The Holy Glory of Zion

Isaiah 4.2-6

The Messianic theology that emerges from this text is threefold. But distinct in all of the points that develop here has to do with holiness- the antithesis of the state of the typological kingdom currently under judgment.

*The Messianic Deliverer*

The happy of future of Zion is first bound to its Ruler and King. The royal character of the realm is rooted in the royal rule of its Messianic deliverer. It is the “Branch” previously stated, who becomes the hope of the “survivors of Israel”- those who are redeemed from bondage. He will be its beauty and glory. The epicenter of Zion’s holy habitation in a renewed earth. As the beauty of the Redeemer shines forth throughout the land, He beautifies the redeemed so that they will shine like the stars (cf. Dan. 12.3; Rev. 22.5). The rest of this passage expounds on this reciprocal glory between the Lord, the Messiah, and the people of God. However, in order to achieve this heightened state of glory, Zion must first be cleansed.

*The Messianic Judge*

As we move from a consideration of Messiah (the Branch of the Lord), we find that another function of His advent (both initial and final) is one accompanied by judgment (cf. Mt. 3.12; Lk. 3.17). However, as the text supplies, the element of judgment is not here primarily one of wrath and condemnation but of purity and cleansing (cf. Is. 59.20; Rom. 11.26). Isaiah gives us several points of consecration associated with Messiah’s coming judgment as Zion is cleansed of all alloy and impurity not fit for the final glory-realm.

*Cleansed of the surrounding wicked*

This is intimated by the fact that only those among the redeemed remnant of “survivors” will be in the new Jerusalem, “everyone who is recorded for life in Jerusalem” (v.3b). Scripture is crystal clear as to the nature of God’s purging of the wicked at the final judgment:

**Revelation 20:11–15** 11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

As far as the world is concerned, as the psalmist tells us, the wicked will be like chaff, they will not enter the congregation of the righteous. There will come a point in time when the church will no longer endure spectators! If you are not recorded for life you will not see life, if you are not a citizen of the kingdom now, you will have no access then (cf. Rev. 22.15).

*Cleansed of the indwelling sin*

Tethered to the Messiah’s ministry of judgment is Messiah’s anointing with the Spirit. And with this reference to the Spirit notice the Trinitarian dimensions of the vision here. The Messiah is the Branch of the “Lord” (presumably the Father), the Spirit is He who anoints and assists, indeed glorifies and magnifies the ministry of the Branch; a ministry of “judgment” and “burning.”

**Isaiah 11:1–2** 1 Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a branch from his roots will bear fruit. 2 The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

Each person Father, Son and Spirit fulfilling their covenant role in bringing the world to its intended, indeed, to its decreed future consummation- a consummation of Trinitarian glory (cf. John 17.5). But the Spirit is central to Messiah’s work; functioning to anoint, empower, comfort, glorify, and aid in all that Jesus Christ ever did in His life, death, resurrection and exaltation. The Messianic mission is the mission of the Spirit (cf. Lk. 4.14). Although applied by the “Spirit,” this sanctification of God’s people can never be conceived of apart from Christ. For all of our sanctification is in, by, and for Jesus Christ; He is our sanctification (cf. 1 Cor. 1.30). He is the source of our sanctification particularly as we think of our union with Him (1 Cor. 1.2). He is our power in sanctification as we think of our vital union and fellowship with Him (John 15.1ff; 1 Cor. 1.9; Phil. 3.10; 4.13). And He is the goal of our sanctification as we think of our image in Him (2 Cor. 3.18; 4.4-6). The Spirit burns and refines us until we are more and more melted into the image of Christ. Isaiah’s vision of a sanctified people, reflecting as it were their Redeemer’s glory, this very thing was also Paul’s burden for the Church (cf. Gal. 4.19). There is no sanctification apart from conformity to Jesus Christ:

**2 Corinthians 3:17–18** 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. 18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

Zion having been so consecrated is now shut! That is, nothing that does not belong will ever come into it. No more foreign armies invading, no more serpents and no more dogs for the clean Zion-city cannot tolerate the unclean. If you are not “recorded for life” you will not be given access to Jerusalem. John the revelator reminds us at this point of Zion’s exclusivity as a city that is above all marked by holiness:

**Revelation 21:27** 27 and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

**Revelation 22:11** 11 “Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and the one who is holy, still keep himself holy.”

*Cleansed of the fallen world*

Just as God moved to systematically dismantle the sinful nation, represented by the filth of the daughters of Zion, in an act of decreation; so too, God is now methodically restoring Zion in an act of glorious *recreation*. He removes the unholy from the nation, He removes the chaos of sin and violence, and by a “Spirit of judgment and the Spirit of burning” He will remove the fallen world around Zion leading the way to a new environment over the whole realm of Zion! This world is passing away and along with it will go the kingdom of Christless nations, along with their cultures, morals, and religions (cf. 1 Cor. 7.31; 2 Cor. 4.18;1 John 2.17). But as one world is removed, another is ready to be fashioned, a new world, a new creation, and new Heavens and Earth filled with righteousness (cf. 2 Pet. 3.13). Notice that the rest of the text says nothing of the moral quality of the realm of Zion. Having been fully consecrated, the focus now shifts to the celestial glory of the heavenly Mountain-city as we consider the work of the Messianic Consummator in bringing all things to their intended goal for the earth to be heavenized, filled with the glory of God.

