

ISAIAH

Chapter 59

Evil and Oppression

Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; 2 but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear. 3 For your hands are defiled with blood and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies; your tongue mutters wickedness. 4 No one enters suit justly; no one goes to law honestly; they rely on empty pleas, they speak lies, they conceive mischief and give birth to iniquity. 5 They hatch adders' eggs; they weave the spider's web; he who eats their eggs dies, and from one that is crushed a viper is hatched. 6 Their webs will not serve as clothing; men will not cover themselves with what they make. Their works are works of iniquity, and deeds of violence are in their hands. 7 Their feet run to evil, and they are swift to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; desolation and destruction are in their highways. 8 The way of peace they do not know, and there is no justice in their paths; they have made their roads crooked; no one who treads on them knows peace. 9 Therefore justice is far from us, and righteousness does not overtake us; we hope for light, and behold, darkness, and for brightness, but we walk in gloom. 10 We grope for the wall like the blind; we grope like those who have no eyes; we stumble at noon as in the twilight, among those in full vigor we are like dead men. 11 We all growl like bears; we moan and moan like doves; we hope for justice, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us. 12 For our transgressions are multiplied before you, and our sins testify against us; for our transgressions are with us, and we know our iniquities: 13 transgressing, and denying the LORD, and turning back from following our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart lying words. 14 Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands far away; for truth has stumbled in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter. 15 Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey.

Ch 59 Isaiah builds the theme announced in 57:21 and developed in ch 58: "There is no peace ... for the wicked." (TLSB)

59:1 *hand... is not shortened.* Even if God had appeared to abandon His people in the Babylonian captivity, nevertheless he had not lost His power to save. He had promised that a remnant would return. In addition, He had promised very clearly in the precious chapters that His Servant would come and would redeem His people. (PBC)

59:2 *your iniquities.* Israel has abandoned their God (Ps 18:41; Is 1:15–17; 58:4–5; Jer 5:23–24; 11:9–11; Eze 39:21–24; Mt 23:37–39; Jn 9:31). (TLSB)

separation. Due to sin; fixed and impenetrable as the firmament between heaven and earth (Gn 1:6). (TLSB)

hidden his face ... he will not hear. The sinful nature of every human separates him or her from God. (PBC)

59:3 *defiled with blood.* See v. 7; 1:15, 21; Eze 7:23. (CSB)

“Your best endeavors and ceremonies, which you perform with your fingers, are not forms of righteousness but iniquities.” Hypocrites have a hypocrisy which they have performed with their fingers. In this they boast and meanwhile, in a remarkable way, they persecute the Word of God and His servants. (Luther)

tongue mutters wickedness – “You teach evil things and lies.” They do not believe this but slander us and the Gospel as heresy and insist that they are the truthful ones. We, however, must always accuse them of being liars. This is a constant struggle. (Luther)

Human nature is so depraved and insolent that the parts of the body used to “make many prayers” (1:15) are also the instruments of murder and deceit. (TLSB)

59:4–8 Isaiah accuses Israel of perverting justice and righteousness in 1:21; 5:7; 28:17. Here, he calls for justice. In the age to come, the Lord promises a “righteous Branch,” a Davidic leader who will “execute justice and righteousness in the land” (Jer 23:5); He will be called “The LORD is our righteousness” (Jer 23:6). (TLSB)

59:4 *empty pleas*. The poor and helpless could not receive fair trials (see v. 14; 1:17–23; 5:7, 23). (CSB)

The Hebrew verb denotes crying, teaching, or preaching. So he says here, “You are noisy enough, you teach many things, but these things are of no avail toward the knowledge of God. They are thoroughly unjust.” (Luther)

honestly – that is, teaches faithfully. To judge means to teach. Judgment is the office of teaching and preaching. Then it is also a discerning of the spirit, because they are unable to distinguish between true and false. He is attacking doctrine and life. (Luther)

they rely... mischief. This statement appears verbatim in Job 15:35. Cf. Isa 33:11; Ps 7:14. (CSB)

This is proverbial and is taken from Ps. 51:5 and from Is. 33:11: “You conceive chaff, you bring forth stubble.” To conceive is nothing else than to be puffed up, to be swollen. “The mountains have conceived.” (CSB)

