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THE HOLISTIC MINISTRY OF THE ANOINTED ONE:
AN INTERPRETIVE ANALYSIS OF ISAIAH 61:1-7

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BIBL 5233 Biblical Exposition and Faith Integration
December 9, 2014

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Introduction

Isaiah 61:1-7 is a passage that is important to both the Jewish and Christian faiths due to the clear Messianic implications that it contains. The first two verses are especially familiar to the Christian community due to its quotation by Jesus in Luke 4:18-19 as one of only three direct quotes of the Old Testament made by Jesus in Luke's Gospel.¹ Isaiah 61:1-7 prophecies on Judah's upcoming destruction, exile, and ultimate Messianic deliverance, containing references to both the near and distant future; all of these conditions must be considered when approaching this passage in order to arrive at an accurate understanding of its original meaning. While Jesus' ministry is sometimes presented in Christendom almost exclusively as a means to allow fallen man to escape hell and enter heaven, the Bible presents a much more holistic view of Jesus' ministry in which he was concerned not only with future eternal realities but also the needs that people had in the here and now. Isaiah 61:1-7 has been noted as one of the marquee Old Testament prophecies supporting such a holistic view of Jesus' ministry.²

Isaiah 61:1-7 (NIV)

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
 because the Lord has anointed me
 to proclaim good news to the poor.
 He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
 to proclaim freedom for the captives
 and release from darkness for the prisoners,
 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor
 and the day of vengeance of our God,
 to comfort all who mourn,
 and provide for those who grieve in Zion—
 to bestow on them a crown of beauty

¹ Andrew Marin, "When Jesus Quoted the OT...And Why it Matters," *Red Letter Christians*, last modified May 7, 2011, <http://www.redletterchristians.org/when-jesus-quoted-the-ot-and-why-it-matters/>.

² S.D. Mason, "Getting a 'Handle' on Holistic Christian Mission: The Contribution of Isaiah 61 as a Discrete Old Testament Voice," *Missiology: An International Review* 40, no. 3 (2012): 295-313.

instead of ashes,
 the oil of joy
 instead of mourning,
 and a garment of praise
 instead of a spirit of despair.
 They will be called oaks of righteousness,
 a planting of the Lord
 for the display of his splendor.
 They will rebuild the ancient ruins
 and restore the places long devastated;
 they will renew the ruined cities
 that have been devastated for generations.
 Strangers will shepherd your flocks;
 foreigners will work your fields and vineyards.
 And you will be called priests of the Lord,
 you will be named ministers of our God.
 You will feed on the wealth of nations,
 and in their riches you will boast.
 Instead of your shame
 you will receive a double portion,
 and instead of disgrace
 you will rejoice in your inheritance.
 And so you will inherit a double portion in your land,
 and everlasting joy will be yours.

Historical Analysis

While the historical background of the life of Isaiah can certainly be deduced from cross-examination of references contained in the book of Isaiah with accounts from 1&2 Kings and 1&2 Chronicles, a historical analysis for Isaiah 61:1-7 is not uniformly agreed upon within theological circles due to an ongoing debate as to the authorship of Isaiah. Traditional evangelical scholarship has held that the book of Isaiah was written entirely by the prophet Isaiah, although the order in which the writings appear in the book may have been constructed by others following his death.³ This view came into question in the late nineteenth century as an alternative view began to be popularized by modern scholars suggesting that chapters 40-66 were

³ Bryan Beyer, *Encountering the Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 31.

written entirely by a different author or group of authors with some of the preceding chapters containing sections of information that were not written by Isaiah either.⁴ Much of the theological climate of this time period that allowed for such an alternative view can be traced to Friedrich Schleiermacher,⁵ who himself shared the view that the Isaiah had additional authorship.⁶ Some scholars have further suggested that chapters 40-55 and chapters 56-66 have two entirely different authors or groups of authors, adding another dimension to the debate.⁷ Each of these three views assigns a different time period to the authorship of Isaiah 61, with the traditional view placing its authorship sometime between 740-690 BC and the multiple-authors view placing it anywhere from the time surrounding Persia's conquest of Babylon in 539 BC to the early 400s BC.⁸ This paper will assume the traditional view of singular authorship, as this view has historically been the most predominant and is the most natural reading of the text.

