpretation and fulfillment of what is described by the use of figurative language is warranted. It is acknowledged that prophecy many times has a translucent feature which is to say the details of prophecy and how they will come to pass are not always clear or transparent. This will be demonstrated with regard to Isaiah’s words in Chapter 61 as Jesus’ interpretation and application of the passage is examined.

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1 Throughout this paper, all references to the “kingdom” refer to the future literal-geographic millennial kingdom over which the Godman Jesus Christ will rule. A spiritual, mystical, or present mystery form of the kingdom is not contemplated.
3 Unless otherwise noted, the King James Version is used throughout this paper.
4 Figurative is a colorful way of presenting the literal truth. Figurative is not antithetical to literal; it is part of it. Figurative depends on ordinary literal language in order for it to be understood. See Roy B. Zuck, Basic Bible Interpretation (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1991), 147.
5 D. Brent Sandy, Plowshares & Pruning Hooks (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2002), 138-139.
The Good News of Salvation is Declared by the Servant (61:1-3)

The passage begins in the first person without a specific pronouncement of who is speaking. The speaker declares the anointing and presence of the Spirit of God upon himself and his message. The identity of the speaker is revealed earlier in the book of Isaiah – it is the Servant. Chapters 40-55 contain the “Servant Songs” and portray this Servant as an individual in several places. Corporately, the nation of Israel is also identified as God’s Servant in several passages throughout this section (40:27-28; 41:8; 42:18-20; 43:10; 44:21; 45:4; etc.). These passages, which refer to Israel as God’s Servant, describe Israel as “blind and deaf” and untrusting of God. However, this is not the Servant of Chapter 61. From the nation of Israel a faithful individual arises who represents the nation as a whole.6 Isaiah 42:1-9 describes the individual Servant of the Lord upon whom the Spirit resides.7 This passage describes the Servant as God’s elect and one with whom the Lord is pleased (cf. Matt 3:17). This Servant is to bring justice and salvation to the Gentiles. “In Isaiah the concept of Gentile participation in salvation is inseparably bound to the mission of the Servant to the nations (cf. 52:10–12 with 52:13–53:12; and cf. 61:11 with 61:1).”8 The Servant will reign with benevolence and righteousness over all the earth. He will open blind eyes and set those bound free; deliverance from oppression brought on by sin will occur. His message is one of hope and promise for Israel and the nations. The provision of God will be realized in the kingdom upon the earth. The Servant’s resolve is to do the will of the Lord. He cannot fail for God’s will is sovereign, and no creature can thwart the will of God.

Much like Chapter 61, the Servant is found speaking in Chapter 49 in the first person. It is highly unlikely Isaiah is speaking of himself in either Chapter 49 or Chapter 61. Careful observation leads one to realize that in the later part of the book, Isaiah is not found bringing any attention to himself. Thus, it would be inappropriate for him to make a sudden outburst in these chapters.9 Further, the Lord Jesus declared Himself to be the speaker, hence the individual Servant, when he began His official ministry in His hometown of Nazareth (cf. Luke 4:18-19).

The message of the Servant is one of deliverance for the nation of Israel. Good news abounds for those who are meek. Jesus expanded upon this matter in the Sermon on the Mount when he said, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” (Matt 5:5) The good news concerns God’s plan for the earth during the kingdom age and the inheritance (ownership) the meek will enjoy in the kingdom. The “meek” are those with the characteristics of patience and humility. Hence, the salvation is to those who trust the Lord and patiently endure; they will be rewarded for their faithfulness (cf. Ps 18:20-24; 24:3-5) in the kingdom. The “brokenhearted” are those who have been crushed by the adversities of life. The “captives” most likely refer to those who do not possess even a measure of wealth. These various descriptions of Israel describe the underclass within Israel who are oppressed yet remain faithful to the Lord. They