59:5 Two comparisons taken from the animal world describe these monsters of iniquity. Cf Mt 3:7. Their machinations are like a spider web that is designed to catch other insects and has no constructive purpose. (TLSB)

hatch adder’s eggs – You know that the eggs are broken in the process of hatching. So here they think they are hatching, but these are the eggs of a basilisk. Their experience is like that of a hen which thinks it is hatching chicks but instead is hatching basilisks. This is so because they are a “brood of vipers” (Matt. 3:7). It is as if he were saying: “When they have brooded for a long time, they hatch for themselves disciples like them, full of malice and the most poisonous vileness. (Luther)

spider’s web. Verse 6 and Job 8:14–15 stress how fragile it is. (CSB)

59:6 *works of iniquity*. See v. 3; Jer 6:7; Eze 7:11. (CSB)

Matthew 15:19, “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.”

59:7–8 Quoted in part in Ro 3:15–17 by Paul to show the universality of sin. (CSB)

59:7 *Their feet run ... to shed innocent blood.* This sentence appears in Pr 1:16. (CSB)

That is, they are prepared to do harm. The holier the hypocrites are, the more insatiable and cruel murderers they are, and there is no mindset more merciless than that of the hypocrites. They are clearly devils in slandering, disparaging, and killing, like the hypocrite in the Gospel who passes judgment on the tax collector (Luke 18:11). The robber and the prostitute are not as vicious as the hypocrites. Under the guise of religion they thirst for the blood of the righteous all day long. (Luther)

thoughts of iniquity. God's thoughts are different (see 55:7–9). (CSB)

This refers to these people themselves. They are full of harmful deeds, and all their devotions, thoughts, canons, statutes, and rules are here referred to contemptuously. *Their thoughts* produce nothing but hardship for themselves and for others. (Luther)

desolation and destruction. Contrast 60:18. (CSB)

They torment themselves. They are the devil's martyrs. Hell will be harder for them than heaven. (CSB)

59:8 *way of peace.* Cf. 26:3, 12; 57:20–21; Lk 1:79. (CSB)

They do not know by what process the afflicted conscience is given peace. Even if they hear it, they cannot judge sincerely. They do not know which way leads to peace. Christ is the way of peace, in Him alone one must believe and simply commit oneself to His mercy, as all of Scripture invites us to do. "Cast your burden on the Lord" (Ps. 55:22). Take the risk in the name of our God. Thus the psalmist says, "He will sustain you." (Luther)

no justice in their paths. The evil know only crooked, destructive roads. (TLSB)

59:9 *us ... We.* The prophet includes himself with the people. (CSB)

justice ... righteousness. Personified here and in v. 14. (CSB)

God's people expect Him to bring judgment on evildoers and to bring salvation to those who appeal to Him. (TLSB)

darkness.† Similar language describes conditions caused by war (see 5:30; 8:21–22; 9:1–2). Contrast 58:8. (CSB)

The ungodly are crushed by a double devastation—inwardly by a terrified conscience, outwardly by calamity. Ahab is a case in point. The more he was beset by calamities, the more he sought justice, but he did not repent, and so he increased in idolatry every day. (Luther)

overtake us. They feel outside the possibility of fair treatment. (TLSB)

59:10–15 Confession of the sins cited earlier in the chapter. Israel has lived blind in their iniquities; therefore, the nation finds no justice. Cf Dt 28:29; Jb 5:14; Is 6:9–10; 56:10; Lm 4:14; Mt 15:12–13; 23:15–36. (TLSB)

59:10 *we grope ... At noon.*† The result of disobedience; see Dt 28:29. Cf. Job 5:14. (CSB)

Even in the brightest noon sun, they are blind because their sin has clouded over the true light of righteousness. (TLSB)

Even in the light itself they go astray. Even if you speak the truth itself to the wicked, he wants to stay in his own blindness. (Luther)

full of vigor. Perhaps enemies or oppressors. (CSB)

59:11 *growl like bears.* Impatient and frustrated. (CSB)

They are discontented, both growling with hunger and moaning pitifully. (TLSB)

These words simply denote frustrated plans and help that is waited for. We perish and we consume ourselves. To trust in human confidence is nothing else than moaning and murmuring that labors in vain. One who trusts in man is the shaft of an arrow that is broken and falls down. (Luther)

59:12 *our transgressions are with us.* Like Ezra (9:6–7), Isaiah confesses the sins of the nation. In this verse he uses the three most common Hebrew words for evil thoughts and deeds. (CSB)

