

Book of Isaiah



Chapter 58

*Theme: Exposure of Israel's wicked ways;
explanation from God for rejecting religious acts;
God's concern for their welfare*

**Michael Fronczak
564 Schaeffer Dr.
Coldwater, Michigan 49036**

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Chapter 58

THEME: Exposure of Israel's wicked ways; explanation from God for rejecting religious acts; God's concern for their welfare

This chapter brings us to the final division of the prophecy of Isaiah -- "The glory of Jehovah which comes through the suffering Servant." We move on in this section to the glory of the Kingdom. Inward wicked ways and outward religious forms delay the grace and glory of God and hurt the cause of Christ as much as anything. Men who are religious and are church members and yet curse like pagans, men who are dishonest in business, immoral in their social lives, yet talk about being good enough to meet God's standards, actually block the grace and glory of God.

The explanation is given here as to why the glory was withheld. The people were supercilious and cynical about their relationship to God. They were observing forms and dared to question the actions of God toward them. They sat in judgment upon God and His methods. A lot of people still do this today. In spite of their outward observance of religion they indulge in their own wicked ways.

This same spirit was manifested after the Babylonian captivity, which reveals that the captivity did not cure them. In Malachi 3:13-14 we read, "Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee? Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?" They were criticizing God for not blessing them -- yet look how religious they were! They went to the temple and they made sacrifices. It was brazen effrontery and audacity to question God! This is the spirit of the natural man with his outward show of religion. His heart is far from God, and his way is wicked. The veneer of godliness is nauseating to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord said to the Laodicean church, "So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth" (Rev. 3:16). This is the attitude of the Lord Jesus to a lot of churchianity in our day.¹

The purpose of this chapter is to rebuke Judah for dependence upon performance of outward show in religion, and claiming protection from God because of such rites.²

In this final nine-chapter section of the book, Isaiah looked to the present and the future. In his day most of the people were not righteous (chap. 58). Because of their depravity the restoration of the nation must be God's initiative (chap. 59). Eventually peace and prosperity will come to Israel and the whole world (chap. 60). Isaiah wrote of the coming of the Messiah and of the Father (61:1-63:6) and of the nation's prayer and the Lord's response (63:7-65:25). In conclusion the prophet wrote again that God will fulfill His promises to Israel as well as the entire world (chap. 66).³

¹ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

² Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

³ The Bible Knowledge Commentary

Again Isaiah presented the folly of simply going through a system of worship without changing one's attitudes and conduct, especially in relationships (1:10-20; cf. Zech. 1; Matt. 5—7). In chapter 1, God threatened His people with destruction if they did not change. Here He promised them blessing if they did change. The difference is due to His provision of the Servant. God appealed to redeemed people to change.

. . . the religion which is exposed here rests on Canaanite rather than Yahwistic principles. The essence of Canaanite religion was to put the gods under pressure to perform their functions (hence, for example, what we would call orgiastic rites designed to stimulate Baal to acts of fertility). . . . The essence of Israelite religion, however, is response. Not doing things to influence the Lord but doing them to obey him; not works looking for reward but faith acting in obedience.⁴

God's true people experience his blessing in a personally godly and socially responsible way of life, owning up to their offenses.⁵

True piety and false piety. The prophet denounces the Judeans, focusing not on pagan practices (as in ch 57) but on apparently proper religious practices that the Judeans perform hypocritically. Lying behind the passage is an implied question: Why have the predictions of glorious restoration found in chs 40-48 not come true? Exiles had indeed returned to Jerusalem, but--contrary to what one expected from the opening chs of Deutero-Isaiah's work--the land remained under foreign control (the Persians having replaced the Babylonians as overlords), conditions were difficult, and God's presence was not manifest there. (On the difficulties facing the early postexilic community, see Ezra chs 4-6; Hag. chs 1-2; Zech. chs 1, 3.) Deutero-Isaiah maintains that it is now the people's sins that prevent the full-fledged restoration from taking place.⁶

⁴ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

⁵ ESV Study Bible

⁶ Jewish Study Bible Notes

¹Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.

“Cry” - “groan.”

“Trumpet” - Hos 8:1; Joel 2:1.

