

Desire of Nations



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isaiah 59; Isa. 59:15–21; Isa. 60:1, 2; Isaiah 61; Isa. 61:2.*

Memory Text: “The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising” (*Isaiah 60:3, NKJV*).

We must learn in the school of Christ. Nothing but His righteousness can entitle us to one of the blessings of the covenant of grace. We have long desired and tried to obtain these blessings but have not received them because we have cherished the idea that we could do something to make ourselves worthy of them. We have not looked away from ourselves, believing that Jesus is a living Saviour. We must not think that our own grace and merits will save us; the grace of Christ is our only hope of salvation. Through His prophet the Lord promises, ‘Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon’ (*Isaiah 55:7*). We must believe the naked promise, and not accept feeling for faith. When we trust God fully, when we rely upon the merits of Jesus as a sin-pardoning Saviour, we shall receive all the help that we can desire.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 36.

This week we can see more of this great truth as revealed in the writings of the prophet Isaiah.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 20.

The Effects of Sin *(Isaiah 59)*

In Isaiah 58:3 the people asked God: “ ‘Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?’ ” (*NRSV*).

In contrast, Isaiah 59:1 implies another question, something like: “Why do we call for the Lord’s hand to save us, but He does not? Why do we cry to Him, but He does not hear?” Isaiah answers that God is able to save and hear (*Isa. 59:1*). His failure to do either, however, is another matter entirely.

Read Isaiah 59:2. What message is being given here that answers the question in Isaiah 59:1?

God chooses to “ignore” His people, not because that is His desire but because “your iniquities have been barriers between you and your God” (*Isa. 59:2, NRSV*). Here is one of the clearest statements in the Bible regarding the effect of sin on the divine-human relationship. Isaiah spends the rest of chapter 59 elaborating on this point, which is seen all through human history: sin can destroy our relationship with the Lord and thus lead to our eternal ruin—not because sin drives God away from us but because it drives us away from God.

Read Genesis 3:8. How does this example reveal the principle expressed in the above paragraph?

Sin is primarily a rejection of God, a turning away from Him. The sin act actually feeds upon itself in that not only is the act a turning away from God but also the *result* of the act causes the sinner to turn away even more from the Lord. Sin separates us from God, not because God wouldn’t reach out to the sinner (indeed, the whole Bible is almost nothing but the account of God’s reaching out to save sinners) but because sin causes us to reject His divine overtures to us. That is why it is so important that we tolerate no sin in our lives.

In what ways have you experienced the reality that sin causes a separation from God? What, in your own experience, is the only solution to the problem?

Who Is Forgiven? *(Isa. 59:15–21)*

Isaiah 59 presents a startling picture of the problem of sin. Fortunately, the Bible also presents the hope of Redemption.

To begin, the first question is, How many of us have sinned? The Bible is unequivocal: all of us have. Redemption, therefore, cannot be based on lack of sin; it must be based on forgiveness (*Jer. 31:34*). Paul agrees. All have sinned (*Rom. 3:9–20, 23*); so, there can be no distinction on that basis (*Rom. 3:22*). Those who are justified can be judged as just, only because they receive by faith the gift of God’s righteousness through the sacrifice of Christ.

Read Romans 3:21–24. What are these verses telling us about how we are saved? What hope should they give us in the judgment?

Most people think the question in the judgment is: Who has sinned? But that is not a question that needs to be asked, because everyone has sinned. Instead, the question is: Who is forgiven? God is just when He justifies “the one who has faith in Jesus” (*Rom. 3:26, NRSV*). The deciding factor in the judgment is, Who has received and continues to receive forgiveness by having faith in Jesus?

Now, it is true we are judged by works—but not in the sense that works save us. If so, then faith is made void (*Rom. 4:14*). Instead, our works reveal whether we truly have been saved (*James 2:18*).

Why can’t works save us, either now or in the judgment? (*See Rom. 3:20, 23.*)

It is too late for good works, or obedience to the law, to redeem anyone. The purpose of the law in a sinful world isn’t to save but to point out sin. Instead, “faith working through love” (*Gal. 5:6, NRSV*), love that is poured into the heart by God’s Spirit (*Rom. 5:5*), demonstrates that a person has living faith in Jesus (*see also James 2:26*).

Works are an outward expression, the human manifestation of a saving faith. Hence, a true Christian experience is one in which faith is expressed in a daily commitment to the Lord that is revealed by obedience to the law. In the judgment, God uses works as evidence for His creatures, who cannot read thoughts of faith as He can. But for the converted person, only works following conversion, when the life is empowered by Christ and the Holy Spirit, are relevant in the judgment. The preconversion life of sin has already been washed away by the blood of the Lamb (*see Romans 6*).

