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December 20th: Isaiah 63 & Luke 19:29-48

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The Divine Warrior coming from Edom. The Triumphant Entry.

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Transcript

Isaiah chapter 63. Who is this who comes from Edom, in crimsoned garments from Basra, he who is splendid in his apparel, marching in the greatness of his strength? It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save. Why is your apparel red, and your garments like his who treads in the wine-press? I have trodden the wine-press alone, and from the peoples no one was with me.

I trod them in my anger, and trampled them in my wrath. Their life-blood spattered on my garments, and stained all my apparel. For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and my year of redemption had come.

I looked, but there was no one to help. I was appalled, but there was no one to uphold. So my own arm brought me salvation, and my wrath upheld me.

I trampled down the peoples in my anger, I made them drunk in my wrath, and I poured out their life-blood on the earth. I will recount the steadfast love of the Lord, the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord has granted us, and the great goodness to the house of Israel that He has granted them according to His compassion, according to the

abundance of His steadfast love. For He said, Surely they are My people, children who will not deal falsely.

And He became their Saviour. In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them. In His love and in His pity He redeemed them.

He lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit. Therefore He turned to be their enemy, and Himself fought against them.

Then He remembered the days of old, of Moses and his people. Where is He who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of His flock? Where is He who put in the midst of them His Holy Spirit, who caused His glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses, who divided the waters before them to make for Himself an everlasting name, who led them through the depths? Like a horse in the desert they did not stumble. Like livestock that go down into the valley, the Spirit of the Lord gave them rest.

So you led your people to make for yourself a glorious name. Look down from heaven and sea, from your holy and beautiful habitation. Where are your zeal and your might? The stirring of your inner parts and your compassion are held back from me.

For you are our Father. Though Abraham does not know us, and Israel does not acknowledge us, you, O Lord, are our Father. Our Redeemer from of old is your name.

O Lord, why do you make us wander from your ways and harden our heart, so that we fear you not? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes of your heritage. Your holy people held possession for a little while. Our adversaries have trampled down your sanctuary.

We have become like those over whom you have never ruled, like those who are not called by your name. The final section of the Book of Isaiah, running from chapter 56 to 66, can itself be subdivided into three major subsections, chapters 56 to 59, 60 to 62, and beginning here in chapter 63, the final subsection which runs until the end of chapter 66. Several commentators have argued for a chiasmic structure to this concluding section of the book, centering upon chapter 61.

Within this section, these final chapters retrace dominant thematic steps back to the beginning of the section. John Goldingave, for instance, sees a return to visions of the Lord acting in judgment, previously seen at the end of chapter 59, at the beginning of chapter 63, and a return to prayers for forgiveness and restoration like those at the middle of chapter 59, in the second half of chapter 63, and into chapter 64. Some of the parallels between these sections should be quite apparent in the text itself.

For instance, the parallel between the account of the Lord's judgment at the end of chapter 59, and that at the beginning of this chapter, can be illustrated in the connections between verses like chapter 59 verse 16 and verse 5 of this chapter.

Chapter 59 verse 16 reads, He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede. Then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him.

Verse 5 of chapter 63 reads, I looked, but there was no one to help. I was appalled, but there was no one to uphold. So my own arm brought me salvation, and my wrath upheld me.

In both instances, the Lord, the Divine Warrior, looks and is appalled that there is no righteous man to assist him, and acts by his own arm and strength, being upheld by his own righteousness and wrath, respectively. Both sections describe the clothing of the Lord as the Divine Warrior, and his coming in vengeance. John Oswald suggests that, given the chiasmic structure, the order of the former section of chapters 56 to 59 is largely reversed in the later, which has the effect of shifting the accent of the material.

Whereas the former material had foregrounded the problem of the people's unfaithfulness and their inability, with the Lord's saving work being cast as the response to that, here the Lord's saving power is given greater prominence from the outset. While we should beware of overstating these shifts in accent, they are nevertheless noteworthy. While recognising such divisions and structuring to the material, we also need to appreciate the ways in which these sections continue from and connect to each other.

While the text can be divided, it should not be fragmented or separated. Chapters 60 to 62 spoke of the restoration and salvation of Zion. Here we see the judgment upon the wicked that is the obverse of that salvation.

At several points we can see points of connection in the themes and language between this chapter and that of the section that precedes it. For instance, in chapter 61 verse 2, the servant declared his mission to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God. Similar language, which isn't that common elsewhere, is taken up in verse 4, for the day of vengeance was in my heart and my year of redemption had come.

The description of the divine warrior in these verses is clearly alluded to in the New Testament in Revelation chapter 19 verses 13 to 15 where the imagery is applied to Christ. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood and the name by which he is called is the Word of God. And the armies of heaven arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.