False fasting (fasting see Lev 23).⁷

Four commands to Isaiah:

1. Cry aloud.
2. Spare not.
3. Lift up your voice like a trumpet.
4. Show My people their sins.

[shew my people their transgression] A similar expression in Mic. 3:8.

[my people] My people -- all the house of Jacob, including all thirteen tribes.⁸

The prophet is commanded to cry aloud a message that is always unpopular, which is to point out the transgressions and sins of a people who think they are very religious. This will bring down the bitter displeasure and caustic invective upon one's head. Only a very brave man will do it. I would say that the basic weakness of liberalism in the pulpit is its aim to please the natural man without telling him the real truth about his fatal disease. The medical profession today would be guilty of gross negligence if they followed the same procedure with the physical part of man that religion plays with the spiritual part of man. When the doctor told me I had cancer, I tried my best to get him to say that it was something else. He said, "I am going to tell you exactly what is wrong with you. I will tell it exactly like it is. If I don't, you won't have any confidence in me." God is telling it exactly like it is. And He wants His servants to tell mankind that they are suffering from the fatal disease of sin, which is going to eventuate in eternal death, eternal separation from almighty God.⁹

True worship was more than religious ritual, going to the Temple every day, fasting, and listening to Scripture readings. These people missed the point of a living, vital relationship with God. He doesn't want us to act pious when we have unforgiven sin in our heart and continue our sinful lifestyle. More important even than correct worship and doctrine is genuine compassion for the oppressed, the poor, and the helpless.¹⁰

God called for heralds to go about telling the nation of their rebellion (peša', "transgressions," from pāša', "to transgress"; see comments on 1:2; also cf. 1:5; 53:5, 8; 59:13) and sins. Like a trumpet used to get people's attention, the heralds were to shout. Outwardly the people seemed eager to want to know God and for God to be near them.¹¹

⁷ Chuck Missler, Notes on Isaiah, khouse.org

⁸ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

⁹ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

¹⁰ Life Application Study Bible.

¹¹ The Bible Knowledge Commentary

The transgressions and sins that the Lord called Isaiah to proclaim to His people were so serious that the prophet needed to grab their attention with loud announcements. The name "the house of Jacob" calls attention to the Jacob-like quality of the nation that God would expose, namely: the people's attempts to manipulate God.¹²

Cry aloud, spare not ... tell My people their transgression: God speaks loudly and directly. His people need to hear their transgression - but will they hear?¹³

The Lord tells Isaiah not to hold back. "Don't be intimidated, don't be politically correct. Just tell it like it is without shame and without fear. Yell it out so people hear you. Tell My people about their sin."

There have been times throughout history that God has found very few men willing to declare sin to His people. Certainly, we live in a time like that today. Nobody gets popular preaching against sin. Just look at the largest church in America. At Lakewood Church in Houston, TX, pastor Joel Osteen doesn't talk about sin. In his book "Your Best Life Now," he says,

Sadly, of all the people who came out of Egypt, only two men, Joshua and Caleb, ever entered the land God intended for them ... Their lack of faith and their lack of self-esteem robbed them of the fruitful future God had in store for them ... Remember, God had already guaranteed the Hebrews the victory, but because of their poor self-images, they never made it into the Promised Land. They never fulfilled their destiny, all because of the way they saw themselves. (Your Best Life Now, pp. 61-62)

It seems like today, God would say just as He did to Ezekiel,

Ezek. 22:30 "I searched for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand in the gap before Me for the land, so that I would not destroy it; but I found no one."¹⁴

1-7 Fasting and justice. The Judeans observe rituals such as fasting, but they do so only for their own benefit, not out of true devotion. Real humility toward God would engender a desire for justice toward the weak, compassion toward the downtrodden, and charity toward the poor. Then fasting would involve a willingness to give up one's own things rather than the hope to acquire salvation. These vv. borrow ideas and vocabulary from Mic. 3.6-12.¹⁵

²Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God.