Universal Appeal *(Isa. 60:1, 2)*

What is Isaiah 60:1, 2 talking about? What principle do you see at work there that's seen throughout the Bible? What hope does it offer?

In Isaiah 60:1, 2, we are given a picture of God's deliverance of His people, following the exile, expressed with the imagery of God's creating light out of darkness and pointing forward to an ultimate fulfillment in salvation through Christ.

In Isaiah 60:3, to whose light do nations and kings come?

In Hebrew this person is feminine singular (*see also Isa. 60:1, 2*). It must be "Zion," personified as a woman, who is mentioned near the end of the previous chapter (*Isa. 59:20*). So, the people of the earth, who are covered in darkness, will come to Zion. They will be drawn by the light of God's glory that has arisen over her (*Isa. 60:2*). "Zion is summoned to enter into the light that is hers and then to observe and react to the nations as they gather to the same light."—J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, p. 494. Notice that although Zion is Jerusalem, the emphasis is more on the people than on the physical location of the city.

The rest of Isaiah 60 develops the theme introduced in verses 1–3: The people of the world are drawn to Jerusalem, which is blessed because of God's glorious presence there.

How does this prophecy compare with God's covenant promise to Abraham? (*Gen. 12:2, 3*.) Are they not saying the same thing?

God had a universal purpose when He chose Abraham and his descendants: through Abraham all families of the earth would be blessed (*Gen. 12:3, Gen. 18:18, Gen. 22:18*). So, God's covenant with Abraham was ultimately intended to be a covenant with all humankind *through* Abraham. He and his descendants would be God's channel of revelation to the world.

Isaiah sought to bring his people back to their ancient, universal destiny. As the representatives of the true God, they were responsible not only for themselves but also for the world. They should welcome foreigners who seek God (*see also Isa. 56:3–8*), for His temple "shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (*Isa. 56:7, NRSV*).

In this context, how do you understand the role of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, or your role in that church?

“The Year of the LORD’s Favor” (*Isa. 61:2, NRSV*)

Who is speaking in Isaiah 61:1?

The Spirit of God is on this anointed Person, which means that He is *a* messiah or *the* Messiah. He is to “bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners” (*Isa. 61:1, NRSV*). Whom does that sound like? Compare Isaiah 42:1–7, where God’s Servant is described in very similar terms.

Isaiah 61:2 talks about the “acceptable year of the LORD.” The Messiah, who is anointed as the Davidic King and Deliverer, proclaims a special year of divine favor at the time when He proclaims liberty. Compare Leviticus 25:10, where God commands the Israelites to proclaim liberty in the holy fiftieth year: “It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family” (*NRSV*). This means that persons who had been forced to sell their ancestral land or to become servants in order to survive hard times (*Lev. 25:25–55*) would reclaim their land and freedom. Because the jubilee year began with the blowing of a trumpet on the Day of Atonement (*Lev. 25:9*), we have mentioned this passage before in connection with Isaiah 58.

While “the year of the LORD’s favor” (*NRSV*) in Isaiah 61:2 is a kind of jubilee year, it is not simply an observance of Leviticus 25. This year is announced by the Messiah, the King, when He reveals Himself through a ministry of liberation and restoration. This is similar to some ancient Mesopotamian kings who promoted social kindness by proclaiming release from debts during early years of their reigns. The Messiah’s ministry goes far beyond the scope of the Leviticus 25 law. Not only does He “proclaim liberty to the captives,” but He also binds up the brokenhearted, comforts those who mourn, and brings about their restoration (*Isa. 61:1–11*). Furthermore, in addition to “the year of the LORD’s favor,” He proclaims “the day of vengeance of our God” (*Isa. 61:2, NRSV*).

When was Isaiah’s prophecy fulfilled? (*Luke 4:16–21*.) How did Jesus’ ministry accomplish this? Also, ask yourself this important question: we, of course, are not Jesus. But we are to represent Him to the world. What are the things the Messiah does, as expressed in Isaiah 61:1–3, that we, in our limited capacities, should be doing, as well? And what are some of the practical ways in which we can do these things?

“The Day of Vengeance of Our God”

(Isa. 61:2, NRSV)

Amid all the good news, why does the Messiah, as depicted in Isaiah 61, proclaim God’s vengeance? When is this prophecy fulfilled?