*The Messianic Consummator*

The language of *recreation* is utilized in the vision of the dissolution and overcoming of the present sin-age and the bringing forth of the future age of glory, the age of the Spirit. The same Hebrew word associated with the original creation, *bara*, is used here of the creation of the new heavenly state of Zion. Having been morally cleansed, kingdom is ready for creation only here it is the new creation. Having become the “faithful city” (1.26) Zion is ready to be the Glory-city of God. To develop this, Isaiah uses familiar imagery. The language of Mount, assembly, cloud, smoke, and flaming fire all recollect the great Exodus event. This then supports the idea that the Branch, the Messiah, Jesus is the head of a new and greater Exodus (cf. Mt. 2.15). Conversely, it also supports the notion that the historical Exodus-event was itself typological of the final eschatological deliverance of the Church of God. So, NT authors speak of New Covenant believers, not only as the reconstituted Israel of God (cf. Gal. 6.16; Phil. 3.3; 1 Pet. 2.9-10), but also, to fit the context of Isaiah, we are strangers, aliens, and exiles sojourning through a strange land (cf. Heb. 11.13-14; Jam. 1.1; 1 Pet. 1.1, 17; 2 Pet. 2.11).

As we are drawn back to the Exodus event of Sinai, we recall that there, such theophanic glory-imagery was dreadful to the people (Ex. 19.10ff. cf. Heb. 12.18ff.). But here what was dreadful is now delightful as we fear the glory and glory in the fear! As we think of this Sinai imagery, Isaiah then adds an additional surprising description adding to the mystery of the vision, “for over all the glory will be a canopy” (כִּ֥י עַל־כָּל־כָּב֖וֹד חֻפָּֽה). The intimation here is twofold. *First*, the Hebrew term *ḥuppâ* (חֻפָּֽה) is manifold. It can mean ‘covering’ as with a roof, ‘pavilion’ as with a porch, but it also speaks of a ‘bridal chamber’ or a bed with a covering canopy spread over (cf. Ps. 19.5; Joel 2.16). Thus interpreted, the imagery is one of God’s intimate fellowship with His people in bridal celebration where we come to commune, feast and worship God in divine love (cf. Ex. 24.9-11; Is. 25.6-8; Lk. 22.14-18; Rev. 19.9). *Second*, Isaiah is careful to note the scope of the glory, “over all the glory” signifies the cosmic extent of the glory. Usually associated with specific locations like the tent of meeting and later only the Most Holy place (cf. Ex. 40.34; Lev. 16.2), now, this glory-cloud together with its canopy phenomenon permeates the whole realm Zion. Sinai, and later the temple were but a microcosm of the cosmic Glory-realm of the Zion-temple-city where saints immortal will enjoy everlasting rest and refuge in the presence of God.

As we consider the total picture here, the glory of God here is presented by the glory-canopy; this temple *pavilion*; the roof over head covering and sheltering the house of the Lord which takes on the function of cosmic bridal chamber where the Bridegroom-Lamb and the Bride-Church consummate their union. The foundations of this imagery stretch both as far back as the creation account in Genesis as the Glory-Spirit of God fashions the cosmic temple (in the lower register) and is seen ‘hovering’ over the cosmic structure (the universe), later represented by the clouds of the firmament, as well as the Exodus event where the same sheltering presence of God is seen (cf. Dt. 32.10-11). Creation and Passover event both have in common the concept of shielding, protection and guardianship. God brooding over His people in avian imagery is nothing new (cf. Ex. 19.4; Ps. 91.4). But in the prophets such avian imagery become prophetic parlance for the eschaton as God’s people will shelter under the wings of the Almighty in the glory-realm of heaven. The connection with the Exodus makes the canopy presence of God *redemptive*. The redeemed refuge inside the canopy of redemption as God throws His tabernacling presence over them as the ultimate symbol of divine protectorate and holy communion. Thus, it is no surprise to find this imagery at the consummation:

**Revelation 7:15–17** 15 “For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. 16 “They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; 17 for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.”

**Revelation 21:3** 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,

Finally, we end on a rather practical but God-centered note only to emphasize the goodness and kindness of God. For, how kind of God it is to shelter and protect us? How good of God to provide shade and refuge. But once again, as we think about these great redemptive themes, there application, as simple as we may want to make them for personal comfort, they are still only truly made meaningful in Christ. As Revelation makes clear, the goodness of Isaiah’s “shelter”, “shade” and “refuge” are only and forever realized through Jesus Christ who brings us through the harsh surroundings of tribulation and the sweltering trials of the present age to the sweet refreshment of His presence through the cross. For, as Jesus taught, man knows no greater “storm and rain” than storm of judgment the torrents of the wrath of God, therefore, build your house on the rock! (Mt. 7.24-27).