That is, “there are many sins of ours that testify against us.” Then they remain with us, they stubbornly persist, they burden us and weigh us down because they are not forgiven. Therefore we are not blessed. The conscience itself knows that they are sins, that is, we sin knowingly. This is the worst situation, that we sin resolutely and knowingly. (Luther)

59:13 *transgressing.* The First Commandment demands that we hope in God. Contrary to this we transgress and lie and desire to be justified by our works. This is an infinite chaos between God and man, to lie and to transgress. (Luther)

turning backs See 1:4. (CSB)

The accumulated sins of v 12 are essentially abandonment of God, turning from Him to idols. (TLSB)

Furthermore, we have not obeyed all the other commandments, because we have been trained to speak slanders. This is the nature of our sin: We forsake what is divine, neither believing nor trusting nor observing the rest, but we are ready to slander and to pervert. We turn away through disobedience, and with a knowing mind we speak against Christ. (Luther)

oppression...lies. That is, we manufacture something, we teach nothing but lies against the Word and our conscience. (Luther)

59:14 *justice ... truth.* Cf. the personification of wisdom in Pr 8:1–9:12. (CSB)

righteousness stands far away. Principles that are to govern the administration of justice in human courts of law, cases were heard in public gatherings. (TLSB)

59:15 *Truth.* Restored Jerusalem is called the “City of Truth” in Zec 8:3. (CSB)

becomes a prey. See 32:7. (CSB)

That is, he who professes the truth and departs from evil is torn to pieces as if by wild animals. What is our God to do? He would have to help us, because we are evil. We want to evade the punishment and not evade the blame. We are scoundrels and do not want to be regarded as such. (Luther)

59:1–15a By their sins, the people of Israel have separated themselves from God and from His salvation. When we fail to confess our sins and do not repent, we, like Israel, separate ourselves from God. In the darkness of our iniquity, our sins testify against us. Jesus came into the world to bridge the separation between God and sinners. All of our transgressions and iniquities were laid on Him at the cross that we might know the bright light of His forgiveness. • Heavenly Father, grant that we might not be used as instruments of wickedness. As we confess our sins and receive Your forgiveness, lead us to be instruments of Your peace and truth. Amen. (TLSB)

Judgment and Redemption

The LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice. 16 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. 17 He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak. 18 According to their deeds, so will he repay, wrath to his adversaries, repayment to his enemies; to the coastlands he will render repayment. 19 So they shall fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun; for he will come like a rushing stream, which the wind of the LORD drives. 20 “And a Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression,” declares the LORD. 21 “And as for me, this is my covenant with them,” says the LORD: “My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children's offspring,” says the LORD, “from this time forth and forevermore.”

59:16 *there was no man.* To help (see 63:5, a parallel to the whole verse). Cf. Eze 22:30. (CSB)

The Hebrews have no neuter gender, hence they use the masculine in place of the neuter. The word “man” is here in the neuter gender and is used as a demonstrative pronoun. *That there was no man* means that there was nothing. (Luther)

wondered. God is described as a person looking in vain for someone to solve a serious problem. (TLSB)

no one to intercede. Cf. the reaction to the servant in 52:14. (CSB)

God is aghast that there is no man to intercede. This is a lofty manner of speaking, as if to say, “Is this not amazing? I would not have thought that there are such wicked people on earth.” In this way he wants to indicate that there is too much ungodliness in the world, so that our God Himself can hardly believe it. So Gen. 11:8 speaks of the Lord God coming down upon Babel. God Himself must be astonished that people are so ungodly as to persecute the Word. (Luther)

intervene. Cf. the intercession of the servant in 53:12. (CSB)

All the righteous are gone. (TLSB)

his own arm worked salvation. See 51:9; 52:10. For the meaning of salvation. (CSB)

The Lord Himself intervenes, not primarily for wrath, but for salvation (43:3–4; 49:8; 51:5, 16; 52:9–10; 53:1, 5). (TLSB)

Very well, if God wants to help, He must first make a declaration, so to say. “If help is to come to you, it must come not because of you but because of My mercy.” (Luther)

righteousness. For the relationship between righteousness and salvation. (CSB)

59:17–19 God is described as an ancient warrior preparing Himself for battle. (TLSB)