When in Nazareth, Jesus, the Messiah, read Isaiah 61 as far as “to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor” (Isa. 61:2, NRSV; Luke 4:19, NRSV). Then He stopped and said, “ ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing’ ” (Luke 4:21, NRSV). So, He deliberately and specifically avoided reading the next words in the same verse: “the day of vengeance of our God” (Isa. 61:2, NRSV). While His ministry of good news, liberty, and comfort was beginning to set captives free from Satan’s tyranny, the day of vengeance was not yet to come. In Matthew 24 (compare Mark 13, Luke 21), He predicted to His disciples that divine judgments would come in the future.

Indeed, in Isaiah 61 the day of God’s vengeance is the “great and terrible day of the LORD” (Joel 2:31, NRSV; Mal. 4:5), to be fulfilled when Christ will come again to liberate planet Earth from injustice by defeating His enemies and setting the oppressed remnant of His people free (Revelation 19; compare Dan. 2:44, 45). So, although Christ announced the beginning of “the year of the LORD’s favor,” its culmination is at His second coming.

How do you reconcile the notion of a loving God with a God who also promises vengeance? Are the ideas incompatible? Or do you understand vengeance as a manifestation of that love? If so, how so? Explain your answer.

Though Jesus has told us to turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:39), elsewhere He is very clear that justice and punishment will be meted out (Matt. 8:12). Though Paul tells us not to “render evil for evil” (1 Thess. 5:15), he also says that when the Lord is revealed from heaven, with flaming fire He will take “vengeance on them that know not God” (2 Thess. 1:8).

The difference, of course, is that the Lord in His infinite wisdom and mercy can alone bring both justice and vengeance in a completely fair manner. Human justice, human vengeance, comes with all the faults, frailties, and inconsistencies of humanity. God’s justice, of course, will come with none of those limitations.

Which of the following incidents would make you more likely to want to see vengeance returned upon someone who does evil? (1) A person who hurts someone you do not love or (2) a person who hurts someone you do love? How do we understand the link between God’s love for us and the warnings of vengeance?

Further Thought: See also Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 376–378; also *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 236–243.

“Jesus stood before the people as a living expositor of the prophecies concerning Himself. Explaining the words He had read, He spoke of the Messiah as a reliever of the oppressed, a liberator of captives, a healer of the afflicted, restoring sight to the blind, and revealing to the world the light of truth. His impressive manner and the wonderful import of His words thrilled the hearers with a power they had never felt before. The tide of divine influence broke every barrier down; like Moses, they beheld the Invisible. As their hearts were moved upon by the Holy Spirit, they responded with fervent amens and praises to the Lord.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 237.

“The day of God’s vengeance cometh—the day of the fierceness of His wrath. Who will abide the day of His coming? Men have hardened their hearts against the Spirit of God, but the arrows of His wrath will pierce where the arrows of conviction could not. God will not far hence arise to deal with the sinner. Will the false shepherd shield the transgressor in that day? Can he be excused who went with the multitude in the path of disobedience? Will popularity or numbers make any guiltless? These are questions which the careless and indifferent should consider and settle for themselves.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 33.

Discussion Question:

A Seventh-day Adventist pastor thoughtfully stated that his number one problem in ministry is the exclusiveness of church members who do not want others to join them. How can “Christians” take the love, hope, and good news of Christ’s kingdom to all the world so that others can have an opportunity to be saved before the end comes (*Matt. 24:14*) when they do not even want to accept people who go out of their way to show up in their church?

Summary: God purifies an unjust society by removing the rebels and by restoring the remnant who turn from the sins that have separated them from Him. Due to the blessings of God’s presence, people from other nations are drawn to God and His people so that they also can enjoy the time of God’s favor that is proclaimed and delivered by the Messiah.

“I Want to Plant a Church”

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Julio Ovalle was bursting with enthusiasm when he returned home from a Global Mission conference organized for church members across Mexico.

He excitedly told his wife, María Díaz, about what he had learned at the event in January 2017. “Now I want to plant a church,” he said.

María liked the idea. “Let’s do it!” she said.

But where to start? Julio wanted to reach out to a new neighborhood, and he thought a good way to start would be to teach people about essential health principles such as air, water, sunshine, and rest. Julio and María won support from the North Mexican Union to work as volunteer Global Mission pioneers, and their church pastor also backed the plans. But some church members remembered that a previous attempt to plant a church had failed.

“This plan will never work,” said one.

“You won’t get any good results,” said another.

Julio, María, and their two adult daughters donned bright-green T-shirts bearing the name of the health program, “I Want to Live Healthy,” and began to knock on people’s doors. At each house, they invited people to sign up for health courses at home and healthy cooking classes at church.

