

## BIBLE BACKGROUND

Isaiah 62:8-12

Verses 8,9

**I have sworn by my right hand and by my strong arm:  
I shall never give your grain as food to your enemies.  
Nor will foreigners drink your new wine for which you have toiled.**

Verse 9

**For those who gather it, will eat it and praise Yahweh  
and the people who collect it, will drink of it in the courts of the sanctuary.**

Trito-Isaiah probably returned to Jerusalem a year or two after Cyrus' edict of 539BC (2Chron 26:22f.; Ezra 1:1-4). Deutero-Isaiah had viewed Cyrus as the anointed of Yahweh, a prefigurement of the Messiah. The exiles returned euphoric on the one hand, for not only had this Persian king released all those peoples taken captive by Babylonian kings but had actually given them money to rebuild the temple of the Lord. What they returned to made them despondent for Jerusalem lay in ruins, its temple under the rubble, the walls brought down and every major building destroyed. Living there were Edomites and other pagan people who had moved in. The Jews now wanted their land and private property returned to them. There was constant tension and constant danger. Into this situation of shock and despondency, TI spoke.

He spoke of a new Israel, or rather, Yahweh spoke through TI. Presently, those who returned had to pay taxes to the regional governor Trans Euphrates, who collected these on behalf of the Persian ruler, Cyrus then Chambysis. These taxes were in addition to the annual tithe and annual temple tax. The Lord made a solemn oath based on his own person, **his right hand and strong arm** that he would not allow the peoples' **grain and new wine as food and drink for their foreign enemies**. Yahweh would not allow them to be humiliated in this way or despoiled, which added to their poverty. The returnees were busy, indeed, overworked trying to restore ruined fields and houses, spending a great deal and yet not seeing the yields of former years.

In the New Israel, the people of God will be able to eat and drink of what they plant or earn by other means with **the praise of Yahweh in the temple courts**. Generally, the people freely offered sacrifices to the Lord in **praise** הללו of his name. Besides sin and guilt offerings, often these were vows or thanksgiving offerings. The latter were holocaust or burnt offerings, others were peace offerings or fellowship offerings. Thus, the offerings expressed the joy worshippers felt in the presence of God for he had blessed them as his chosen people living in his covenant of love (Neh 9:32). Offerings were not seen as a tax but a result of this special relationship the Lord had with his chosen. It is in this light that TI saw the new existence of the people in the New Israel. The temples, following the tabernacle had at least one court. Herod's temple had a court of the Gentiles and then two further courts for men and for women. It is hard for modern believers to understand what this meant for them; somewhat like standing in the sacramental presence of God in his temple.

Verse 10

**Pass through, pass through the gates;  
clear the way for the people.  
Build up, build up the highway; remove the stones.  
Raise up a standard over the peoples.**

The double imperatives, **pass through and build up** are to be seen as God's eschatological commands, his word that creates history. Just as Isaiah, DI understood historical events as signs or what God was about to do or fulfillment of what he had promised, so TI hears the insistent voice of God, the repetition emphasising determination of Yahweh to gather his people in the New Israel. **The gates** are probably the gates of Babylon (48:20) but they are to be flung open for the people because

Babylon is under the Lord's compulsion to not only release God's people so that more of them can return but that the rulers of Babylon are actually **to build** a highway on which the exiles are to return.

The verb **to build** can also mean to cast up and refers to the act of road making, roads being raised up from lower surrounding ground. This act should be considered an honour. A road already existed from Babylon to Jerusalem but this highway is to be God's construction to exalt his people and lift them up from a very lowly place as servants, slaves and imprisoned people. Hence, the Lord demands that **a standard** be raised over the throngs of returning exiles (11:12).

Verse 11

**Pay attention! Yahweh has proclaimed to the ends of the earth:  
Say to the daughter of Zion: "Your deliverance is coming;  
his reward is with him and his recompense is before him."**

This banner floating over the peoples of Israel, is a victorious exaltation that is to reach **the end of the earth** (end is singular in the Hebrew). What reaches to the end of the earth? It is the good news of salvation. In saving Israel, God is making them shine like a light to all the nations (49:6). It involves two things: God is present amongst the difficulties of his people with the news of coming deliverance wherever they may be and the surrounding nations are within earshot of this proclamation.

The nature of this **proclaiming** **השמיע** needs further thinking about. It is similar to the divine imperatives in verse 10. His **declaration of salvation to the daughter of Zion** is performative in nature. Human beings cannot bring about this good news; they can serve it as in opening gates and building a highway but nothing at all will happen until the Lord proclaims it and establishes it. Thus, this salvation is seen as a pure gift from the Lord himself, **a reward** as in a special prize and **a recompense**, as in a payment of wages. Now, the Lord's grace is not being contradicted by a doctrine of works here. Rather, as deliverance is God's work of love, so it can be viewed as an undeserved compensation for the great suffering inflicted on the people by others.

The picture is of a mighty deliverer carrying in his arms a gift of land, houses, safety, honour, exaltation, renewed faith, joy and peace. Perhaps that has led translators to speak of the Saviour and there is some manuscript support for this but the word is **deliverance** **ישך**, not even the fuller Hebrew word for salvation **ישועה**. However, since this is God's story and not man's history, by faith, the people are to understand that a miraculous opening of gates, building of a highway, the standard of victory, reward and recompense, are the work of only one, gifts from only one source, Yahweh himself.

It may be that TI is in mind hear as the one who **says**, who delivers the news. Of course, special messengers and prophets must speak but God's declaration goes to the ends of the earth, to many places, both great and obscure, and all there are to join is this act of wonder: **say...your deliverance is coming**. When we understand the actual pitiful circumstances of life in Israel and the news of the New Israel, then we can comprehend how extraordinary this word **say** is. People, occupied with their harsh life are called upon to go out of the rubble of the church and journey to the ends of the earth in God's mission.

Verse 12

**They will call them the holy people; the redeemed of Yahweh.  
They will call them the sought after; a city not forsaken.**

**They**, must be understood as the nations, since in verse 10, Yahweh **has proclaimed the news of deliverance to the ends of the earth**. Israel's status as the holy people will be acknowledge wide and far because of his special intervention. Holy has the meaning of set apart, though the sense of cultic purity is also present. The following phrase, redeemed of Yahweh gives us this meaning for redeem has its roots in the duties of a close relative to pay debts and purchase property on behalf on a kinswoman or man in the case of Boaz and Naomi. God's action of delivering from bondage and

bringing the people to Judea and elsewhere in the traditional homelands would ensure the people are new, reborn as it were, in a New Israel. The following line of poetry reinforces this view: **They will call them the sought after; a city not forsaken.** It is the Lord's love seen in opening gates and building a highway for his people that gives them the special honour of those being sought and found. Matt 18:10-14 comes to mind here. The Lord's seeking guarantees that his people are really his, that they belong to him as the redeemed and that he has given them his loving attention. To seek is to put all one's concentration on the object of seeking and all of one's attention.