From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. Many over church history, often squeamish of the imagery of Christ as the shedding the blood of his foes, have sought to refer the fulfilment of Isaiah 63's image of

the divine warrior to the shedding of Christ's own blood at the cross.

Ben Witherington is surely correct, however, in arguing that the New Testament relates the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy to Christ's sanguinary judgement upon his foes, and the blood on his robes cannot be identified as the wearer's own. The prophecy seems to be told from the perspective of a watchman, espying a figure approaching from the south, from Edom in its capital, Bozrah, dressed in splendid garments, and with the confident gait of a mighty warrior. Edom, of course, was the land of Esau, Jacob's twin.

Situated to the south of Judah, within the book of Isaiah we have already seen it standing for the enemy nations more generally. The description of the judgement of Edom in Isaiah 34, verses 5-9 plays such a role, Edom representing the opposing nations more broadly. That passage, in the conclusion of the earlier section of the book, prior to the narrative section, is surely recalled here.

The same imagery of the divine warrior, the language of the day of vengeance and the shedding of much blood, tie that earlier passage to our present one. The prominence of blood imagery in prophecies concerning Edom is likely in part a result of purposeful wordplay, as Edom, red and blood are words that sound alike in the Hebrew. Another example of such a peculiar emphasis upon blood in a prophecy against Edom can be seen in somewhere like Ezekiel chapter 35, verse 6. As Witherington observes, the symbolism of the scene is further filled out by the recognition of the importance of viticulture in Edom and the similarity between the verbal route for grape gathering and the place named Bozrah.

The watchman wonders at the identity of the figure that he sees, as by his appearance he is clearly a remarkable person. The lord himself, who is the warrior, answers that he is the one, speaking in his righteousness and powerful to save his people. From a distance, the redness of the approaching warrior's garments is apparent, but the watcher might initially have thought that the warrior's clothing itself was red.

When he gets closer, however, he sees that the garments are stained and spattered. Perhaps his garments have become reddened through treading the grapes on the winepress. The watchman inquires as to the cause of the redness of the warrior's glorious garments.

That the divine warrior should have allowed such splendid garments to become stained is surprising. The lord answers this inquiry in verses 3 to 6. The cause of the garment's redness is the lord's solitary act of judgment upon the peoples, trampling them and shedding their blood in his wrath and displeasure against them. In his anger the lord has taken matters in his hand, and without any to assist him, had in his might wrought vengeance upon the wicked and salvation for his servants.

Developing further wine-related imagery, the lord speaks of making the peoples drunk in

his wrath. The common prophetic image, most fully developed in Jeremiah, of the poisoned cup of the lord's wrath that causes the drinker to reel, stagger, and topple over. The final clause of verse 6 could be taken as referring either to bringing down the eminence of the people to the ground, or of pouring out their blood upon the earth.

It would not surprise me if the double entendre were the intention, especially given the prominence of wine and blood imagery in the context. In verse 7 we turn from the presentation of the divine warrior to what seems to be a lament. In the rest of this chapter and the chapter that follows, the history of the nation will be recalled, a complaint or lament concerning the nation's current situation will be expressed, confession will be made, followed by an appeal for divine action in forgiveness and deliverance.

In the history of his dealings with his people, we see the power, the purposes, and the character of the lord displayed. This is where we begin in verse 7. The speaker declares the praiseworthy love of the lord, his goodness to his people, all of these things displayed over the course of the people's history and in concrete events of deliverance. It is the election of the people that is first mentioned in verse 8. The lord took Israel for himself, surely they are my people.

The lord committed himself to be their guard, and as their reciprocating obligation, the people were to be faithful to him, to be his people, children who will not deal falsely. Throughout their history and all of their trials, the lord acting as the father of his people was their saviour and redeemer, in claiming them for himself, he took on the responsibility of delivering them when they were in trouble. The occasion for his redemption was their difficulties and the afflictions that they suffered.

He redeemed them through the angel of his presence and according to his love and compassion upon them. The figure of the angel is mentioned at various points in the Old Testament text, though often as a shadowy figure who never comes fully into the centre of the stage. We can think for instance of Exodus chapter 23 verses 20 and 21.

The figure of the angel of the lord's presence, the angel of the covenant or the angel of the lord is one that is often associated with the lord's personal presence. We might think for instance of the story of Genesis chapter 18 where the angel of the lord, when he speaks concerning the promise of the child to Abraham and Sarah, speaks as God himself. Likewise in the appearance at the burning bush or the story of Joshua when he meets the commander of the army of the lord.

Throughout church history people have, I believe rightly, related this figure to the second person of the trinity, to the son prior to his incarnation. The angel of the covenant is in many ways the son acting incognito. In Jesus Christ we finally come face to face with the one who had been with Israel on every step of their journey.