The family worked intensively for four weeks and finally signed up the first person, a 60-year-old man named Rogelio, for Bible studies.

When church members saw the family’s diligence and learned about Rogelio, a few donned bright-green T-shirts and joined them in going door-to-door. Before long, the group swelled to 15 people.

The church members worked incessantly for six months. Seeing a growing number of people studying the Bible, Julio decided to form a small group to meet on Sabbath afternoons. He announced the plan to the church in February 2017 and invited more church members to join the effort. The church endorsed the small group, and 10 members accepted the invitation to get involved. Moreover, a church member who rented out a hall for birthdays and weddings offered the place free of charge to the small group. Twenty-five Bible-study participants showed up for the small group’s first meeting.

Three months after being endorsed as a small group, the local conference recognized it as a branch Sabbath School. Seventeen months later, in September 2018, it became a church. Today, Puerta del Cielo (Door of Heaven) Seventh-day Adventist Church has 35 members, including 24 people baptized through Julio and María’s health classes. Sabbath attendance reaches 50 people. Plans are under way to construct a church building. “Our goal is to raise up the church and to raise up more souls for the kingdom,” said Julio, 46.



Study Focus: *Isaiah 60****Part I: Overview***

In the prophetic genre, divine revelation is not only about how oracles relate to the prophet's time but also about how these oracles relate to time beyond the immediate context in which they are given. The fulfillment of the prophetic pronouncement is often far away from the prophetic ministry of the prophet. In the case of Isaiah 60, the message is given in the context of the future restoration of Judah from the Babylonian exile. However, this message also has a future application to the glorious event of the restoration of the redeemed at the end of the time.

Isaiah 60 represents one of the more optimistic messages of the book. This lesson explores the first verses of this chapter and also some verses of Isaiah 61.

The three main topics that are explored in this study are as follows: (1) arise, shine; (2) the brightness of the city; and (3) the anointed One.

Part II: Commentary

Arise, Shine

The first clause of the chapter includes two feminine verbs in the imperative: *arise, shine*. The clause presupposes a reference to Jerusalem and its future restoration. There are some references related to "arise" in the previous chapter, but in those cases, the expression is used in a chaotic description of Judah's fall.

In Isaiah 60 the expression is instead joined with a positive component: arise, shine. This word combination is the starting point from which we may infer some biblical allusions that Isaiah makes to Aaron's benediction in Numbers 6:24–26:

"The LORD bless you, and keep you;
The LORD make His face shine on you,
And be gracious to you;
The LORD lift up His countenance on you,
And give you peace" (*NASB*).

This prayer possibly could have been an influence for Isaiah 60, particularly the sentence "The LORD make His face shine on you."

The connection between Aaron's benediction of Numbers 6:24–26 and

Isaiah 60 lies in the use of the same Hebrew verbal root, *'wr* (shine), in both texts. Isaiah seems to apply to the redeemed Jerusalem a Pentateuchal blessing, which is mentioned in the reference to the radiance of God's face. The brightness of the countenance expresses favor, according to the perspective of Luis A. Schökel (*The Sacred Books: Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy* [Madrid: Ediciones Cristianidad, 1970], vol. 2, p. 147).

Thus, Isaiah comforts Jerusalem by using the image of brightness, but Jerusalem does not have its own brightness. It is something it must receive from a source outside itself. This imputed brightness is well expressed by Isaiah: "Your light has come" (*Isa. 60.1, NKJV*). As such, the glorious experience of the redeemed Jerusalem will be an expression of divine favor.

The sentence "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee" shows a clear parallelism, connected by the explanatory conjunction "and." The light that has come is the glory of the Lord, and it is His glory that has brought brightness to Jerusalem.

The Brightness of the City

In addition to the influence of Aaron's famous benediction on Isaiah 60, the idea of radiance or brightness, common to Moses' encounters with the LORD, also influences Isaiah in this chapter.

For instance, Exodus 34 says that "Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him" (*Exod. 34:29, NASB*).

The brightness motif is also present when God leads the Israelites during their wilderness experience: "And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light" (*Exod. 13:21*).

Isaiah 60:2 presents another interesting parallel to this motif of light in Exodus to help us learn about the glorious experience of Jerusalem:

"For behold, darkness will cover the earth
And deep darkness the peoples;
But the LORD will rise upon you
And His glory will appear upon you" (*NASB*).

It is clear from the context that "the earth" is parallel with "the peoples," while "the Lord" is parallel with "His glory" in the second part of the sentence. It is evident that the expression YHWH and "His glory" have been used interchangeably.

