

40. Defining Restoration and Retribution (Isaiah 58–66)

There comes a point when time runs out in the world and events come to a conclusion—what the prophet Joseph Smith called the “winding-up scene.” While retaining word links with the earlier parts of his prophecy that now lead up to the end, Isaiah depicts the final showdown between evildoers and God’s holy ones. The latter become sanctified sufficient to endure God’s presence with them precisely because evils on the earth reaches their zenith, causing the Lord to empower over it those who call on his name. His coming thus at once bodes ill for the wicked, who are erased from it, but well for the righteous, who live on into a millennial age of bliss.

As discussed previously, the self-righteousness or hypocrisy of God’s people lies at the root of God’s end-time judgment of the world and of the reversal of circumstances between them and his people of the house of Israel. Says, God: “Proclaim it aloud without restraint; raise your voice like a trumpet! Declare to my people their transgressions, to the house of Jacob its sins. Yet they importune me daily, eager to learn my ways, like a nation practicing righteousness and not forsaking the precepts of its God” (Isaiah 58:1–2).

Appointing his “arm” of “righteousness” as his emissary, the Lord sets in motion his judgments upon the wicked as depicted in symbolic terms that characterize the end-time roles of his servant and the king of Assyria: “Jehovah saw that there was no justice, and it displeased him. When he saw it, he wondered why there was no man, no one who would intercede. So his own arm brought about salvation for him; his righteousness rallied to his cause. He put on righteousness as a breastplate and made salvation the helmet on his head; he clothed himself with vengeance for a garment and wrapped himself in fury as in a robe. According to what they deserve, he will repay them: wrath upon his adversaries, reprisals upon his enemies; to the isles he will render retribution” (Isaiah 59:15–18).

While the Lord’s bloody sacrifice for sin saves those who repent, it works against the wicked. These must now pay for their own sins but without resolution: “Who is this coming from Edom in red-stained garments? Who is this from Bozrah, arrayed in majesty, pressing forward in the strength of his power? It is I, who am mighty to save, announcing righteousness! Why are you clothed in red, your garments like those who tread [grapes] in the winepress? Alone I have trodden out a vatful; of the nations no one was with me. I trod them down in my anger; in my wrath I trampled them. Their lifeblood splattered my garments, and I have stained my whole attire. For I had resolved on a day of vengeance, and the year of my redeemed had come” (Isaiah 63:1–4).

“From the west men will fear Jehovah Omnipotent, and from the rising of the sun his glory. For he will come [upon them] like a hostile torrent impelled by the Spirit of Jehovah. But he will come as Redeemer to Zion, to those of Jacob who repent of transgression” (Isaiah 59:19–20).

To the rescue of his elect God sends his righteous watchmen—his end-time servants who intercede for and restore the house of Israel: “I have appointed watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem, who shall not be silent day or night. You who call upon Jehovah, let not up nor give him respite till he reestablishes Jerusalem and makes it renowned in the earth” (Isaiah 62:6).

God's end-time servant and his fellow-servants prepare the way before the Lord's coming to reign on the earth: "Pass on, go through gates; prepare the way for the people! Excavate, pave a highway cleared of stones; raise the ensign to the nations! Jehovah has made proclamation to the end of the earth: Tell the Daughter of Zion, See, your Salvation comes, his reward with him, his work preceding him. They shall be called the holy people, the redeemed of Jehovah; and you shall be known as in demand, a city never deserted" (Isaiah 62:10–12).

A glorious end-time restoration of the house of Israel contrasts God's retribution upon the wicked: "Arise, shine, your light has dawned; the glory of Jehovah has risen upon you! Although darkness covers the earth, and a thick mist the peoples, upon you Jehovah will shine; over you his glory shall be visible. Nations will come to your light, their kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look about you! They have all assembled to come to you: your sons shall arrive from afar; your daughters shall return to your side" (Isaiah 60:1–4).

"Foreigners will rebuild your walls, and their kings will minister to you. Though I struck you in anger, I will gladly show you mercy. Your gates shall always remain open; they shall not be shut day or night, that a host of nations may be brought to you and their kings escorted in. And the nation or kingdom that will not serve you shall perish; such nations shall be utterly ruined" (Isaiah 60:10–12).

"Although you had been forsaken and abhorred, with none passing through [your land], yet I will make you an everlasting pride, the joy of generation after generation. You will suck the milk of the nations, suckling at the breasts of kings. Then shall you know that I, Jehovah, am your Savior, that your Redeemer is the Valiant One of Jacob" (Isaiah 60:15–16).

Songs of salvation issue from the lips of those whom God delivers out of the world's destruction: "I will recount in praise of Jehovah Jehovah's loving favors, according to all that Jehovah has done for us, according to the great kindness he has mercifully and most graciously rendered the house of Israel. For he thought, Surely they are my people, sons who will not play false; and so he became their Savior: with all their troubles he troubled himself, the angel of his presence delivering them. In his love and compassion he himself redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old" (Isaiah 63:7–9).

The Lord addresses directly his faithful servants who brought about the great end-time restoration of all things: "Hear the word of Jehovah, you who are vigilant for his word: Your brethren who abhor you, and exclude you because of my name, say, Let Jehovah manifest his glory, that we may see cause for your joy! But it is they who shall suffer shame. Hark, a tumult from the city, a noise from the temple! It is the voice of Jehovah paying his enemies what is due them" (Isaiah 66:5–6).

Those who abused and opposed his servants, who felt justified doing so, now feel God's retribution upon them: "Thus says my Lord Jehovah: My servants shall eat indeed, while you shall hunger; my servants shall drink indeed, while you shall thirst; my servants shall rejoice indeed, while you shall be dismayed. My servants shall shout indeed, for gladness of heart, while

you shall cry out with heartbreak, howling from brokenness of spirit. Your name shall be left to serve my chosen ones as a curse when my Lord Jehovah slays you” (Isaiah 65:13–15).