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7 Prior to the “Servant Songs,” the Servant upon whom the Spirit so mightily rests is mentioned in Isaiah 11. There he is called the “Branch” and the “root of Jesse.” A sevenfold work of the Spirit is attributed to the “Branch” in Isaiah 11:2. Hence, the connection is made with the promised Messiah who was to proceed from the line of David. Although the word Messiah is not used in Isaiah, the anointing mentioned in 61:1 provides further evidence that the “Servant” and the “Branch” are one in the same – the Messiah.
represent the righteous remnant of the nation who is walking in fellowship with the Lord. These faithful Israelites endure suffering, entrust themselves to Yahweh and await eschatological salvation. The message of the prophet in Isa 61:1 is that the awaited Messianic kingdom characterized by social justice is very near indeed. Intimation back to Lev 25:10 is quite probably in view. The Year of Jubilee is the subject of the Leviticus passage, and those who were in debt were to be set free. This message of hope and blessing was the message of the Lord Jesus to the nation of Israel when he declared “repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matt 4:17b) As Israel’s Messiah, Jesus was offering the promised kingdom to the nation. He authenticated the offer with an unprecedented display of signs and wonders. The kingdom was “at hand” and being extended to Israel. It was this message of hope Jesus told John the Baptist’s disciples to convey back to John when he was suffering and doubting in prison (Matt 11:5). John’s confusion arose most likely from his perspective of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming deliverer, the Messiah. The Messiah was to bring in the kingdom and obliterate the opposing Gentile nations. This is evidenced by John’s question, “art thou he who should come or do we look for another?” (Matt 11:3) However, Jesus’ offer of the kingdom did not line up with John’s understanding (an example of the translucent nature of prophecy). Judgment of the enemy did not seem imminent with Jesus’ offer of the kingdom.

The message of good news is enlarged in 61:2. The period of time is designated, and the message of blessing and judgment is proclaimed. The Servant is commissioned to proclaim the “acceptable year of the LORD and the day of vengeance of our God.” For the prophet Isaiah, the “acceptable year of the LORD” (year of favor) and the “day of vengeance” are concurrent. As stated above, the Year of Jubilee is in view. The Year of Jubilee was a Sabbath year and the time when the nation would “proclaim liberty throughout all the land” (Lev 25:10) to all its inhabitants. Every fiftieth year was marked by the Mosaic Law to be a Sabbath Year of Jubilee. In the ceremonial law, the ultimate restoration of all things is symbolized by the Year of Jubilee, the crown of the sabbatical system (Lev 25). This was a time of repentance, release, rest, and restoration for the nation. All debts were canceled, and land reverted back to its original owners. Jubilee marked a new beginning where slaves were set free, and society allowed a certain amount of equality among the people. The Lord’s will was that no one should be impoverished, imprisoned, or oppressed forever; it was a time of deliverance and liberty. The Servant in Isaiah picks up on this theme of liberty and uses the Sabbath Year of Jubilee as a picture (type) of the promised millennial kingdom which would be a time when the Lord would release His people, and restore their land, and bless them abundantly. The “acceptable year of the LORD” also corresponds to the “day of salvation” (Isa 49:8) and “the year of my redeemed” (Isa 63:4). This theme of salvation runs throughout the book of Isaiah with salvation ultimately being realized by Israel and all the earth in the coming kingdom.

The “day of vengeance” is a parallel theme running through Isaiah. Because of the
opposing Gentile nations, Israel’s God must fight for them and deliver them into the blessings of the millennial kingdom. Isaiah 63:1-4 uses figurative language to describe the Servant as a mighty warrior treading a winepress consisting of opposing peoples. He is seen trampling the oppressors in His wrath and fury. The concept of vengeance is also mentioned in Isa 34:8 and 35:4 where the Lord is seen defending Zion while defeating all Gentile opposition.