The message is clear: God promises a brilliant future for Jerusalem. Even though the faces of God's people show vestiges of their past struggles (*Isa. 60:15*), "the days of thy mourning shall be ended" (*Isa. 60:20*), because the glory of the Lord is going to be shown. In majestic words, Isaiah describes it:

"No longer will you have the sun for light by day,
Nor for brightness will the moon give you light;

But you will have the LORD for an everlasting light,
And your God for your glory” (*Isa. 60:19, NASB*).

This new experience also brings extreme prosperity: “Thou shalt also suck the milk of the Gentiles, and shalt suck the breast of kings” (*Isa. 60:16*). This new era of prosperity also includes a new order in “the city.” “And I will make peace your administrators and righteousness your overseers” (*Isa. 60:17, NASB*).

Joy, transcendence, and salvation are other features of the glorious Jerusalem (*compare with Isa. 60:5, 9, 18*): all of them come from the Lord. The night has disappeared for the forsaken city. A new day has come, and “they will call you the city of the LORD, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel” (*Isa. 60:14, NASB*).

In this regard, Ellen G. White comments, “‘Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.’ Isaiah 60:1. Christ is coming with power and great glory. He is coming with His own glory and with the glory of the Father. And the holy angels will attend Him on His way. While all the world is plunged in darkness, there will be light in every dwelling of the saints. They will catch the first light of His second appearing. The unsullied light will shine from His splendor, and Christ the Redeemer will be admired by all who have served Him. While the wicked flee, Christ’s followers will rejoice in His presence.

“Then it is that the redeemed from among men will receive their promised inheritance. Thus God’s purpose for Israel will meet with literal fulfillment. That which God purposes, man is powerless to disannul. Even amid the working of evil, God’s purposes have been moving steadily forward to their accomplishment. It was thus with the house of Israel throughout the history of the divided monarchy; it is thus with spiritual Israel today.”—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 720.

The Anointed One

The main theme that spans the whole of chapter 61 is the Messiah who brings redemption and justice to His people. This chapter can be divided into three sections:

(1) The prophecy of the coming Messiah and His mission (*verses 1–3*), (2) the effect or result of the Messiah’s mission (*verses 4–9*), and (3) the hymn of exaltation to God (*verses 10, 11*).

The anointed one is a recurrent theme in the Bible. To anoint means to take an individual and set him apart for some particular office or mission. For instance, Aaron is anointed by Moses to be the high priest (*Exod. 40:13*). Saul and David are anointed by Samuel as kings of Israel (*1 Sam. 10:1, 1 Sam. 16:13*). Christ is anointed by God the Father, through the Holy Spirit (*Ps. 45:7, Acts 10:38*) (see Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 317). In Isaiah 61:1, 2, Jesus interprets that

He is the Anointed One. After reading the passage, He begins by saying to the people: “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears” (*Luke 4:21*).

Concerning this chapter, Ellen G. White maintains, “The sixty-first chapter of Isaiah testifies that Christ was to do the very work He did.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 458.

In another section of the book, Ellen G. White provides some details about Jesus’ use of Isaiah 51 in this preaching in Nazareth. “When Jesus in the synagogue read from the prophecy, He stopped short of the final specification concerning the Messiah’s work. Having read the words, ‘To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord,’ He omitted the phrase, ‘and the day of vengeance of our God.’ Isaiah 61:2. This was just as much truth as was the first of the prophecy, and by His silence Jesus did not deny the truth. But this last expression was that upon which His hearers delighted to dwell, and which they were desirous of fulfilling. They denounced judgments against the heathen, not discerning that their own guilt was even greater than that of others. They themselves were in deepest need of the mercy they were so ready to deny to the heathen. That day in the synagogue, when Jesus stood among them, was their opportunity to accept the call of Heaven. He who ‘delighteth in mercy’ (Micah 7:18) would fain to have saved them from the ruin which their sins were inviting.”—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 240, 241.

Part III: Life Application

- 1. God wants to glorify us in His Son and restore our position as children of His kingdom. As we are restored to that position, He wants us to reflect His character. Nations and people need to see God’s glory through His people.**

We are called in order to reflect the glory of the Lord. We ourselves are not the light. We can only reflect the light of the Lord. What do Jesus’ words “‘You are the light of the world’ ” (*Matt. 5:14, NKJV*) mean to you? In what ways do we reflect His light to others?

2. Read Luke 4:18, 19. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.” What principles about sharing the gospel can we derive from these verses?