However the people rebelled against the lord, the one who had taken them for himself. He had placed his holy spirit within their midst so that they might know his glory and his personal presence. The warning that we have in Ephesians chapter 4 verse 30, not to grieve the holy spirit by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption, might be seen as alluding back to this long history of grieving the holy spirit by the unfaithful people of the lord.

At points like this in the old testament it should be very clear that the doctrine of the trinity did not come like a bolt from a clear blue sky within the new. Core elements of the doctrine can already be seen in the united work of the lord, the father of his people, the angel of his presence and the spirit that he has placed in the midst of them. Back in chapter 51 verses 9 to 11 the people had recalled the great salvation work of the lord in the past.

Awake awake put on strength thou arm of the lord awake as in days of old the generations of long ago was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces who pierced the dragon was it not you who dried up the sea the waters of the great deep who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass and the ransomed of the lord shall return and come to zion with singing everlasting joy shall be upon their heads they shall obtain gladness and joy and sorrow and sighing shall flee away as in that earlier passage here the great deliverance of the exodus is recalled and particularly the deliverance at the red sea the people described as a flock led by shepherds under the leadership of moses was led safely through the depths and brought up from the sea the lord's purpose through all of this was to make himself a glorious name and to give rest to his people we might perhaps hear in some of this passage allusions back to the original creation the purpose of the salvation in part as we see in the book of hebrews is so that the people can enter into the sabbath of the lord great themes of the creation can also be seen in the emphasis upon the depths the division of the waters and bringing things up out of the sea we might also think about the prominence of the holy spirit here as the one who's upon the surface of the waters as the one who breathes into the people the breath of life as a nation and as the one who gives rest is the sabbath spirit this all serves to illustrate the lord's character power and purpose when these things are recalled the people can take renewed confidence knowing that the lord has not changed even though their circumstances might have done they are still his flock they are still his creation and his intent is still to make his name glorious through and in them there is a subtle illusion back to verse 11 in hebrews chapter 13 verse 20 now may the god of peace who brought again from the dead our lord jesus the great shepherd of the sheep by the blood of the eternal covenant sadly in their current beleaguered position the people feel that the lord is far off he is up in heaven in his beautiful habitation and they are struggling on the earth they feel distanced and alienated from him where is the zeal and the power of the lord that he formerly demonstrated on their behalf where is his steadfast love and his pity for his people they may be the descendants of abraham but abraham does not know

them he's not around to recognize them their true father is the lord who called abraham and he is the one that they are looking to for salvation he must act as their kinsman redeemer indeed he is identified by name as their redeemer and yet though he is their father he has allowed them to stray their land his land is overrun his temple and sanctuary have been trampled underfoot by their enemies by his enemies to anyone looking it might seem that they have been completely disowned by him as if the lord recognized no relationship between him and them in this lament the people are recalling both god and themselves as a people to the relationship that they share he is their god and they must once more think of themselves as his people a question to consider where else in the old testament might we find hints of the triune character of god luke chapter 19 verses 29 to 48 when he drew near to bethphage and bethany at the mount that is called olivet he sent two of the disciples saying go into the village in front of you where on entering you will find a colt tied on which no one has ever yet sat untie it and bring it here if anyone asks you why are you untying it you shall say this the lord has need of it so those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them and as they were untying the colt its owner said to them why are you untying the colt and they said the lord has need of it and they brought it to jesus and throwing their cloaks on the colt they set jesus on it and as he rode along they spread their cloaks on the road and as he was drawing near already on the way down the mount of olives the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise god with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen saying blessed is the king who comes in the name of the lord peace in heaven and glory in the highest and some of the pharisees in the crowd said to him teacher rebuke your disciples he answered i tell you if these were silent the very stones would cry out and when he drew near and saw the city he wept over it saying would that you even you had known on this day the things that make for peace but now they are hidden from your eyes for the days will come upon you when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground you and your children within you and they will not leave one stone upon another in you because you did not know the time of your visitation and he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold saying to them it is written my house shall be a house of prayer but you have made it a den of robbers and he was teaching daily in the temple the chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy him but they did not find anything they could do for all the people were hanging on his words at the end of luke chapter 19 we begin the third phase of luke's gospel the first phase runs from the start of the gospel to the turn towards jerusalem the second phase is the drawn-out journey to jerusalem and now with the triumphal entry we enter jerusalem and the final week jesus's triumphal entry into jerusalem echoes passages such as first kings chapter 1 verses 33 to 44 where solomon's riding on the king's mule is a demonstration that he is the true heir and successor to david this also fulfills the prophecy of zachariah chapter 9 verses 9 to 10 rejoice greatly oh daughter of zion shout aloud oh daughter of jerusalem behold your king is coming to you righteous and having salvation as he humble and mounted on a