59:17 *righteousness as his breastplate.* The Lord’s armor is compared to the believer’s armor in the battle against Satan in Eph 6:14. (CSB)

garments of vengeance.† God’s vengeance is described also in 34:8 (see note there); 63:4. It is part of the day of the Lord. (CSB)

Exclusive to the Lord. Cf 1:24; 34:8; Lv 19:18; Nu 31:3; Dt 32:35; Rm 12:19–21; Heb 10:30–31. (TLSB)

zeal. God’s jealous love. (CSB)

Hbr word denotes ardor prompted by jealousy. (TLSB)

59:18 *adversaries... enemies.*† God will judge the wicked in all nations. (CSB)

islands. See note on 11:11. (CSB)

He is speaking not of Jews and domestic enemies but of foreign nations and enemies. This is a very comforting passage in prayer, that the Lord does not wish to look upon our merits but upon His own mercy. (Luther)

59:19 *From the west ... rising of the sun.*† All nations will fear the name of the Lord and revere his glory. (CSB)

name. The work of salvation, done through the Redeemer (Jb 19:25; Is 60:16; 63:16), will bring glory to God before the world (40:5). (TLSB)

He will come ... drives. The Redeemer sent by the Lord. Cf Jb 38:8–11, 25, 28–30, 34–37. (TLSB)

like a rushing stream. The coming of the Lord will be irresistible, like a “rushing torrent” that overwhelms the enemy (see 30:28). (CSB)

59:20 *Redeemer.* When you will see the Redeemer in Zion for the remnant which did not dare to open its mouth, that remnant will again be strengthened. (Luther)

come to Zion.† “Salvation is from the Jews” (Jn 4:22). From this one nation, the good news of peace (Is 52:7) was to be published for the salvation of all Israel (Rm 11:26), a spiritual commonwealth made up of Jewish and Gentile believers (the Church). (TLSB)

59:21 *covenant.*† The “new covenant.” (CSB)

My Spirit. The Lord is discussing His Spirit-empowered Messiah (cf 11:2; 44:3; 61:1; Mt 11:5; Lk 4:16–21). The emphasis on the anointed leader’s mouth and word connects these promises with those of the Servant Songs (42:1–7; 49:1–13; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12), which stress the mouth of the Servant (e.g.,

49:2; 53:7). Luther: “He is saying this of the spiritual coming which will always abide and prevail for the purpose of turning away evil.... Thus Paul and the prophet agree. This is Paul’s argument [Rm 11]: The Gentiles must not despise the Jews, because God can reinstate them, since the Spirit of the Lord and the Word of the Lord will remain in the world, and by them God can reclaim some. As long as the Word remains, God can always save people through this means.... Not all Israelites are the seed of God. But this fall and apostasy did not happen simply for the purpose of destroying the Jews and saving the Gentiles. Hence no one has cause to boast of his election.... It is through the preaching of the Gospel that we receive the forgiveness of sins. Thus Paul in this discussion was at pains to show how the Jews have been rejected and, at the same time, some are saved” (AE 17:307–8). (TLSB)

you ... your ... your.... your.† In Hebrew the pronouns are singular but are probably intended in a collective sense—the citizens of redeemed Zion. (CSB)

my words ...of your mouth.† God’s people will always have and proclaim divine truth (see 51:16 and note; Jer 31:33). (CSB)

shall not depart. See Jos 1:8.(CSB)

He is saying this of the spiritual coming which will always abide and prevail for the purpose of turning away evil. This is the nature of the covenant, that “the Spirit and My Word” will endure forever. Thus Paul and the prophet agree. This is Paul’s argument: The Gentiles must not despise the Jews, because God can reinstate them, since the Spirit of the Lord and the Word of the Lord will remain in the world, and by them God can reclaim some. As long as the Word remains, God can always save people through this means. (Luther)

59:15b–21 The Lord Himself, by His own arm, will act with zeal to accomplish both justice and salvation among His people. We are not righteous enough to achieve salvation by our own merits. In mercy, Christ Jesus has interceded on our behalf. His zeal is for our salvation, which He made possible through His suffering, death, and resurrection. His perfect righteousness is freely given to all who believe. • Merciful Redeemer, You do not repay us according to our iniquity. Grant that by Your Word and Spirit we might turn from our transgression and always rejoice in the gift of Your salvation. Amen. (TLSB)