Knowledge concerning the prophetic tradition of Israel is derived almost entirely from the Biblical texts themselves, as only one archeological excavation as of 1996 had ever uncovered legible, direct references to Hebrew prophets, with these references being brief and offering only "very meager" information.⁹ The period of writing for the various books of

⁴ Ibid., 31.

⁵ James Hernando, *Dictionary of Hermeneutics* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2005), 69.

⁶ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism*, ed. Andrew Bowie (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 213.

⁷ Bryan Beyer, *Encountering the Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 31.

⁸ Ibid., 155.

⁹ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 8.

prophecy has been cited to have occurred over a period of slightly more than 400 years,¹⁰ although there is some speculation in this since not all of the Minor Prophets contain strong enough time period references to allow for exact dating.¹¹ Depending on how various books are dated, Isaiah's prophetic ministry would have been preceded by only three to five of the sixteen writing prophets, placing him relatively early in the written tradition of Hebraic prophecy.¹²

Isaiah prophesied to the southern kingdom of Judah during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah,¹³ a time period marked by the expansion of Assyria under Tiglath-pileser III, Shalmaneser V, Sargon II, and Sennecharib.¹⁴ Although Assyria had been rising in power for some time prior to this, previous military campaigns had been terminated in Syria and Israel, thus having only a minimal effect on the state of Judah.¹⁵ The Hebrew form of Isaiah's name means "Yahweh saves,"¹⁶ and it can be surmised based on the prophetic significance of names within Isaiah's family¹⁷ that Isaiah's name may have been an intentional prophetic symbol in

¹⁰ H. Wayne House and Randal Price, *Charts of Bible Prophecy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 19-20.

¹¹ Peter Craig, *Twelve Prophets: Volume 1* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), 85, 195.

¹² H. Wayne House and Randal Price, *Charts of Bible Prophecy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 19-20.

¹³ Is. 1:1.

¹⁴ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 66-70.

¹⁵ Leon Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, ed. David O'Brien (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 301.

¹⁶ Bryan Beyer, *Encountering the Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 25.

¹⁷ Isaiah 8:1-18.

light of Assyria's rising power. The religious state of Judah fluctuated significantly throughout this time period, with the nation turning to Baal worship and child sacrifice under Ahaz followed by a return to Yahweh under Hezekiah.¹⁸ Except in passages where a king or incident is mentioned within the text, it is not possible to know the exact point within this time period in which each prophecy in Isaiah occurred; therefore, it cannot be determined with certainty at what specific point within this continuum that Isaiah 61 was written.

Contextual Analysis

In terms of chapters, Isaiah is the longest book of prophecy in the Bible and second longest book in the Bible as a whole. As such, there are many themes that can be noted and various ways to classify the topics covered. The book of Isaiah contains both prophecies that pertain directly to the time period in which he lived as well as prophecies of the distant future.¹⁹ While his prophetic ministry is directed towards Judah, there are numerous references to a broader global context,²⁰ and it is clear that God is going to open up a way for the Gentiles to know him as well.²¹ One scholar has noted five recurring themes in the book of Isaiah which he terms remnant, the sovereignty of God, servant, the Holy One of Israel, and Messiah.²² All five of these themes can be seen directly within or in close proximity to Isaiah 61:1-7, with the theme

¹⁸ Bryan Beyer, *Encountering the Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 29-30.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁰ Bryan Beyer, *Encountering the Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 32.

²¹ Is. 2:2; 49:6.

²² Bryan Beyer, *Encountering the Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 32-34.

of Messiah being the most prevalent. A brief outline of the book adapted from Bill Arnold and Bryan Beyer's *Encountering the Old Testament*²³ along with the *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*²⁴ is as follows:

- I. Isaiah 1-39
 - A. Messages of Judgment and Hope (1-12)
 - B. Oracles Against Nations (13-23)
 - C. The "Little Apocalypse" (24-27)
 - D. Oracles of Woe (28-30)
 - E. More Judgment and Blessing (34-35)
 - F. Historical Interlude: Hezekiah (36-39)
- II. Isaiah 40-66
 - A. The Return from Babylon (40-48)
 - B. Salvation through the Servant of the Lord (49-57)
 - C. Ultimate Blessing and Final Judgment (58-66)