donkey on a cult the foal of a donkey i will cut off the chariot from ephraim and the war horse from jerusalem and the battle bow shall be cut off and he shall speak peace to the nations his rules shall be from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth donkeys and mules were associated with judges and royalty in the kingdom began with a quest to find donkeys in first samuel chapter 9 and it seems to me that that story is being recalled here in various ways the judges and saw were associated with donkeys judges chapter 5 verse 10 chapter 10 verse 4 chapter 12 verse 14 and first samuel chapter 9 verse 3 the instructions given to the disciples are also similar to the sorts of signs given to Saul at the dawn of the kingdom in first samuel chapter 10 and indeed this is the first of three signs i believe that present the coming of the kingdom with christ as parallel with the first dawn of the kingdom in the book of first samuel no one has ever sat on the animal before it's dedicated for a special purpose and the casting of garments is reminiscent of the welcome of jehu to jerusalem in second kings chapter 9 verses 11 to 13 where he came to destroy the worship of bale when jay who came out to the servants of his master they said to him is all well why did this mad fellow come to you and he said to them you know the fellow and his talk and they said that is not true tell us now and he said thus and so he spoke to me saying thus says the lord i anoint you king over israel then in haste every man of them took his garment and put it under him on the bare steps and they blew the trumpet and proclaimed jay who is king this might also remind us of david's removal of his outer garments in the triumphal entry of the ark into jerusalem the pharisees then would be like michael who sought to rebuke david in second samuel chapter 6 and was judged for it it's important to notice that jesus moves from the mount of olives to jerusalem and back again several times in the chapters that follow in chapter 19 verse 37 chapter 21 verse 37 chapter 22 verse 39 chapter 23 verse 33 and chapter 24 verse 50 this geographical to and fro is significant the reference to the stones crying out might also recall john the baptist claim of chapter 3 verse 8 of god creating children for abraham from the stones it should also be related probably to the claim in the immediately following verses that the stones of jerusalem would be leveled jesus weeps over jerusalem jerusalem does not know the day of its visitation it was not aware it was not prepared and his weeping of jerusalem might recall the weeping of the prophet jeremiah in the book of lamentations jay who's triumphal entry into jerusalem was followed by the destruction of the temple of bale and his priests unsurprisingly then jesus goes to the temple and drives people out his statement about the temple being a den of thieves needs to be read against the background of jeremiah chapter 7 to which he alludes jeremiah chapter 7 verse 11 is the verse he quotes the word that came to jeremiah from the lord stand in the gate of the lord's house and proclaim there this word and say hear the word of the lord all you men of judah who enter these gates to worship the lord thus says the lord of hosts the god of israel amend your ways and your deeds and i will let you dwell in this place do not trust in these deceptive words this is the temple of the lord the temple of the lord the temple of the lord for if you truly amend your ways and your deeds if you truly execute justice one with another if you do not oppress the sojourner the fatherless or the widow or shed innocent blood in this place

and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm then i will let you dwell in this place in the land that i gave of old to your fathers forever behold you trust in deceptive words to no avail will you steal murder commit adultery swear falsely make offerings to baal and go after other gods that you have not known and then come and stand before me in this house which is called by my name and say we are delivered only to go on doing all these abominations has this house which is called by my name become a den of robbers in your eyes behold i myself have seen it declares the lord the jews of jeremiah's day treated the temple as a sort of talisman it protected them from god's judgment because god was present there they could get away with what they wanted they thought that it enabled them to continue in oppression and lawlessness they could like brigands fleeing to a den flee to the temple and find refuge there their worship providing them with cover for all their iniquity jesus is making the same point of his generation they have treated the temple and its worship as a way to excuse themselves from the actual service of the lord as a way to cover up their crimes and not to deal with the truth of what they have done i don't believe that the point of driving out those buying and selling in the temple was primarily to do with an objection to the money changes and the dove sellers in particular or with any principled objection to the performance of such activities within the broader temple precincts the chief point was to put a temporary halt to the sacrifices which couldn't proceed without these activities now there is an allusion i think to zachariah chapter 14 verse 21 and every part in jerusalem and judah shall be holy to the lord of hosts so that all who sacrifice may come and take of them and boil the meat of the sacrifice in them and there shall be no longer a trader in the house of the lord of hosts on that day jesus then having driven out all these people makes the temple a site of his teaching as worth noting the language of exorcism that is used to describe the removal of those who are buying and selling in the temple in verse 45 a question to consider in the triumphal entry as the people are praising god they quote psalm 118 why might the quotation from this psalm at this particular juncture be significant