

## 2. THE HERALD OF GOOD NEWS IN ISAIAH: MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

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### **Author's Profile**

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### **Abstract**

An essential part of the missionary task is the communication of the good news. Little attention has been given to the Old Testament development of the idea, particularly as it pertains to our understanding of the missiological implications. The book of Isaiah contains several references to herald/heralding at key points. This theme in Isaiah has important implications for God's people in considering the message and the messenger. The God-initiated message is intended to be spread from those who first receive the message to others. In particular, the city of Jerusalem is seen as a conduit for the message to spread to other towns and cities. A communication strategy can be detected in Isaiah that has application for missions in our day. This article will examine the use of herald in Isaiah and examine the communication strategy for the dissemination of the good news.



## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Is the idea of missions, as the evangelical church typically thinks of it, found in the Old Testament? There has been an ongoing debate among scholars about the missionary calling of Israel in the Old Testament (hereafter OT). Is the posture of Israel to be passive or centripetal in nature? Or is Israel called to a proactive or centrifugal missional posture? Most of the arguments for either side are attempts at broad sweeping statements from the Bible. More rigorous study of particular passages or themes found in the OT is often lacking.<sup>2</sup> This paper will attempt to answer the question, in part, by examining the role of the herald in Isaiah.

While the nature of Israel's sentness is questioned, it is clear the nations are in view throughout the OT. The selection of Israel as God's people was always to have global implications. For example, Exodus 19 indicates Israel exists, in part, to point the surrounding nations to God. What's more, as becomes clear in Isaiah, even Israel is in need of mission. Whole cities slipped away from worship of Yahweh and established other gods in their high places and even town centers. There was a concerted need for news of the one true God to be heralded in Jerusalem, to the towns and cities of Judah, and to the nations.

## Heralding Good News in the Old Testament

The herald of good news or the act of heralding the good news is based on the Hebrew root, *bsr*, which occurs thirty times in the OT (24 times as a verb and 6 times as a noun). The root appears widely in

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<sup>1</sup> This article was originally presented at the Evangelical Missiological Society National Conference, September 18, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Elisha Kwabena Marfo, "Who Said, No Mission In The Old Testament: A Theological Framework Of Mission In The Isaianic Literature," *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies* 6, no. 4 (July 2020): 223.

Ancient Near East languages, all similar to the Hebrew usage, “to bring good news.”<sup>3</sup> Occasionally, the news delivered is neutral (1 Sam 4:17), but most occurrences denote *good* news (1 Sam 31:9; 2 Sam 1:20; 18:19-31; 2 Kings 7:9; Psalms 40:9).<sup>4</sup> There has been some discussion of whether *bsr* specifically refers to the news being good in nature. David’s reaction to King Saul’s death brings clarity on this point. When the Philistines found Saul and his sons dead, they dispatched messengers to bring the “good news” (*bsr*) to their people (1 Sam 31:9). When David is told of the “good news,” he slays the messenger because it was not good news (2 Sam 4:10). The herald thought it would be good news even though David did not think it was good news. Additionally, implied in bringing good news is the geographical movement of the message going from one place to another via the messenger.

There is a transitive nature to the heralding of good news. Psalm 68:11 refers to a great number of women announcing good news of enemy retreat, which may be referring to instances found in Exodus 15:20-21 and 1 Samuel 18:6-7. The good news is not the solitary act of one messenger telling one recipient. Rather, there is a jubilant air of repeating and passing on the news far and wide.

### Isaiah’s Use of Herald

The Hebrew verb *bsr* appears seven times in Isaiah in important locations in the text (40:9; 41:27; 52:7-9; 60:6; 61:6).

#### Isaiah 40:9

Walter Brueggemann says this verse is crucial “because this is the first intentional, self-conscious use of the term *gospel* in the Old

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<sup>3</sup> Wilhelm Gesenius, *Genenius’s Hebrew And Chaldee Lexicon To The Old Testament Scriptures*, trans. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (Grand Rapid, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1969), 146; Matthew Seufert, “Isaiah’s Herald,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 77, no. 2 (2015): 220–21.