I think there is an element of God's biting satire in this statement. These people were attending the temple worship regularly. They were going through the ordinances punctiliously. They were meticulous in following the forms of worship. They actually enjoyed going to the temple; yet

¹² <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

¹³ https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Isa/Isa-58.cfm?a=737001

¹⁴ <http://rondaniel.com/library/23-Isaiah/Isaiah5801.php>

¹⁵ Jewish Study Bible Notes

their lives bore no resemblance to those of believers. What was true in that day is also true today.¹⁶

Sin, Unrighteousness—Religion mixed with unrighteousness and injustice is sin. Going through the motions of worship and repentance does not gain favor with God when we exploit the poor and gain social standing by mistreating other people. A contentious spirit does not fit a religious heart. If we expect God to answer our prayers, we must help the helpless and establish justice for all people. True worship comes only from righteous living.¹⁷

First, God describes the appearance: They seek Me daily, and delight to know My ways. On the surface, it seemed that God's people loved Him and were devoted to Him. They had the reputation of a nation that did righteousness, and they looked like people who would take delight in approaching God.¹⁸

Even though the Israelites sinned, they sought the Lord constantly and inquired concerning His ways. They claimed to be a righteous people who had observed the Mosaic Law carefully. They asked God for justice, and they delighted in the thought that He was near them.¹⁹

What was the sin that Isaiah was called to point out? The sin of religious hypocrisy.

They went through the motions of seeking God. They had established a national "morality." They religiously followed the Law. They liked knowing that Israel was "God's nation." They even went through the practice of fasting, denying themselves food for a day.

But it was all outward actions without inward faith. They had the right words, but the wrong hearts. They were like the Pharisees of Jesus' day, who washed the outside while their insides were corrupt (Matt. 23:25-26).

God points out that even on fasting days, they indulged their pleasures and mistreated their employees.²⁰

'The right way,' alternatively, "victorious judgments." People pray for divine intervention in their quarrels against others; their prayers and fasts have selfish purposes, not sacred ones.²¹

The people are not gripped by the practical implications of biblical faith (cf. 29:13). Yet they seek me daily. "Me" is emphatic in the Hebrew text, for ironic effect (cf. Luke 18:9–14).²²

¹⁶ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

¹⁷ Disciples Study Bible

¹⁸ https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Isa/Isa-58.cfm?a=737001

¹⁹ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

²⁰ <http://rondaniel.com/library/23-Isaiah/Isaiah5801.php>

²¹ Jewish Study Bible Notes

²² ESV Study Bible

³Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours.

These people are petulantly complaining. They ask the reason for fasting and self-infliction if God doesn't take note of it and pat them on the back for the ritual. Yet their hearts are far from God. They evidently had made fasting an important part of their religion. God never gave them fast days; He gave them feast days. It is true that they were to afflict their souls in connection with the great Day of Atonement, and in times of sin they were to fast. Fasting was the outward expression of the soul, but they had made it a form which ministered to their ego and pride. They boasted of the fact that they fasted. Fasting was to be a private matter between the soul and God - not a public show. Our Lord condemned them for abusing the fast. When He was here He said, "Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward [which was to be seen of men]" (Matt. 6:16). They needn't expect anything from God, for they didn't do it because of their relationship with Him. The Lord Jesus said to those who are His own: "But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly" (Matt. 6:17-18). Real religion is a personal relationship with Christ, and it is as secret and private as anything can possibly be. Do you go around and tell others about your intimate relationship with your wife or your husband? Of course you don't. My friend, if you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, it is a precious secret between the two of you. You witness for Him, but you don't reveal your intimate moments with Him. My friend, are you boasting about your religion, or about going through a certain ceremony or ritual? Shame on you! They are nothing in the sight of God -- unless they reveal what is within your heart. Oh, how we need reality rather than ritual!

I am of the opinion that many folk in that day questioned Isaiah's message. They probably said, "Isaiah, what in the world are you talking about? You criticize these people who are very religious, who go regularly to the temple and make their sacrifices!" But, you see, God knows the heart. Their religion was only superficial. They had no real relationship with God.²³

The people voiced their concern that they were in difficulty though they seemed to be doing what the Law required. They fasted and humbled themselves, but they feared that God had not seen it or noticed. Apparently they thought that by going through the "motions" of religion (without any inward reality of faith) they would be blessed.