Isaiah 61:1-7 occurs within a section of the book that repeatedly oscillates between the fallenness of Israel, resultant judgment, and ultimate salvation. This can be clearly seen by examining the five chapters immediately preceding and following Isaiah 61. Isaiah 56 begins with a section on salvation for both Jews and foreigners, with the first verse making the statement, "...Soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed."²⁵ In verse nine, a drastic shift occurs in the tone of the passage, and the prophecy turns to the fallenness of Israel with special emphasis on Israel's leadership. The theme of Israel's sin carries into chapter 57 up until verse 14, where the passage turns back to the concept of salvation. Chapter 58 then turns to judgment for improper heart attitudes behind Israel's fasting, closing with a promise of salvation if Israel repents. Chapter 59 continues to address Israel's sin and resultant judgment, but

²³ Bill Arnold and Bryan Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 354, 370-371.

²⁴ Herbert Wolf, "Isaiah, Book of," in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible Vol. 1*, ed. William Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1048-1052.

²⁵ Taken from English Standard Version.

similarly ends with a statement of hope. Finally, immediately preceding Isaiah 61:1-7, Isaiah 60 turns entirely to the topic of God's salvation, a theme that flows into Isaiah 61:1-7, the remainder of chapter 61, and chapter 62. With the exception of chapter 64, which is dedicated entirely to a prayer for God's mercy, all of the remaining chapters continue to shift between the topics of judgment and salvation, with a clear eschatological emphasis toward the closing of the book.

While the general context of Isaiah 61:1-7 repeatedly addresses both judgment and salvation, the immediate context of Isaiah 60-62 focuses entirely on salvation. Although this section is divided into three chapters, a reading of the chapters reveals one uninterrupted thought pattern. Though not necessarily the case for the entirety of Isaiah, this section of prophecy takes an entirely poetic form, allowing for the repeated use of powerful word pictures and illustrative phrases. In the four verses immediately preceding Isaiah 61:1-7, the LORD is referred to as an "everlasting light" on two occasions,²⁶ and Israel is referred to as "the branch of my planting."²⁷ A similar phrase is used shortly following Isaiah 61:1-7 in reference to a larger, more global context, "...The Lord God will cause righteousness and praise *to sprout up* before all the nations."²⁸ Though subtle, this movement toward a more global context is characteristic of the book of Isaiah, which consistently makes it clear that God is unfolding a plan for the salvation of those beyond Israel as well.

Theological Analysis

The historical and contextual analysis of Isaiah 61:1-7 reveal unique insights that enhance the modern day reader's understanding of the passage. When Isaiah penned this prophecy,

²⁶ Is. 60:19-20, NIV.

²⁷ Is. 60:21, ESV.

²⁸ Is. 61:11, ESV, emphasis added.

difficulties were rising in the nation, Assyria's empirical subjugation was looming, and the people's sins were causing a plethora of problems. Israel was quickly entering into increasing levels of apparent hopelessness, and their only chance of restoration was to turn back to God. Throughout the book of Isaiah as a whole as well as the general context of the passage at hand, God repeatedly delineates the exact sins of Israel and the correlating judgment that is beginning to surface as a result. God does not withhold a solution, however, promising an anointed one who is being sent "to proclaim good news to the poor...to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for captives and release from darkness for the prisoners."²⁹ It is evident that even though Israel was constantly rejecting God, God had not given up on Israel and would continue to provide a way for them to return to him.

A comparison of Isaiah 61:1-7 in the New International Version (NIV), New King James Version (NKJV), and English Standard Version (ESV) reveals some slight differences in translation that help to bring out different elements of the passage. Among these three passages, the NIV is the only to use the adjective "sovereign" to describe the LORD in verse one, placing greater emphasis on the overarching theme of God's sovereignty throughout the book of Isaiah. The NKIV also has a unique nuance in verse one in that it repeatedly capitalizes the word "Me," emphasizing the fact that this is a Messianic prophecy. Although there are additional differences in phrasing among these translations after the opening verse of the passage, these differences in verse one are by far the strongest amplifying nuances between the translations.

There a number a key words and phrases used in Isaiah 61:1-7 that are important to understanding the meaning of the passage. The first and arguably most important of these is the word "anointed" in verse one, used within English translations of the passage in place of the

²⁹ Is. 61:1, NIV.