The use of the phrases “acceptable year of the LORD” and “day of vengeance” should not be taken literally to mean only one 365-day year is acceptable or the Lord’s vengeance is limited to only one 24-hour day. Both of these phrases along with several other Old Testament phrases (“day of the Lord,” “that day,” “the great day,” “time of Jacob’s trouble,” “day of salvation”) are figures of speech used to describe a period of blessing or judgment. The Old Testament prophets generally saw the times of blessing and judgment as analogous periods. The Old Testament prophet’s perspective can be likened to a view of distant mountain peaks where the valleys cannot be observed. This phenomenon of prophetic utterance represents what is sometimes described as the translucent aspect of prophecy. Many times the details of the fulfillment of prophecy are not clear. The following account of Jesus’ interpretation and application of Isa 61:1-2 will help shed light on the matter.

It is noteworthy to examine the Lord Jesus’ superior vision (Luke 4:18-19) of the valley between the mountain peaks of the “acceptable year” and the “day of vengeance” in Isa 61:2. Quoting the passage from Isaiah, Jesus proclaimed the fulfillment of the “acceptable year” had come without including the “day of vengeance.” Jesus being a prophet with a full and complete perspective was able to properly delineate the prophecy. The fulfillment of the “day of vengeance” was contingent upon repentance from the nation of Israel. This is succinctly addressed by Jesus and John the Baptist when they proclaimed to the nation of Israel, “repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matt 3:2; 4:17b) Because of the nation’s rejection of the Lord Jesus and their refusal to repent, the “day of vengeance” was delayed (cf. Matt 21:43; 23:37-39). The offer of the millennial kingdom of blessing was withdrawn and awaits a future generation. The current dispensation of Grace is the valley of time which exists between the peaks of Isa 61:2.

The precise fulfillment of the “acceptable day of the Lord” and the “day of vengeance,” although not clearly seen by Isaiah, will converge in the millennial kingdom. The prophecy in Isaiah 61 assumes a repentant nation of Israel in that the meek and mourning are mentioned. The repentant nation will be comforted and will receive the reward of inheritance – the kingdom (cf. Matt 5:5). The figurative language in 61:3 uses a play on words to describe the salvation to come. Instead of placing ashes upon the head as a sign of mourning (cf. 2 Sam 13:19; Es 4:1; Dan 9:3), a beautiful “crown” (NIV) will be placed on the head of the nation to signify its joyful status. The application of oil upon the head as a means of soothing and anointing is used to describe the salvation the Servant will bring. The symbol of a beautiful garment is used to display the glory of the nation which enjoys salvation. Instead of being likened to an oak tree with withering leaves (cf. Isa 1:30), the repentant and righteous nation is likened to strong trees planted by the Lord. The righteous nation’s salvation and elevated status among the nations will be the result of the Lord’s sovereign work for them with Him receiving the glory.

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16 For a visual representation of this truth, see Clarence Larkin, *Dispensational Truth* (Glenside, PA: Rev Clarence Larkin Estate, 1918), 6.
When the salvation of the kingdom arrives by way of the Servant, the nation of Israel will enjoy an unprecedented time of glory and honor among the nations. Isaiah 49:8 speaks of this time of salvation in which the heritage of Israel will be restored. The new covenant (cf. Jer 31:31-34) will be in place, and the nation will be at rest from past tribulations. The desolate cities will be rebuilt, and the city of Jerusalem will be the capital city of the kingdom (cf. Ps 48:3; Jer 3:17). Because of the power of the Servant and His victory over any and all adversaries, the Gentile nations will serve the nation of Israel. No longer will Israel be subservient to the nations; rather it will be elevated to a regal status among all nations (cf. Deut 28:13, 44). The Gentiles will serve the nation by participating in shepherding and farming for Israel in its land. The Gentiles will also help Israel rebuild its cities and participate in its blessings (cf. Isa 14:1; 60:10).

