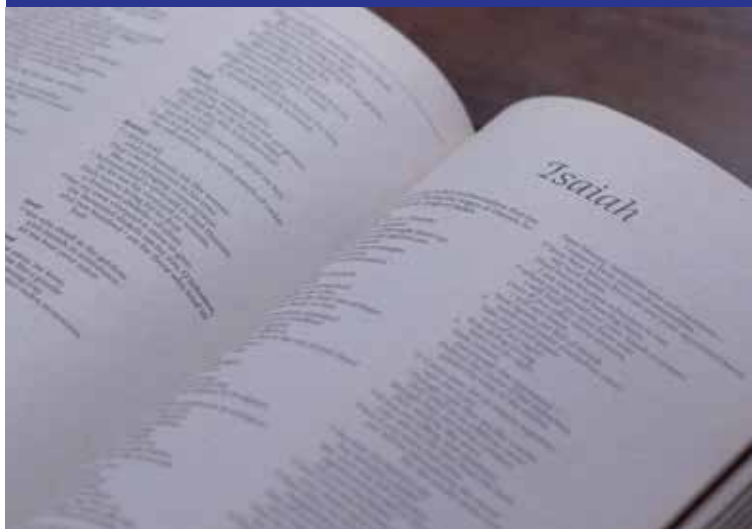


ISSUE #37
2019

BIND UP THE BROKEN HEARTED

A STUDY OF ISAIAH 61
AND LUKE 4



BY
FRANK BOOTH

AN OLIVE PRESS
RESEARCH PAPER

Welcome to the Olive Press Research Paper – an occasional paper featuring articles that cover a wide spectrum of issues which relate to the ministry of CMJ.

Articles are contributed by CMJ staff (past and present), also by Trustees, Representatives, CMJ Supporters or by interested parties.

Articles do not necessarily portray CMJ's standpoint on a particular issue but may be published on the premise that they allow a pertinent understanding to be added to any particular debate.



Telephone: 01623 883960

E-mail: office@cmj.org.uk

Eagle Lodge, Hexgreave Hall Business Park, Farnsfield, Notts NG22 8LS

BIND UP THE BROKEN HEARTED A STUDY OF ISAIAH 61 AND LUKE 4

by Frank Booth

INTRODUCTION

When Jesus quotes from Isaiah 61 in the synagogue in Nazareth, it is often pointed out that He stopped short at a critical point for a very good reason. What is less well known is that He omitted another important phrase, which has an interesting and significant implication for our ministry among the Jewish people.

Tracing the roots of the reason for this omission is an interesting exercise in seeing how different scriptures fit together, so that our understanding of one text is illuminated by our knowledge of preceding texts which influence it, and our understanding of the New Testament is enhanced by our knowledge of the relevant Hebrew scriptures.

LOCATION AND SETTING

Luke tells us that early in His ministry Jesus came to His home town of Nazareth, where He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath.

Once in the synagogue, we read that “The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him; unrolling it He found the place where it is written:

*‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.*

*He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners,
and recovery of sight for the blind;
to release the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.”*

(Luke 4:17-19)

This passage is widely understood to show Luke setting out the Messianic mission as identified in Isaiah, then later showing Jesus identifying His ministry as a fulfilment of that scripture. To Luke, it is important that Jesus' mission is rooted in scripture and fulfils messianic prophecy.

Subsequently Luke shows how Jesus' ministry fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy, although it may not have met all the varying messianic expectations found among Jesus' contemporaries:

*“Go and report... what you have seen and heard:
The blind receive sight, the lame walk,
those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear,
the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.”*

(Luke 7:22)

Yet it is widely noted that in the synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus stopped short at the phrase “The year of vengeance of our God”, because this part of the Isaiah 61 task was not on God's agenda to be fulfilled in His earthly ministry; the expectation is that it remains to be fulfilled at or following His Return.

However, what is often not noticed is that Jesus also omits another phrase: ***“bind up the broken-hearted”***.

[Note: The phrase is omitted from Luke 4 in most English translations, although included in the KJV; see the section on Textual Variations for further discussion. Even when commentators point out its absence, they are unable to explain why it is left out; see the later section on Academic Views.]

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

To see this clearly here are the two passages as set out in the NIV.

Isaiah 61:1 (NIV)

*The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to **bind up the broken-hearted**,
to proclaim freedom for the captives,
and release from darkness for the prisoners.*

Luke 4:18-19 (NIV)

*The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners,
and recovery of sight for the blind.*

So why did Jesus also leave out the phrase ‘to bind up the broken-hearted’? To understand the significance, we need to look at the background of Isaiah 61.

Isaiah 61 echoes two earlier prophecies in Isaiah 42 and Psalm 147. There is nothing unusual in this; many writers in scripture pick up and re-use previous themes. Often the same ideas, even the exact phraseology, are used both in the Psalms and the prophetic writings, which is what we see happening here. So it seems that Isaiah 61 uses material from Isaiah 42:7 and Psalm 147:2 and combines them in one prophecy. (See also Psalm 146:7-8 & Isaiah 58:6.)

