

v18-19 “This divine judgment will cause people all over the world (from the setting of the sun to the rising of the sun) to fear the name and glory of God (59:19). At that time when the Lord brings forth his judgment on the wicked, he will also cause his glory to fill the earth (6:3; 40:5, and Ps 72:19) and bring his salvation to all people. The wicked will fear God’s name because of his wrath, but the righteous will revere God’s name because they will see the glory of the Holy One (6:3; 57:15)” (Smith 2009: 602).

v21 “God appears to be speaking to two different audiences. First, God makes a covenant with “them” (third masculine plural) in 21a, the people who revere God’s name and repent of their sins (59:10–20). Then he puts his Spirit on “you” (second masc. singular) and his words in “your” (second masc. singular) mouth. The “them” would naturally refer to those in Zion (59:20) and the Gentiles from the east to the west (59:19) who repent of their sins, but references to “my Spirit” being on an individual (“you”) reminds one of statements about “the Spirit of the LORD” resting on the Messianic “shoot” and “Branch” from Jesse in 11:2, God’s promise to “put his Spirit” on the Servant who brings justice to the nations in 42:1, the person who is sent by God “with his Spirit” in 48:16, and the figure in 61:1 who will have the Spirit on him” (Smith 2009: 605).

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

When you feel that God is distant and unwilling to help you, do you carefully examine your life for sin?

What can you learn and apply from Isaiah’s prayer of confession in verses 9-15a?

How is your understanding of Romans 3:10-18 and Ephesians 6:13-17 increased by an understanding of this chapter?

SOURCES CITED

J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC, 1999.
John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66*, NICOT, 1998.
Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 40–66*, New American Commentary, 2009.

ISAIAH 59: GUILT, CONFESSION, AND REDEMPTION

OUTLINE OF ISAIAH 40-66

- III. The Holy One of Israel is sovereign over the restoration and salvation of his people (40:1–66:24).
 - A. The Holy One of Israel vindicates his glory over idols by predicting the restoration of his people from Babylon (40:1–48:22).
 - B. The Servant of the Lord will suffer to save his people (49:1–55:13).
 - C. The Holy One of Israel will return blessing to the righteous and retribution to the evil (56:1–59:21).
 - 1. The Lord will reward the righteous and expose the wicked (56:1–57:21).
 - 2. **The Lord will redeem those who repent (58:1–59:21).**
 - D. The Holy One of Israel will restore his people to a glorious new home (60:1–66:24).

OUTLINE OF ISAIAH 59

- I. The problem: separation from God (59:1)
- II. The cause (you/they): the people’s sin (59:2-8)
- III. The confession (we): we acknowledge our guilt (59:9-15a)
 - A. The experience of separation from God (59:9-11)
 - B. The recognition that we are the cause (59:12-15a)
- IV. The solution (he): God will save (59:15b-21)
 - A. Only God can save (59:15b-17)
 - B. God will punish his enemies (59:18)
 - C. People all over the world will fear the Lord (59:19)
 - D. The Lord will redeem those who repent (59:20)
 - E. The Lord will provide his Servant (59:21)

NOTES

“Together these two sins sum up Isaiah’s, and all the prophets’, understanding of sin: idolatry and social injustice” (Oswalt 1998: 512).

vv1-8 “These people wondered why God did not answer their prayers (59:1-3), but it is clear that their sinful lies, blood-stained hands, lack of integrity, acts of violence, and evil thoughts separated them from God (59:1-8)” (Smith 2009: 606).

v2 “Isaiah calls us to some simple cause-and-effect logic. God is neither powerless nor insensitive. But he is holy. What is it then that could keep him from us? One thing only: sin. John says the same thing: if we think we can have a relationship with God while living in sin, we are badly mistaken. Sin separates us from God (e.g., 1 John 1:6)” (Oswalt 1998: 513).

v2 “Sin is like a solid brick wall or a giant chasm that separates people from God, and the only thing that can penetrate that wall is a confession of sin” (Smith 2009: 589).

vv5-6 “These two verses can hardly be surpassed for their picture of the menace and the futility of the society that is ruled by sin” (Oswalt 1998: 515).

vv9-13 “The change in these verses is marked by first-person plural verbs. The secret work of divine enabling (57:19) and the proclamation of God’s law (58:1-14) have brought the people to the place where they acknowledge the *darkness* (9), helplessness (10), bitterness (11ab), hopelessness (11cd) and guiltiness (12) of sin” (Motyer 1999: 413-14).

v10 “God’s future promise to remove the nation’s blindness is a repeated theme in the book of Isaiah (29:18; 32:3; 35:5; 42:18-19; 43:8)” (Smith 2009: 595). See also God’s plan to make the people blind (6:10) and to send the Servant to open the eyes of the blind (42:7; 61:1; Luke 4:18).

v12 “Whenever we become aware of our condition, we can hope for God’s power to be unleashed in our lives. So long as we are ignorant of our sins, or try to explain them away, or blame them on somebody else, we can have no real hope for change. It is only when we agree with God’s assessment of our condition that God’s curative powers may be released in us, and our waiting may come to a glad end” (Oswalt 1998: 522).

v12 “The prophet is no doubt hoping that his frank admission will encourage others to confess the sins that they have committed. His remorse and his willingness to take responsibility should encourage others to boldly renounce their evil ways (cf. Ezra 9-10). This courageous and godly confession presents a powerful practical example for all leaders who wish to lead their people in a time of revival and rededication” (Smith 2009: 596).

vv15b-21 “The news of God’s future coming to Zion appears to be God’s direct response to the preceding prayer. God’s promised plan of action in 59:15b-21 will happen at some unknown eschatological date, and his powerful coming to establish justice will impact both the wicked sinners (59:18) and the righteous (59:19-20). Since justice and righteousness did not prevail on the earth because of human sin (59:4,8,11,14,15b), God will use his own righteousness to inaugurate a new era of divine rule through his Spirit (59:21; 60:1-62:12). With this triumphant conclusion, 58:1-59:21 can close so that the next phase of God’s plan (60:1-63:6) can be explained” (Smith 2009: 598-99).

vv15b-16 “The great hope of the world is that God sees! He is neither blind nor insensitive. He sees and hears the clamor of the Sodoms of this world and decrees that their sin will have a limit (Gen. 18:21; 19:24-25). Likewise, he sees the oppression of his people in Egypt and determines to put an end to it (Exod. 2:23-25). So here, although he is the transcendent God of the universe, he is nevertheless aware of his people’s helplessness before sin” (Oswalt 1998: 527-28).