The regal status of Israel is evidenced in that they are named “Priests of the LORD” and “Ministers of God.” The original purpose for which Israel was called will be realized in the kingdom. Exodus 19:6 indicated God’s intention for the entire nation was that they be His representatives to and for all peoples upon the earth – a royal priesthood. Unfortunately, the redeemed people (cf. Ex 14:31; 15:13) failed to enjoy the privilege of their calling because of sin. When the Servant ushers in the kingdom, the redeemed nation will have repented of its past transgressions and will be able to enjoy the promised reward (cf. Deut 28). During this glorious age, Israel will enjoy the bounty of all the earth. The Gentiles, in subjection to the royal nation, will bring the wealth of the world to the land of Israel. Gentile world dominion will have ceased, and the bounty of the earth will flow into Israel (cf. Isa 60:5, 10-11; Zech 14:14).

The earth is the Lord’s, and all nations are to serve and worship Him (cf. Ps 2). Because of a special creation in Jacob (cf. Isa 43:1), Israel is distinct from all the other nations. They are not numbered among the nations and enjoy a special place in the plan and purpose of God (cf. Ex 19:5-6; Num 23:9; Deut 7:6). The regal nation of Priests and Ministers of God will enjoy a double-portion in the kingdom. As a result of the sovereign grace of God (cf. Deut 7:6-8), Israel was given the position of God’s first-born son (cf. Ex 4:22). Thus, they will enjoy the benefits of primogeniture during the millennium. The first-born son was eligible for three specific blessings: 1) a double-portion of the father’s land and possessions – he received twice the amount of the other sons; 2) kingship of the family – he was the leader of the family; 3) priesthood of the family – he represented the family before God. All three of these privileges will be realized by Israel in the kingdom as they serve the nations as King-Priests in the most blessed and revered land upon the earth. Conversely, the Gentile nations will also enjoy benefits from God through the nation of Israel. The full realization of God’s promise to Abraham, “in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen 12:3), will occur through Israel during the millennial kingdom. Joy and peace will characterize the kingdom of which Israel is the administrator. The Servant will direct the nation in a benevolent righteous rule with all the earth praising the Lord for his most glorious plan. Isaiah 60 outlines the glory of Israel during the kingdom age. This chapter has been deemed the most brilliant and grand prophetic utterance in all of the Old Testament. The chapter describes the blessed nation and the glory of God that shall rest upon it. Likewise, Isaiah 62 continues to amplify the theme of the glory of Israel.

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17 It is interesting to note that a first-born son could lose the privileges afforded him. Esau is a classic example of a first-born son who lost his birthright. Jacob’s first-born Ruben also lost his first-born privileges (cf. Gen 25 and 49).
18 McClain, 211.
Over and over in Chapters 60-62 the glory of Israel is touted. They are “a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of God.” (Isa 62:3) Israel will rule the earth as benevolent sovereigns full of the Spirit and grace of God.

A Song of Praise From the Servant (61:10-11)

The Servant concludes the chapter by breaking forth in song. He identifies himself with Israel and leads them in a song of praise, “In the midst of the congregation will I praise thee” (Ps 22:22). He rejoices in the wisdom and grandeur of God. Maximum and ultimate joy is the result of a faithful relationship with the Creator. The Servant is pictured wearing clothes of salvation and a robe of righteousness. This is the attire of God. A similar description of the Servant’s clothes is seen in Isa 59:17. The garments of salvation He wears reference the redeemed people of God – Israel. The robe of righteousness signifies the fellowship the redeemed are experiencing with their Lord (cf. Isa 58:8; 60:21). The further description of the Servant is that of a bridegroom and bride who are fully dressed and adorned for the joyous occasion of a wedding. The picture is one of joy and rapture. The Servant will provide the delivered Israel with a most joyful and pleasant experience in His land of promise and blessing. All the nations will be a witness to this most beautiful marriage (cf. Isa 62:4b). The land of Israel will be so blessed, and the fellowship between the Lord and His people will be so intense that the nations cannot help but see the work of the Lord. The Servant is jubilant over this result for His desire is to point all the nations to the Lord (cf. Matt 5:16). Salvation rests in Israel, and the entire world will witness this great salvation (cf. John 4:22b). The mission of the Servant is to enable the nation of Israel to proclaim the Lord. His hope is that Gentiles upon the earth will see the works of Israel and believe on their God for everlasting life (cf. Isa 42:6-7).