<sup>4</sup> Seufert, “Isaiah’s Herald,” 221.

Testament.”<sup>5</sup> Scholars are divided on the translation and thus the interpretation of this verse. How one understands the context of Isaiah 40 impacts the identification of the herald in verse 9. R. W. Fisher studied the herald in Isaiah, but his interpretation was guided by an assumption that Second Isaiah was the messenger.<sup>6</sup> Brevard Childs refutes Fisher’s interpretation, seeing a strong intertextual link with Isaiah 35.<sup>7</sup> The previous verses in chapter 40 already recall imagery used in chapter 35, and verbal links between 35:3-4 and 40:9-10 continue this connection. In chapter 35, Zion is told to expect a time of redemption, when things are put right. Now, in chapter 40, Zion/Jerusalem have been redeemed and are given the task of making this glorious news known.

There are two ways to translate the genitive, *mebasseret*. If it is an objective genitive, then Zion/Jerusalem would be the recipient of the good news, as interpreted in the LXX.<sup>8</sup> Some base this assumption on the other references to the herald as male (cf. 41:27).<sup>9</sup> The more likely option is to translate it as appositional genitive which makes Zion/Jerusalem, the bringer of the message.<sup>10</sup> Jerusalem is addressed

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<sup>5</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah, Vol. 2: Chapters 40-66*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 20.

<sup>6</sup> Issues of canon and authorship in Isaiah are beyond the scope of this paper. The assumption in this paper is that Isaiah is best understood canonically (chapters 1-66).

<sup>7</sup> Brevard S Childs, *Isaiah*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 301.

<sup>8</sup> John Goldingay and David Payne, *Isaiah 40-55 Vol 1: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, International Critical Commentary (London: T&T Clark, 2014), 86; Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaia*, Reprint (Nabu Press, 1892), 290.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Goulder, “Deutero-Isaiah of Jerusalem,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 28, no. 3 (March 1, 2004): 354, <https://doi.org/10.1177/030908920402800306>.

<sup>10</sup> Klaus Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 40-55*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 61; Christopher R. North, *The Second Isaiah: Introduction, Translation and Commentary to Chapters XL-LV* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 79; Geoffrey W. Grogan, *Isaiah*, Revised, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 722; Childs, *Isaiah*, 301; John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, vol. 25, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Texas: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 82; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-55*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 185; Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah: Vol. II* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1890), 139.

using female imagery in several places of Isaiah (cf. 1:21; 52:1; 54:1-17; 62:4-5). The feminine form makes the most sense with the latter translation. Israelite cities, particularly Jerusalem, were personified using feminine language,<sup>11</sup> a fact that settles the issue according to Delitzsch.<sup>12</sup> Jerusalem is already addressed at the beginning of the announcement (v. 1). The five feminine imperatives that follow give further reason to see the city as the herald in this passage.<sup>13</sup> The exile was most noticeably felt in Jerusalem, the political and spiritual epicenter of Judah. Here in chapter 40, at last, is the promise of a new day for God's people. The news comes to Jerusalem via the prophet. In verse 9, it is expected that the city of Jerusalem is to deliver this message to the cities of Judah.<sup>14</sup> "It is therefore unsurprising and unexceptional if Jerusalem is called on to proclaim good news to the cities of Judah."<sup>15</sup>

Common to Isaiah is the use of the poetic device of parallelism in the lines. Zion and Jerusalem are each called to herald good news. Zion is technically the topographical name of the eastern hill in Jerusalem, a place associated with the temple and presence of God's glory and rule.<sup>16</sup> Jerusalem is the name of the whole city and more often conjures thoughts of the political seat of Judah. Baltzar suggests the combination pulls the religious and political together as the whole city.<sup>17</sup> Jerusalem not only holds a position of influence but the city is physically perched on a hilltop, strategically positioned to