Hebrew word מָשַׁח,³⁰ transliterated as masah.³¹ This word is used on 69 occasions in the Old Testament and is translated as “anoint” or a variant of “anoint” in all but one occasion in the King James Version (KJV), leaving little discrepancy for its meaning in Isaiah 61:1.³² Isaiah uses this word on only one other occasion when he refers to anointing or oiling shields in a prophecy against Babylon in chapter 21.³³ The act of anointing held great significance in the Old Testament, and was used as a means for inducting someone into a leadership office such as that of prophet, priest or king.³⁴ It is important to note that this word is the etymological root to the Hebrew word מָשִׁיחַ,³⁵ transliterated masiah, from which the English word “Messiah” is derived.³⁶ In Hebrew, masiah means “anointed one” and is often used to refer to Israel’s king in 1&2 Samuel and the Psalms.³⁷

A proper understanding of the terms masah and masiah is helpful in understanding the reaction that Jesus received from his hometown when he quoted Isaiah 61:1-2 as a prophecy

³⁰ “Lexicon: Strong’s,” *Blue Letter Bible*, accessed December 6, 2014, <http://www.blueletterbible.org/>.

³¹ Lawrence Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 54.

³² “Lexicon: Strong’s,” *Blue Letter Bible*, accessed December 6, 2014, <http://www.blueletterbible.org/>.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Lawrence Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 54.

³⁵ “Lexicon: Strong’s,” *Blue Letter Bible*, accessed December 6, 2014, <http://www.blueletterbible.org/>.

³⁶ Lawrence Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 54.

³⁷ Ibid.

concerning himself in Luke 4. Although Luke's Gospel is the only one containing the direct quote of Isaiah 61:1-2, all of the synoptics record this event, with Matthew giving the longest quotation of the crowd's verbal response, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?...Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?"³⁸ Although not necessarily evident to the modern reader, it was abundantly clear to Jesus' listener that he was claiming at the very least to be a prophet, king, or priest, something that would have been difficult for his hometown to accept since they were intimately aware of his mundane upbringing in the unimportant, lower-class town of Nazareth.

A second word of particular importance to a proper understanding of Isaiah 61:1-7 is the word "bind" in the phrase "bind up the brokenhearted," also found in verse one. The word "bind" typically has a negative connotation when used as a verb in modern English, signifying restricting or holding someone against his or her will. It is obvious by the surrounding phrases that the latter description of the word "bind" is not at all what is intended here, but it can be confusing to the modern reader as to what exactly the word means in the context of Isaiah 61:1. The Hebrew word translated as "bind" in this passage is *הָבַשׁ*,³⁹ transliterated *habas*.⁴⁰ This is the least used of the three primary Hebrew words that are translated as "bind" in the English language⁴¹ and

³⁸ Matt. 13:54b-56, NIV

³⁹ "Lexicon: Strong's," *Blue Letter Bible*, accessed December 6, 2014, <http://www.blueletterbible.org/>.

⁴⁰ Lawrence Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 125.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 125.

almost always refers to either saddling a horse or binding a wound.⁴² This word should not be confused with the word אָסַר,⁴³ transliterated asar, which connotes imprisonment⁴⁴ and is also found in Isaiah 61:1 within the phrase “to proclaim...release from darkness for the prisoners.”⁴⁵ Therefore, the word “bind” in Isaiah 61:1 signifies a mending of the wounds of the brokenhearted.

A third word of importance to Isaiah 61:1-7 is the word translated as “ministers” within the statement in verse six, “You will be named ministers of our God.” The Hebrew word used here is תָּרַץ,⁴⁶ transliterated sarat,⁴⁷ and can be found on three other occasions in Isaiah, all occurring in chapters 56-61.⁴⁸ This word is used throughout the Old Testament to denote people “who give personal service to a ruler, particularly of those who are set aside to perform some special service to God.”⁴⁹ For this reason, it is sometimes translated as “servant,” although the

⁴² “Lexicon: Strong’s,” *Blue Letter Bible*, accessed December 6, 2014, <http://www.blueletterbible.org/>.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Lawrence Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 125.

⁴⁵ “Lexicon: Strong’s,” *Blue Letter Bible*, accessed December 6, 2014, <http://www.blueletterbible.org/>.