Isaiah 42:7 (NIV)

*To open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison,
and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.*

Psalm 147:2 (NIV)

*The Lord builds up Jerusalem, He gathers the exiles of Israel;
He heals the **broken-hearted and binds up** their wounds.*

Isaiah 61:1 (NIV)

*The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to **bind up the broken-hearted**,
to proclaim freedom for the captives,
and release from darkness for the prisoners.*

From this, we see that the theme of ‘binding up the broken-hearted’ originally derives from Psalm 147, where it is specifically in the context of Jewish exiles returning to Israel and building up Jerusalem. Since these are the only two texts in scripture which use this particular phrase, it should be seen that the resonance is intentional, the association with the returning exiles intentionally continues from Psalm 147 into Isaiah 61, particularly since Isaiah then continues to speak of the returning exiles at some length in verse 4 onwards.

SIGNIFICANCE

So the next question is “why would Jesus (and Luke) deliberately want to omit the phrase ‘bind up the broken-hearted?’”

Quite simply, if the scriptural root of ‘bind up the broken-hearted’ links it firmly to consoling the returning exiles, which was not relevant to Jesus’ ministry, then it was not appropriate for Him to include it in His quotation from Isaiah 61, so He deliberately left it out.

We are the only generation that has had the opportunity of being involved with God’s chosen people as they return to the Land after so many centuries of persecution. It seems that Jesus’ personal fulfilment of the Isaiah 61 Messianic task was only partial; we have the privilege to be part of its fullness, of working with Him to complete it. We are able to help ‘bind up the broken-hearted’ by supporting in

various ways the returning exiles of Israel, not least by sharing the Good News which Isaiah foretold and which Jesus both embodied and announced.

TEXTUAL VARIATIONS

We noted earlier that most English translations of Luke 4 do not include the phrase 'bind up the broken-hearted'. So while it is found in the King James Version (KJV), it is not in the RSV, NRSV, NLT or NIV. Why is this?

The reason is that the earliest and most reliable Greek texts do not include the phrase; it only appears in later secondary Greek texts. It is easy to see why these texts would add it in, they would see its omission as a scribal error, and would assume the quotation should follow the Isaiah text. For the same reason the translators of the KJV decided to follow the later Greek texts, they too assumed because the phrase was in Isaiah, then it should be in Luke. But other translators have followed the earlier superior texts as more accurately indicating Luke's intentions.

We should assume that Luke understood that the phrase was not appropriate to Jesus' Galilean ministry, so he quoted Jesus accurately by also leaving it out. Both Jesus and Luke knew that Jesus could not at that time 'bind up the broken-hearted' in the scriptural sense of comforting the returning exiles. It was only copyists of the Greek text at a later stage who assumed Luke must have made a mistake, so they put it back in to follow Isaiah 61 more closely.

Only the translators of the KJV followed the later texts, assuming Luke should mirror Isaiah. But whether they understand Jesus' (and Luke's) reasoning or not, most modern translators have (correctly) followed the earlier texts as being a more reliable source of Luke's intentions.

ACADEMIC VIEWS

Many commentators point out the absence of the phrase 'bind up the broken-hearted', without being able to explain why it is left out. Here is a selection.

Kenneth Bailey - 'Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes'

In his book 'Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes' Kenneth Bailey has a whole chapter comprising a long and informative study of Luke 4:16-31; (p147-169). He discusses whether Jesus is quoting from a Hebrew language version of Isaiah or an Aramaic translation of the Septuagint (p154-6). The difference in Bailey's view is that the Hebrew version fits in far better with Jesus' stress on Gentile inclusion in the Messianic mission; this being the point which Jesus stressed by referring to the widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian, and which made the home townfolk round on Jesus to kill Him.

Bailey analyses Jesus' quotation from Isaiah 61 in great detail, discussing related Hebrew scriptures which he identifies as being Isaiah 42:7, Isaiah 58:6, and Psalm 146:7-8. He looks very closely at the chiasmic structure of the quotation as Jesus presents it (p157), and also has a very interesting section discussing many close parallels from the Qumran scrolls (p150).

However, he notes the omission of 'to bind up the broken-hearted' without tracing its source to Psalm 147, or stopping to conjecture why it was left out (p149 & p152). In fairness to Bailey, his interest is in why Jesus chose to include the phrases which He did, not why He left one out.

While Bailey is surely correct in his view that Jesus' stress on Gentile inclusion in the Messianic mission was what enraged His hearers, by the same token this also supports the case made in this paper, that since 'binding up the broken-hearted' refers specifically to comforting the returning Jewish exiles it was not appropriate to His mission at that time. Jesus' mission has continued through the church throughout the centuries, but only in this generation do we have the privilege of being partners with Him in that particular aspect of His mission.