The Lord responded by pointing out that He was more interested in their obedience than their rituals. Unfortunately they, like many people, had confused rituals with relationship, outward acts with true obedience.²⁴

Formerly, the nation fasted in times of national calamity (Jer. 36:9; Joel 1:14); later, fasting became part of the liturgical calendar (Zech. 7:2, 3; 8:19; Luke 18:12). This sermon may have been delivered on the Day of Atonement when the people of Israel afflicted their souls (v. 10; Lev. 16:29). You take no notice: A similar attitude is expressed in Mal. 3:14. Paradoxically, Israel finds pleasure in fasting, but not in keeping the Sabbath (vv. 13, 14). The accusations, you

²³ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

²⁴ The Bible Knowledge Commentary

... exploit all your laborers and you fast for strife and debate, expose the hypocrisy of the people's worship. Instead of ceasing their normal pursuits and setting the day aside to fast and pray, they strike with the fist the laborer who does not work. Will not may also be translated "cannot."²⁵

Why have we fasted ... and You have not seen? With this spiritual veneer, they felt God was unfair to them. "LORD, we have fasted, but You still don't answer our prayer. Don't you know that we seek you daily, delight to know Your ways, do righteousness, and take delight in approaching You? Yet You do not answer our prayers!"

In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your laborers: Enough with the image; now God exposes the reality. The reality was that His people didn't fast with the right heart, and did it only as an empty ritual. The reality was that even on a day when they fasted, they still exploited their employees. God didn't accept their fasting when it wasn't connect with a sincere heart of obedience.

"How can any nation pretend to fast or worship God at all, or dare to profess that they believe in the existence of such a Being, while they carry on the slave trade, and traffic in the souls, blood, and bodies of men! O ye most flagitious of knaves, and worst of hypocrites, cast off at once the mask of your religion; and deepen not your endless perdition by professing the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, while ye continue in this traffic!" (Adam Clarke, writing in 1823)²⁶

They could not understand why God had not blessed them—because they had fasted and humbled themselves (cf. Mal. 3:13-15). The only fast that the Mosaic Law commanded was on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:26-32). But the Israelites also fasted voluntarily, even in Isaiah's day. The reason God had not blessed them was that when they fasted, they did not demonstrate the attitudes and activities that fasting represented. They did not really sacrifice their own desires, and they continued to treat other people inconsiderately. They pursued their personal interests and worked when they fasted, and they insisted that their employees keep on working.

They were practicing religious ritual to try to manipulate God into blessing them. "But repentance is not for the purpose of getting God to do anything; it is an expression of the conviction that my ways are wrong and God's ways are right, whether he does anything for me or not."²⁷

The "delight" of v. 2 is false, for it is an emotional mechanism for pressuring God into compliance with human wishes. When God refuses to be used, the people are offended that their religion does not "work." Their unacknowledged attempt to gain advantage with God is exposed in their overbearing use of people: oppress all your workers . . . hit with a wicked fist. God called his people to show humanity in their social life, but they are failing to do this (cf. the recurring theme of Amos).²⁸

²⁵ Nelsons Study Bible

²⁶ https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Isa/Isa-58.cfm?a=737001

²⁷ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

²⁸ ESV Study Bible

⁴Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high.

[shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high]

Ten things that do not constitute a fast:

1. Practices about which we complain (Isa. 58:3)
2. Afflicting the soul to attract God (Isa. 58:3-5)
3. Doing pleasures (Isa. 58:3)
4. Exacting all labors
5. Contention and debates (Isa. 58:4)
6. Smiting with the fist of wickedness
7. Making voice to be heard in public
8. Bowing the head like a bulrush to make an impression on others (Isa. 58:5)
9. Spreading sackcloth as ashes under us
10. Having a sad countenance, disfiguring the face, and making a show to be seen of men (in fasting or any other practice, Mt. 6:16-18)²⁹

God explains why He cannot accept their fasting. They thought it gave them special acceptance with Him.³⁰

Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness: They fasted for needs, certainly; but selfish needs like "LORD, help me win this argument." "LORD, help me defeat this person." Though their prayer was accompanied with fasting, it was still a selfish, even wicked prayer - so God did not answer.