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<sup>11</sup> Alison R. Gray, "Reflections on the Meaning(s) of Ur in the Hebrew Bible," in *The City in the Hebrew Bible: Critical, Literary and Exegetical Approaches*, ed. James K. Aitken and Hilary F. Marlow, Library of Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament Studies 672 (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2018), 18; Christl M. Maier, "Whose Mother? Whose Space? Jerusalem in Third Isaiah," in *Constructions of Space V: Place, Space, and Identity in the Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. Claudia V. Camp and Andrew Mein, Library of Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament Studies 576 (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 123-24.

<sup>12</sup> Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah: Vol. II*, 139.

<sup>13</sup> Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-55*, 185.

<sup>14</sup> Terry W. Eddinger, "An Analysis of Isaiah 40:1-11 (17)," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 9 (1999): 131.

<sup>15</sup> Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-55*, 185.

<sup>16</sup> Ben C. Ollenburger, *Zion, the City of the Great King: A Theological Symbol of the Jerusalem Cult* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 23.

<sup>17</sup> Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 40-55*, 12.

declare the news of “good tidings that God and the salvation of God are near at hand” far and wide.<sup>18</sup>

Jerusalem is told to herald the good news to the cities of Judah. Edward Kissane sees the contrast between Jerusalem and the other cities as another reason Jerusalem should be interpreted as the bearer of the good news.<sup>19</sup> The movement from Jerusalem to the surrounding cities implies influence over Jerusalem’s “daughter” cities (cf. Ezek 16:46-48). The other towns and cities of Judah were not as pillaged or depopulated as Jerusalem. And there was certainly an increase of spiritual infidelity. According to Jeremiah, the cities of Judah had come to acquire their own objects of worship, city-gods of a sort (cf. Jer. 11:12-13). The announcement of good news for God’s people also involved a religious clash with the gods that had taken root in the hearts of those dwelling in Judah.<sup>20</sup> Good news is only good for the beneficiaries. But there is a sting of judgment for those who remain loyal to other idols.<sup>21</sup> Isaiah’s monotheistic emphasis is not merely perfunctory doxological repetition. To reinstate Yahweh as Lord over the cities of Judah required declaration.

There is an emphatic quality to the heralding of good news. Already the image of a herald reporting news of victory has an urgent tone. The following language of raising one’s voice loudly further underscores this emphasis. And the message to be given to the surrounding cities uses “messenger speech.”<sup>22</sup> “Behold” (*hinnēh*) is an attention-grabbing word that has gravity that points to something or

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<sup>18</sup> Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-55*, 185.

<sup>19</sup> Edward J. Kissane, *The Book of Isaiah: Volume II (XL-LXVI)* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan Limited, 1943), 9.

<sup>20</sup> Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 40-55*, 62.

<sup>21</sup> R. Heskett, *Reading the Book of Isaiah: Destruction and Lament in the Holy Cities* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 72.

<sup>22</sup> Goldingay and Payne, *Isaiah 40-55 Vol 1*, 88.

someone both unexpected and significant.<sup>23</sup> A herald possessing a message must share the message.<sup>24</sup>

### Isaiah 41:27

As Isaiah so often does, 41:21-29 uses courtroom language to deliberate the truth claims of God's word compared with false gods, Babylonian gods in particular. Much like 40:9, the context indicates missional engagement between different beliefs. The flow of thought in this chapter is the disputation of false gods at the beginning and the end, with the contrast of Yahweh, strong and active, whose mere presence is good news.<sup>25</sup> Verse 26 describes gods who are unable to declare anything.<sup>26</sup> These muted gods are contrasted with the God who speaks. God's word is life-giving.