James Edwards - 'The Gospel According to Luke: Pillar NTC'

James Edwards in his commentary on Luke refers to Jesus' sermon at Nazareth as 'the Keynote Address' of Jesus' ministry, which sets out all the major themes to be found in Luke-Acts. He sees the sermon in Nazareth as initiating the mission to the Gentiles, rather than the later conversion of Cornelius in Acts. So *"The inaugural sermon in Nazareth sets forth major theological and missional themes contained in Luke-*

Acts, and the rejection of Jesus at Nazareth over 'the Gentile question' sets the stage for Paul's rejection on the same grounds in Acts.' (p132/3)

As far as Jesus' ministry is concerned, Edwards regards the six claims Jesus makes in His reply to John the Baptist (7:22) as being "*conspicuous fulfillments of the messianic prophecy of Isaiah 61:1-2, on which Jesus based His ministry*". (p221)

Regarding the scripture which Jesus reads in the synagogue, Edwards comments "*The text of Isaiah 61:1-2 quoted in verses 18-19 closely follows the Septuagint, although 'binding up the broken-hearted' has been omitted, and a line from Isaiah 58:6, 'to set the oppressed free', has been added*". However, he does not explain why either of these changes might have been made. (p137)

Joel Green - 'The Gospel of Luke: NICNT'

Similarly Joel Green considers that "*the ministry of Jesus in Nazareth at the outset of his public ministry is of central importance to the Gospel as a whole, and thus also to Luke-Acts*" (p207)

Elsewhere he emphasises the importance of the passage in announcing the wider impact of the mission to the Gentiles: "*insofar as 4:16-30 anticipates a mission to the Gentiles, it establishes narrative seeds not resolved in the Third Gospel; hence in an important sense 4:16-30 looks ahead not only to Jesus' ministry but also to that of the church in Acts*". (Theology of the Gospel of Luke p77 n1)

Of the citation from Isaiah, he notes that "*The bulk of 4:18-19 derives from Isaiah 61:1-2, but two departures are of particular interest. Firstly, Isaiah 61:2b 'and the day of vengeance of our God' has been omitted from Luke 4:19*", which he ascribes to 'negative' implications. Then he adds "*Secondly, language from Isaiah 58:6, literally 'to send forth the oppressed in release,' has been added to the end of Luke 4:18, to draw special attention to the word 'release' as a characteristic activity of Jesus' ministry.*" (p209/210)

He does not comment on the omission of 'bind up the broken-hearted' in the main body of his text, but simply notes in a footnote that "*Luke's citation also omits the phrase 'to bind up the broken-hearted' (Isaiah 61:1), but his reason for doing so*

is unclear.” (p210 n24) So like many other commentators, he notes the omission without understanding why.

SUMMARY

There are good reasons why the commentators do not realise the significance of the omission of ‘to bind up the broken-hearted’. Firstly, they are rightly focussed on what the text is telling us, that is their prime task. They realise that the phrase ‘the day of vengeance’ is deliberately avoided, and while there are subtle variations in meaning put forward, the understanding that vengeance was not part of Jesus’ ministry (at that time) is widely accepted.

Quite correctly they focus on how Jesus uses the reading to announce not just the general terms of His ministry, but also the broader and important principle that the mission will reach out to include the Gentiles. So, as a result, they do not drive down, as we have done, to see the underlying link with Psalm 147, and to make the connection between ‘broken-hearted’ and the return of the exiles.

Nevertheless, reading on in Isaiah supports our analysis. Context, as always, is essential in analysing any scripture; and Isaiah 61:3-6 returns to the refrain of comforting the returning exiles. The phrase *“the day of vengeance of our God”* in Isaiah 61:2 is followed by *“to comfort all who mourn and provide for those who grieve in Zion... instead of mourning... they will rebuild the ancient ruins, restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations.”* (61:2-4)

The link between ‘binding up the broken-hearted’ (meaning the returning exiles), and the ongoing description of the ‘ancient ruins’ being rebuilt in Isaiah 61:3-6 and beyond is unmistakable. It is an aspect of the Messianic mission envisioned in Isaiah 61 which could not fit into the Luke 4 Messianic agenda but rather forms an essential part of Messiah’s ongoing ministry today.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bailey Kenneth, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, SPCK 2008

Edwards James, *The Gospel According to Luke: Pillar New Testament Commentary*, Eerdmans / Apollos 2015

Green Joel, *The Gospel of Luke: New International Commentary on the New Testament*, Eerdmans 1997

Green Joel, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, Cambridge University Press 1995

Scripture quotations are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

© Frank Booth, 2019

The right of Frank Booth to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright Design and Patents Act 1988. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reprinted or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Editorial team: Frank Booth and Rev. Alex Jacob
Concept and design: Phil Bowell Design
Printed through: A-Tec, Broxbourne, England