You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high: The purpose of their fasting was to glorify themselves, to make their voice heard on high. God says, "No more. You will not fast as you do this day."³¹

The spiritually insensitive Israelites did not consciously fast so they could be contentious and strive and beat each other up, but these were the results of their fasts. Fasting made them grouchy and belligerent, and they took these sinful feelings out on their neighbors. It would have been better for their neighbors if they had not fasted at all. These religious hypocrites were really fasting for reasons other than mourning over their sinfulness.³²

There seems to be two ways to read this. It's possible that God is saying, "Your foul tempers manifest worse when you fast, and so fasting makes you argue and fight." I know that's been true for me in the past. One of the first fasts I went on after getting married didn't go well at all. About the second or third day into the fast, my wife ordered pizza for the kids. I started arguing, "How can you fill the house with pizza smell when you know I'm fasting?" I was mad all night. Not a very productive fast, I can tell you.

²⁹ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

³⁰ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

³¹ https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Isa/Isa-58.cfm?a=737001

³² <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

The other possible way to read this is that they were fasting to get God on their side in their ungodly conflicts. They were praying selfishly and wickedly, asking God to bless their treachery and violence.³³

Purpose Of Fasting

But what is the purpose of fasting? What does it accomplish? A quick study of it in the Scriptures shows us that there are several reasons. In the Bible, people fasted to seek and inquire of the Lord (2Sam 12:16); because of extreme sorrow (2Sam 1:12); to appeal to God for answered prayer (Dan. 9:3); or as a simple act of humbling themselves before the Lord (Psa. 35:13). It is also a way to exercise control over the flesh (1Cor. 9:27).

⁵Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? *is it* to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes *under him*? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?

Fasting was always voluntary, except for Day of Atonement (which was a mandatory fasting day, Lev 16:29, 31). Israel fasts, self-imposed (1 Sam 7:6; Judg 20:26; 1 Kgs 21:12; Jer 36:9). To appear not as fasting (Mt 6:10-18), between you and the Lord.³⁴

God had not commanded their fasting, and their acts of worship were entirely outward and did not reveal the condition of the heart.

This is largely the condition of the contemporary church. I don't say it is the condition of your church -- there are many wonderful churches. But, by and large, the organized church has only a form of godliness.³⁵

Their fasts did not alter their poor relationship with others. They were disregarding other peoples' needs by exploiting their employees (cf. Deut. 24:14-15; James 5:1-6) and by quarreling and fighting. Therefore their prayers would not be heard, for their kind of fasting was not what the Lord accepted. Their hearts, not just their heads, needed to bow before the Lord.³⁶

Is it a fast that I have chosen? The kind of fasting God rebukes here is a hollow, empty, show, without the spiritual substance behind it. This isn't the kind of fast God has chosen. Even though they do all the right things in fasting (bow down his head like a bulrush ... spread out sackcloth and ashes), God does not even call this a fast.

The people of Isaiah's day had the same problem as the Pharisees of Jesus' day. They trusted in empty ritual, apart from the spiritual reality. Real fasting - fasting that is partnered with real repentance, and isn't only about image - has great power before God (Matthew 17:21). But God sees through the hypocrisy of empty religious ritual, including fasting. In Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, He told how the self-righteous Pharisee made a special point to say, "I fast twice a week" (Luke 18:9-14).

³³ <http://rondaniel.com/library/23-Isaiah/Isaiah5801.php>

³⁴ Chuck Missler, Notes on Isaiah, khouse.org

³⁵ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

³⁶ The Bible Knowledge Commentary

It isn't that Isaiah or the LORD are down on fasting. They are down on any empty religious ritual. The answer isn't to stop fasting, but to get right with God and make your fasting more than superficial. As Jesus said to His people about the empty religious rituals of the Pharisees, These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone (Matthew 23:23).³⁷

This was not the type of fasting God approved (cf. 1:11; Ps. 51:16-17; Luke 18:9-14). It consisted only in His people bowing their heads, not their hearts. Bowing the head like a reed expresses formal worship, like a reed automatically bending in response to wind. The people sat in sackcloth and ashes, but they did not really mourn over their disobedience to the Lord. They thought their outward fasting, bowing, dressing, and adorning were more important than their attitudes and behavior, though they probably did not realize it and certainly did not admit it (cf. James 1:27; 4:8).³⁸

Isaiah uses sarcasm to dismiss false piety. What establishes true religion is not what is acceptable to man but what is acceptable to the Lord (cf. Ps. 51:17; Isa. 56:6-7).³⁹

'Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?'