Verse 27 recalls the entre of good news to Zion. The Hebrew is difficult to translate and most translations fill in gaps.<sup>27</sup> This time the verb is masculine, leading some to conclude Isaiah is the herald in this passage. Using the verb's gender to determine the identity of the herald is complicated by the metaphorical usage. Jerusalem/Zion are mentioned with both feminine and masculine language depending on the thrust of the metaphor. For example, although Jerusalem/Zion normally use feminine forms, some passages use masculine forms based on the metaphorical image (Isa 51:12, 14-16).<sup>28</sup> In summary, Jerusalem receives the herald who delivers life-altering news, not only for Jerusalem, but for all who hear and believe.

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<sup>23</sup> William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 82.

<sup>24</sup> Eddinger, "An Analysis of Isaiah 40:1-11 (17)," 131.

<sup>25</sup> Brueggemann, *Isaiah, Vol. 2: Chapters 40-66*, 40.

<sup>26</sup> Seufert, "Isaiah's Herald," 226.

<sup>27</sup> J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1998), 316.

<sup>28</sup> Leland Edward Wilshire, "The Servant-City: A New Interpretation of the 'Servant of the Lord' in the Servant Songs of Deutero-Isaiah," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94, no. 3 (September 1975): 356-67.



## Isaiah 52:7

Isaiah 52 opens with a call to attention to Jerusalem. A new era is coming, an era marked by victory and joy rather than defeat and shame. Childs connects this passage with chapter 40.<sup>29</sup> The prologue would have readers expect the herald to be Zion, but instead there is one who speaks to Zion. Van der Woude argues that the herald here is the Lord himself, the one who brings comfort (40:1-2; 49:14-26) and processes down the highway prepared for him (40:3-5).<sup>30</sup> Good news is a call to action. The wording of the call in verse 7 expects a response.<sup>31</sup> God's return to Zion calls for all of Jerusalem to worship, which then gives witness to the world.

Verse 7 moves readers to visualize the herald coming over the mountains with the message of God's salvation. Christopher North describes the scene:

The watchers in Jerusalem would have their first sight of the runner as he appeared on the Mount of Olives. But his journey would begin in Babylonia and the Prophet's imagination pictures him as he makes his way direct across the Syrian Desert, over hills and across ravines, a distance of more than 500 miles. A Marathon-race indeed! . . . The 2:2 line suggests a picture of the runner first on a distant hill, then descending into the valley separating it from one nearer the city, reappearing and once more disappearing, until he comes within earshot and cries, 'Your God reigns!' Or 'has become King' cf.

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<sup>29</sup> Childs, *Isaiah*, 406.

<sup>30</sup> Annemarieke van der Woude, "Can Zion Do without the Servant in Isaiah 40-55?," *Calvin Theological Journal* 39 (2004): 112.

<sup>31</sup> Childs, *Isaiah*, 406.

‘Yahweh reigns/has become King’ of Ps. 96:10;  
97:1; 99:1.<sup>32</sup>

It is noteworthy that the good news is about God, rather than Babylon. Jerusalem has been redeemed (v. 9) because God has made it so. God enters as king! Blenkinsopp elaborates:

What is behind this language is the ancient connection between kingship and salvation, the figure of the savior king. The basic image here, therefore, is that of a royal *parousia*. Yahveh is a royal figure (41:21; 43:15; 44:6; 52:7) ready to impose his will, by force if necessary. The metaphor of the arm that wields the sword or the scepter (51:9; 53:1; 59:16; 62:8), the arm bared for combat (52:10), connotes struggle against political forces opposed to God's purposes, and also echoes traditional liturgical language hymning Yahveh as king in the so-called Enthronement Psalms (Pss 47, 93, 95-99).<sup>33</sup>

The prophet has been building towards this victorious announcement since chapter 40. Although the immediate context is the captivity of Babylon, there is something much bigger happening here. From Isaiah's opening salvo in the first chapter, Jerusalem was not the city God intended. Injustice and idolatry marked the city. The depth of their sin could not simply be ignored. Furthermore, the failure of God's people also meant the nations remained in darkness. The herald sighted with news of peace and victory is not merely speaking of a temporary victory, rather “we are moving in the theological and spiritual area of wrath removed from the Lord's people (51:17), their new status as kings and priests before him (52:1-2), the great redemption without money (3) and the revelation of the Lord in word and person (6).”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> North, *The Second Isaiah*, 221.