⁴⁶ “Lexicon: Strong’s,” *Blue Letter Bible*, accessed December 6, 2014, <http://www.blueletterbible.org/>.

⁴⁷ Lawrence Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 443.

⁴⁸ “Lexicon: Strong’s,” *Blue Letter Bible*, accessed December 6, 2014, <http://www.blueletterbible.org/>.

⁴⁹ Lawrence Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 443.

KJV translates it as “minister” the majority of the time.⁵⁰ It is important to note that this word connotes that a person is of high rank and has “a very close relationship with the ruler they serve.”⁵¹ Sarat is not the only word for servant in Hebrew,⁵² but Isaiah intentionally uses it because it indicates that Israel will know God on a highly personal level, something that keeps with the theme of salvation in the immediate context of Isaiah 61:1-7.

A final word that deserves consideration is the word “boast” found in verse six within the phrase, “In their riches you will boast.” The Hebrew word used here is *יָמַר*,⁵³ transliterated *yamar*,⁵⁴ and can only be found on one other occasion in the Old Testament in Jeremiah 2:11.⁵⁵ Because of its infrequent usage, there is limited information available for study on this word. Both the NIV and KJV translate *yamar* as “changed” when it is used in Jeremiah,⁵⁶ complicating matters for the English speaker who cannot see how the words “boast” and “changed” could possibly be related. James Strong, one of the primary scholars of the modern era on Biblical

⁵⁰ “Lexicon: Strong’s,” *Blue Letter Bible*, accessed December 6, 2014, <http://www.blueletterbible.org/>.

⁵¹ Lawrence Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 443.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 549

⁵³ “Lexicon: Strong’s,” *Blue Letter Bible*, accessed December 6, 2014, <http://www.blueletterbible.org/>.

⁵⁴ James Strong, *The Strongest Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, ed. John Kohlenberger III and James Swanson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 1510.

⁵⁵ “Lexicon: Strong’s,” *Blue Letter Bible*, accessed December 6, 2014, <http://www.blueletterbible.org/>.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

language, defines yamar as “to change [or] exchange,”⁵⁷ leaving one to wonder why exactly this word is translated “boast” in Isaiah 61:6. It can further be noted that Lancelot Brenton’s direct English translation of the Septuagint, originally published in 1851, does not include the word “boast” or “changed” within verse six or any of the surrounding verses.⁵⁸ Ultimately, the reader must accept that, though “boast” may not be the best possible translation, there is not enough linguistic information available on yamar for a better translation to be suggested in light of the fact that the word “changed” would not in any way fit within the context of yamar’s usage in Isaiah 61:6. Regardless, the meaning of the passage does not change based on the translation of this word.

One topic of discussion that is prevalent across the commentary entries on Isaiah 61:1-7 is the question as to who the speaker is exactly within this passage. There are correlations between this passage and the Servant Songs found earlier in Isaiah, so much so that many older commentators have considered this passage a fifth Servant Song and argued that the speaker is the same person.⁵⁹ The reasoning for this lies partly in the usage of similar phrases, such as the similarity between “the year of the LORD’s favor” in verse two and “the time of my favor” in Isaiah 49:8 or “liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison” in verse one and a statement concerning the freeing of captives in Isaiah 49:9.⁶⁰ More recently written

⁵⁷ James Strong, *The Strongest Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, ed. John Kohlenberger III and James Swanson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 1510.

⁵⁸ Lancelot Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 896.

⁵⁹ Geoffrey Grogan, “The Year of the Lord’s Favor,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary Vol. 6*, ed. Frank Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 333.

⁶⁰ R.N. Whybray, *New Century Bible Commentary: Isaiah 40-66* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 239-241.

commentaries tend to differ from this view, though,⁶¹ as illustrated by Joseph's Blenkinsopp's commentary in *The Anchor Bible* which states, "It is...difficult to understand how the speaker could be the Servant...since the community would then have a mission directed at itself."⁶² An alternative view on Isaiah 61's relation to the Servant Songs is that the speaker is not the Servant himself but is "claiming inheritance of the office of that important figure in Second Isaiah."⁶³ John Calvin further suggested "that the passage may apply to the prophets, in that they were anointed of the Lord and spoke His words under His authority."⁶⁴ This certainly cannot be the exclusive meaning of the passage, though, since Jesus used it in Luke 4:18-21 to refer to himself.⁶⁵ Regardless of where various commentaries stand on who the speaker is, it is clear that the passage has ultimate reference to Jesus.