Summary and Application

The text of Isa 61 is a most glorious passage revealing the heart of God for mankind. It reveals a God who is mighty and who will not allow His sovereign plan of salvation to be frustrated. The election of Israel as His special messenger to the peoples of the earth is clearly seen. His longsuffering and faithfulness is displayed by the ministry of His Servant. Corporately, Israel was redeemed by the Lord but failed to walk faithfully. God promised blessing for obedience or cursing for disobedience. Unfortunately, Israel chose to disobey, thus suffering the curse of God for more than two millenniums. However, His punishment is measured toward His redeemed, and He will not renege on His covenant promises (cf. Ps 89:28-36). In grace and mercy, the Lord promised salvation – a Year of Jubilee. The promise of the kingdom will be realized in the future because it is the will of God. Israel, led by God’s Servant, will serve Him, and the nations of the earth will be saved through them. God’s ultimate and complete purpose for mankind will be realized during the future millennial kingdom. His Spirit will convict and convince men of their sinful state like never before. The fruit of the Spirit, “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance” (Gal 5:22-23) will characterize life on earth. The ultimate climate to receive the gift of God will exist during this golden age.

Current-day believers should take note of the truths taught in this passage. God is all powerful and able to deliver from any circumstance. No matter where one has been along this world’s path of sin, the Lord is able to deliver. Trusting Him followed by obedience is the key.
As one realizes who the Lord is and how powerful He is, one must bow and worship His majesty. Humility and meekness are rewarded by God (cf. Phil 2:1-16; 1 Pet 5:6). The Servant of Isaiah who proclaimed liberty to the captives of Israel makes a very similar proclamation today. To those who are in darkness and do not know the God of Israel, He offers the gift of eternal life to all who will believe (cf. John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47). To those who are already redeemed but out of fellowship, the will of God is that fellowship be restored (cf. 1 John 1:9). Like the faithful of Israel who will enjoy the benefits of God’s eschatological salvation in the kingdom, so can faithful Christians enjoy similar benefits in the kingdom. Jesus invites us to overcome and sit with Him on His throne (Rev 3:21). This is an invitation to share special intimacy with the Lord as He administers benevolent rule in the kingdom of God. The Apostle Paul admonishes New Testament believers to “walk worthy of God who has called you unto His kingdom and glory.” (1 Thes 2:12) Much like the downtrodden of Israel who remained faithful and were promised reward, Christians are to suffer or patiently endure so they might reign with Christ (cf. Rom 8:17; 2 Tim 2:12).

Christians are encouraged by Peter (2 Pet 1:4-11) to claim the precious promises of reward in the coming kingdom. He advises believers to add to their faith and continue to grow in the Lord, i.e. walk in the Spirit. The Christian life should not be a barren unfruitful existence. Rather it should be one of excitement, joy, and fellowship with the Lord through the power of the Holy Spirit. The current ministry of the Holy Spirit is but a foretaste of His superlative ministry in the coming kingdom. Those believers who are unfruitful have forgotten their salvation experience and do not realize the potential blessings that can be theirs currently and in the kingdom. Those who are faithful and fruitful will enjoy abundance of life during their walk of faith and abundance in the kingdom. It is this gospel of the kingdom that should encourage and invigorate the New Testament saint to a life of abiding fellowship, faithfulness, and service to the Lord.

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19 This position of reward for the Church is in the heavenlies, while the nation of Israel will enjoy an earthly position of reward.
Bibliography