<sup>33</sup> Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-55*, 186.

<sup>34</sup> Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 419.

Jerusalem experiences the true comfort promised in 40:1-2 because God has made it so through his own intervention. The arm of the Lord (cf. 40:10; 51:9; 53:1) resembles his power to overcome evil and offer true and lasting salvation (51:6), such that the ends of the earth see God's salvation. Jerusalem experiences the news of God's salvation and reign first, but this news is not intended to remain in Jerusalem. The nations are to know of God as the one who "rolls up his sleeves"<sup>35</sup> to act on behalf of a people under wrath (51:17, 22). It is incumbent on Jerusalem to herald the good news in three ways: 1) declaring the word of God; 2) singing in joyous response; 3) living as God's redeemed people.

The idea of the herald in Isaiah is always tied to the word of God.<sup>36</sup> The servant songs tell of one who will bring about true salvation. As Seufert notes: "The Herald-image heralds the victory as though it were already accomplished."<sup>37</sup> There is a verbal message to be declared sourced in verbal revelation from God.

Singing is a natural response to the news of God's reign. God's people are invited to sing as a response to the servant (42:10-12; 44:23; 48:20).<sup>38</sup> Such singing is a doxological response to God from the congregation of God. However, it is more than corporate remembrance, it is also one way in which witness is declared to the nations (cf. 42:10-12).

God's redeemed people also testify to the good news through holy living. In Isaiah 52:11-12, this living is metaphorically described as a departure from where they have been (drawing on exilic imagery) and setting out in new life with God going before them. Not all interpreters are agreed on this interpretation,<sup>39</sup> but if the real message

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<sup>35</sup> Motyer, 420.

<sup>36</sup> Seufert, "Isaiah's Herald," 234.

<sup>37</sup> Seufert, 231.

<sup>38</sup> Childs, *Isaiah*, 406.

<sup>39</sup> Motyer notes that discussion of Babylon and Cyrus are in the rearview mirror (48:20-21) at this point in Isaiah. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 421.

goes beyond triumph over Babylon, to reestablishing God's holy rule over his people, then these verses that follow must reflect more than a change of address. It should include spiritual transformation due to release from bondage. This becomes clearer in 52:13-53:12, describing the servant who would give his life, bearing the sin of many (53:12).

### Isaiah 60:6

Isaiah 60 moves readers to a future point in which Jerusalem receives an ingathering of the nations. Here the verb changes to an imperfect verb, but the intent is still the heralding of good news. However, here it is the nations who have become bearers of good news, evangelists even.<sup>40</sup> Scenes like this one are often portrayed as passive, centripetal mission. But here there has been a clear process of the nations having heard the good news and now entering Jerusalem as witnesses of the good news. The nations have inherited the task of the herald.<sup>41</sup>

### Isaiah 61:1

The final use of the verb appears in Isaiah 61:1 as an infinitive construct. This use adds significance to the notion of the herald because of the weighty claims of this passage. As Seufert notes: "The figure presented here is a blended one and has been identified as prophet, priest, king, anointed one, Servant, the Spirit-endowed one, the Messiah, and finally, the Herald."<sup>42</sup> Christians will be quick to recall that Jesus used this very passage to describe himself in Luke 4:18-19. Motyer asserts the passage stands out in Isaiah, without appealing to the New Testament, as displaying a messianic figure.<sup>43</sup>

For this study, it is important to note the tie between the Messiah as the cause of the good news and the act of declaring the good

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<sup>40</sup> Motyer, 495.

<sup>41</sup> Seufert, "Isaiah's Herald," 233.

<sup>42</sup> Seufert, 233.