Scholarly works outside of commentaries have similarly held a variety of views on Isaiah 61:1-7. Bradley Gregory notes that one of the reasons for this is that the text "articulates its message through a collage of allusions to prior texts and traditions."⁶⁶ The relation of this passage to the Servant Songs continue to be a topic of discussion, with one scholar going so far as to say that verse one was originally part of the Servant Songs and but was later "dislocated"

⁶¹ Geoffrey Grogan, "The Year of the Lord's Favor," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary Vol. 6*, ed. Frank Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 333.

⁶² Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Anchor Bible: Isaiah 56-66 Vol. 19B* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 220.

⁶³ Paul Hanson, *Interpretation: Isaiah 40-66* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1995), 223.

⁶⁴ Edward Young, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah Vol. 3* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 458-459.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 458.

⁶⁶ Bradley Gregory, "The Postexilic Exile in Third Isaiah: Isaiah 61:1-3 in Light of Second Temple Hermeneutics," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126, no. 3 (2007): 475.

and “transferred” to the position it now holds in Isaiah 61.⁶⁷ Beyond topics of debate, it remains clear that Isaiah 61:1-7 is an incredible depiction of “the Yahwistic vision of redemption.”⁶⁸ For this reason, a portion of the text has come to be designated in the Episcopal and Lutheran traditions for usage on the third Sunday following Epiphany, positioning the passage in close proximity to the celebration of Jesus’ first coming.⁶⁹ The passage has also been linked to the importance of holistic Christian mission, as it makes a clear link between “[proclaiming] a gospel message...and [ushering] in salvation before the nations” with “[helping] the disenfranchised.”⁷⁰

Interpretation

Verse one begins with a proclamation by the speaker that he is anointed by the Holy Spirit for the work outlined in verses one through three. The word “anointed” contains clear Messianic undertones, and it is evident that the “me” in this passage has reference to Jesus. The work of the anointed one is holistic, linking “the year of the LORD’s favor” with the meeting of people’s situational needs. After focusing on the work of the speaker, the passage shifts halfway through verse three to the resultant condition of the people the speaker is being sent to. “They” is used three times in verses three through four, referencing the poor, brokenhearted, captives, prisoners, and those who mourn in verses one and two. Verses five and six continue this but

⁶⁷ Julian Morgenstern, “Isaiah 61,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 40-41 (1969-1970): 109.

⁶⁸ Paul Hanson, *Interpretation: Isaiah 40-66* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1995), 224.

⁶⁹ A. Joseph Everson, “Isaiah 61:1-6: To Give Them a Garland Instead of Ashes,” *Interpretation* 32, no. 1 (1978): 70.

⁷⁰ S.D. Mason, “Getting a ‘Handle’ on Holistic Christian Mission: The Contribution of Isaiah 61 as a Discrete Old Testament Voice,” *Missiology: An International Review* 40, no. 3 (2012): 296.

switch from the third person to the more personal second person, appropriate in light of the personal nature of the Hebrew word employed for “ministers” in verse six. Finally, verse seven juxtaposes the condition of the people before and after the work of the speaker in verse one, stating, “Instead of your shame you will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace you will rejoice in your inheritance.” Finally, the passage concludes with a view of eternity, “Everlasting joy will be yours.”

Contemporary Application

The Bible makes it clear throughout the New Testament that Christians are to model their lives after that of Jesus, and it is also evident that at least portions of Isaiah 61:1-7 are direct reference to Jesus. Therefore, the modern church should see this passage as instructive of the ministry that the church has as the bride of Christ. The primary emphasis of this passage is upon the holistic uplifting of society that occurs when the Gospel is introduced, with special attention given to the marginalized of society. The modern church needs to find ways to identify with the marginalized of modern society, serving the whole person and ministering to all of the needs in a person’s life, not just needs that are deemed spiritual. When this is done, ministry is congruent with the heart of God, and lives are transformed as people experience the full work of Jesus modeled before them.

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