<sup>43</sup> Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 500.

news. The figure in this passage is both liberator and proclaimer of the news of liberation. In other words, there is a missionary aspect of the Messiah's ministry. It is the Messiah's divine calling, endowed by the Spirit, to intentionally bring good news to the poor.

## **The Message and Messenger and Communication Strategy in Isaiah**

### **The Message**

All of the instances of the "herald" (*bsr*) in Isaiah are tied to God and his victorious actions. Seufert's study of the herald in Isaiah shows a tight connection between the declaration of good news and God himself. God speaks! Moreover, the message is that of salvation promised and accomplished by God.<sup>44</sup>

### **The Messenger**

The messenger in Isaiah is not static. There is no herald of good news without God initiating the chain of communication. God delivers the message to Isaiah. Isaiah delivers the message to Jerusalem. Jerusalem then becomes the messenger to the rest of Judah. In Isaiah 60:6 the nations have taken on the role of the herald. In chapters 40-66, Isaiah draws readers' attention to the servant (Isa 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12).<sup>45</sup> Isaiah 52:7 and 61:1 brings the idea of servant and herald together. Isaiah 52:1-12 leads right into the final, and most important servant song. Isaiah 61:1-4 and 49:1-6 are connected through thematic and linguistic links.<sup>46</sup> A detailed analysis

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<sup>44</sup> Seufert, "Isaiah's Herald," 235.

<sup>45</sup> Bernhard Duhm identified these passages as the servant songs. This has helped in identifying a growing theme, but these passages are best read in context. Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja*; Grogan, *Isaiah*, 738.

<sup>46</sup> Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 499.

of the servant is beyond the limits of this paper.<sup>47</sup> Stuhlmueeller brings together the views of the servant as Israel collectively and the servant as an individual: “the collective interpretation leads to an individual Servant of supreme holiness, greater than any single Israelite of the past.”<sup>48</sup> Ultimately, the Messiah would deliver his people from bondage and initiate a restoration that allows the nations to know God as king and redeemer. The servant is “called to an active missionary vocation.”<sup>49</sup> When the servant songs are brought together with the herald passages, readers can see the missionary vocation go from the servant to those who hear the good news. The commission transfers to new heralds as the news spreads.

Is Israel expected to be missionary to the nations? Some interpreters of Isaiah attempt to make a hard distinction between Israel and the other nations. At times the rhetoric towards other nations is harsh and yet there is language of global inclusivity coursing throughout the book. Isaiah clearly makes a case that God is the only true God. If the nations are to experience salvation, they would do so at the hand of Yahweh. As a result, moving into later chapters of Isaiah that describe a time after the exile, Israel has become an “ethnic and cultural mixture.”<sup>50</sup> When Ruth joins herself to Naomi’s people (Ruth 1:16), she as a Moabite becomes a part of God’s people. The fluidity of ethnic/tribal identity can make it more difficult to discern the perceived missional responsibility of Israel (cf. Isa 56:6-7).

One mistake sometimes made by scholars is to evaluate roles based on modern categories. Israel’s missionary calling did not have the same characteristics of modern mission sending agencies, but this

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<sup>47</sup> For treatments of the servant passages, see: North *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah: An Historical and Critical Study*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1956). and Seitz “‘You Are My Servant, You Are the Israel in Whom I Will Be Glorified’: The Servant Songs and the Effect of Literary Context in Isaiah,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 39 (2004): 117–34..

<sup>48</sup> Roger E. Hedlund, *The Mission of the Church in the World: A Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), 111.

<sup>49</sup> North, *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah: An Historical and Critical Study*, 73.

<sup>50</sup> Michael A. Grisanti, “Israel’s Mission to the Nations in Isaiah 40-55: An Update,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 58.

does not discount the call to mission.<sup>51</sup> Isaiah, in concert with the rest of the OT, makes clear that Israel has a role in giving witness to the nations. Grisanti sees Israel as having a mediatorial role: “Isaiah’s fervent desire for Israel is that they will respond to God’s intervention on her behalf and carry out her role as God’s servant nation before the world.”<sup>52</sup>

In the case of the herald in Isaiah, the responsibility transfers from the messenger to the recipient. Some scholars try to find one herald in Isaiah. They take the information about the herald from one passage and then fuse the interpretation with the other herald passages. As an example, the masculine form of *bsr* in 41:27 and 52:7 influences the way some scholars interpret 40:9, even though the feminine form is used.<sup>53</sup> However, the missionary responsibility falls on the recipient to pass on the announcement of good news. The Apostle Paul interpreted Isaiah’s use of herald similarly. He adjusts his quotation of Isaiah 52:7 from one herald to multiple heralds in Rom 10:15.<sup>54</sup> God initiates the good news by sending the servant who would take our iniquity upon himself (53:6). When the good news is heralded to Jerusalem, Jerusalem then becomes the herald. It is Jerusalem herself “who is to be the missionary instrument to all the world.”<sup>55</sup>

The emphasis throughout these passages reflects the character of God, holy and loving. In Isaiah 40:10-11, God is described as a conquering warrior and a gentle shepherd and along with “the twin

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<sup>51</sup> Celiane Vieira, “Isaiah 42: The Mission of the Servant,” *Missio Apostolica* 22, no. 1 (May 2014): 131–36.

<sup>52</sup> Grisanti, “Israel’s Mission to the Nations in Isaiah 40-55: An Update,” 62.

<sup>53</sup> Robert W. Fisher, “The Herald of Good News in Second Isaiah,” in *Rhetorical Criticism: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg* (Pittsburg: Pickwick, 1974), 117; Goldingay and Payne, *Isaiah 40-55 Vol I*; Seufert, “Isaiah’s Herald.”

<sup>54</sup> J. Ross Wagner, “The Heralds of Isaiah and the Mission of Paul: An Investigation of Paul’s Use of Isaiah 51-55 in Romans,” in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins*, ed. William H. Bellinger and William R. Farmer (Harrisburg PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 207.

<sup>55</sup> George Angus Fulton Knight, *Servant Theology: A Commentary on the Book of Isaiah 40-55*, International Theological Commentary (Edinburgh; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans; Handsel Press, 1983), 15.

accents of majesty and mercy, bespeak all that is crucial about the good news.”<sup>56</sup> When the herald is called upon to carry news of God’s deliverance to the surrounding cities, moreover to the ends of the earth, there is every expectation that the messenger goes forth representing godly character. In addition, the messenger carries a message that is sure. There is no truer source than the word of God, which represents the nations.

### **From city to cities to the world**

Jerusalem, as the city of the one, most-high God, represented the center of worship which rippled out to the world. It was a place of pilgrimage. People from as far away as Africa were to come confess true worship (cf. Isa. 45:14). Ultimately, peoples are drawn from the ends of the earth to bow before the throne of God (Isa. 45:22-23).<sup>57</sup> Jerusalem was to be the model city for all cities to emulate. In the later chapters of Isaiah, there is movement to and from Zion. Chapter 60 describes a vibrant ingathering of the nations in Zion. The prophet gives theological permission for this multiethnic inclusivity in Isaiah 56:1-8. But it is not a singular flow to Jerusalem. Chapter 66:18-21 depicts a sending out from Jerusalem to the nations. God will gather the nations and send from the ingathered. Thus, we see a pulsing action of people(s) flowing to Jerusalem and being sent out in order that God’s glory might be known to the ends of the earth. “The attracted nations come to the ‘center,’ to Israel (Zion, Jerusalem), to receive instruction and revelation (e.g., Psalm 87; Isa 2:2-3; 25:6 ff.; 55:3b-5; Mic 4:1-2).”<sup>58</sup> Israel is called to impart of God’s redemptive message in centrifugally.

Although this paper has not involved the New Testament, this movement from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth becomes the movement of the early church. Grogan sees a parallel with Acts 1:8,

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<sup>56</sup> Brueggemann, *Isaiah, Vol. 2: Chapters 40-66*, 21.

<sup>57</sup> North, *The Second Isaiah*, 19.

<sup>58</sup> Grisanti, “Israel’s Mission to the Nations in Isaiah 40-55: An Update,”



witness going to the ends of the earth beginning in Jerusalem.<sup>59</sup> The calling to testify to the one true God is thoroughly woven into Isaiah in such a way that the early church took cues from Isaiah.

## Conclusion

The herald passages reinforce and clarify missional themes in Isaiah.<sup>60</sup> A close analysis of the herald passages in Isaiah reveals several important insights for the church.

1. God speaks (40:1). The good news is initiated by God and the word of God is at the core of the message. The news God's people receive is the declaration of God reinstating his kingdom (40:9; 52:7)
2. The role of heralding good news is intended to be transferrable. Nowhere is this clearer than Isaiah 40:9 where Zion/Jerusalem receives the good news, after which they are to herald the news to the cities of Judah.
3. God's people are called to declare good news internally and externally. Missions is popularly conceived as taking the gospel to "other" peoples/nations. Isaiah emphatically confronts idolatry wherever it is found (cf. 40:18-31; 42:21-29; 44:6-20) within Judah. This leads to three corollary points. First, when we understand heralding good news within Judah/Israel, it expands the ways we see mission emphasized in the OT. Heralding good news within Judah and Israel is also missions. Second, related to the previous point, bringing the good news within Judah was missional in that it was often

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<sup>59</sup> Grogan, *Isaiah*, 722.

<sup>60</sup> Elmer A. Martens, "Impulses to Global Mission in Isaiah," *Direction* 35, no. 1 (2006): 59–69; Craig A. Evans, "A Light to the Nations: Isaiah and Mission in Luke," in *Christian Mission: Old Testament Foundations and New Testament Developments*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Cynthia Long Westfall (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 94–107.

telling worshippers of other gods about the Holy One of Israel. Third, the recognition of the need for mission within a people, and not only for other nations, should change the way the church sees her missional role in the world.

4. The imagery of the herald bringing the gospel entails geographical movement. The one who receives the good news is not intended to keep the news in place, but to take it to places where the news is needed. Implicit in this is a process of sending and going.
5. The good news goes first to a major urban center (Jerusalem, Isa 41:27) and from there the good news goes to the surrounding cities and towns. Jerusalem is given the good news with the purpose of taking the news to others (Isa 40:9). Although Jerusalem plays a special role in Scripture, there is a more general application for cities and missions. Major cities are strategic points for anchoring the good news so that the news can travel to the surrounding towns and cities (cf. Acts 19:9-10; Rom 15:19).
6. The good news in Isaiah is tied to the saving work of the servant. Although the immediate context of Isaiah's prophecy is promising an end to the exile, it is clear from the emphasis that the primary concern is spiritual in nature and the solution is found only in God. The servant songs build until 52:13-53:12, where the servant "bore the sin of many" (v. 12) in order to "make many to be accounted righteous" (v. 11). This is the reason the anointed one in Isaiah 61:1 can declare the good news. In other words, the good news of greatest value is the salvation made available through God's servant. This is the news to be heralded so that "all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God" (52:10). This is the mission bestowed upon the people of God.

David Bosch writing about the Servant in Isaiah, refuted the common claim that the servant is to be seen as a missionary. He summarizes: "in the final analysis, Yahweh himself is the Witness...

God himself remains the real ‘missionary’, but Israel—in as far as she is God’s obedient servant—is most directly involved in this.”<sup>61</sup> Bosch’s analysis is half-right. God is clearly described in Isaiah as a missionary God. But this does not remove the missionary label from God’s people; rather, it becomes an imperative of being God’s people.

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<sup>61</sup> David Jacobus Bosch, *Witness to the World: The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective* (Nashville, TN: John Knox Press, 1980), 75, 77.

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