This is tremendous -- it gets right down to the nitty-gritty, right down where the rubber meets the road. God says in effect, "If you really want to fast, let Me tell you what to do: Instead of fasting and going around with a pious look, stop your sinning. Stop your gossiping. Stop the things that reveal the wickedness and the evil in your hearts. Demonstrate your faith in Me by your conduct. Start being honest in your dealings. Be truthful in what you say. Instead of seeing you in sackcloth and covered with ashes, I'd like to see you clean on the inside."

My friend, I am of the opinion that the Lord could stop many church services today and say, "Listen, let's cut this out. Why are you going through this form? You are not getting close to me. You are not pleasing Me. When you leave this service, you gossip, you have bitterness in your heart, you are not moral in your conduct, and you are living loose lives. You think you are pleasing Me by your religious form. I want you to know that you are not pleasing Me. That is the reason I am rejecting you."⁴⁰

6-7 Fasting was to encourage a person to respond positively to God's commands. In the Old Testament only one fast was commanded—the annual Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29, 31). Only after the fall of Jerusalem were fast days instituted (Zech. 7:3, 5; 8:19). Ironically on the other hand many specific commands were not being followed. So the Lord reminded the people that they should be just (Isa. 58:6) and openhanded with those in need—the hungry (cf. v. 10), the poor... the naked (v. 7). The Israelites were to consider themselves members of one family who at one time had been slaves in Egypt. Therefore they were not to neglect each other. When

³⁷ https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Isa/Isa-58.cfm?a=737001

³⁸ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

³⁹ ESV Study Bible

⁴⁰ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

someone shared with one in need, it was a reminder that everything he owned belonged to the Lord.⁴¹

6-12 We cannot be saved without faith in Christ, but our faith lacks sincerity if it doesn't reach out to others. Fasting can be beneficial spiritually and physically, but at its best fasting helps only the person doing it. God says he wants our fasting to go beyond our own personal growth to acts of kindness, charity, justice, and generosity. This truly is pleasing to God.⁴²

Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness: God tells His people, "If you want to fast the way that pleases Me, begin with getting right with your brothers and sisters. Stop oppressing others, and reach out to help others."

First, they had to stop acting wickedly towards others (loose the bonds of wickedness ... undo the heavy burdens ... let the oppressed go free ... break every yoke). Getting right with God begins by stopping the evil we do towards others.⁴³

The type of fasting that pleases God is: giving up wickedness, oppression, enslavement, and binding of other people—not just food. Isaiah did not mean, of course, that God had no concern about His people going without food (cf. Lev. 16:31). The prophet was going to the opposite extreme to make a point (cf. 1:10-20; Amos 5:25-27; Mic. 6:6-8; Luke 14:26).

If they want to deprive themselves, let them do it for the sake of the oppressed, the needy, and the helpless, not for the sake of their own religiosity. God's nature is to give himself away to those who can never repay him. There is no clearer evidence of the presence of God in a person's life than a replication of that same behavior.⁴⁴

God defines the true piety that he does bless, for it is true to his non-oppressive gospel (cf. 1:17; James 1:27). Is not this . . . ? Is it not . . . ? God dignifies his dishonest people with appeals to reasoned thought (cf. Isa. 1:18). every yoke. Every form of oppression (cf. Deut. 28:48; 1 Kings 12:4).⁴⁵

***7*Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?**

[deal thy bread to the hungry] Break, divide, and distribute bread to the hungry.

[bread] Bread stands for all kinds of food.

[hide not thyself from thine own flesh] This could have a twofold meaning:

Do not cover up your own faults and leave a better impression than that which is strictly true.

Do not shut your eyes from the needs of those who are of your own flesh and blood.⁴⁶

⁴¹ The Bible Knowledge Commentary

⁴² Life Application Study Bible.

⁴³ https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Isa/Isa-58.cfm?a=737001

⁴⁴ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

⁴⁵ ESV Study Bible

⁴⁶ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

They were turning their backs on the poor and needy. They even refused to show kindness and love to their own flesh and blood. Their religion was as cold as the north side of a tombstone in January! They didn't have a heart for God. When you have a heart for God, my friend, you will also have a heart for other folk. You will want to be helpful to them and be a blessing to them. You cannot be hateful and fundamental in your theology at the same time. All of the criticism and unloveliness today is harmful to the cause of Christ. Isaiah has a tremendous message for us!

God told His people that He didn't want their so-called worship -- they were just going through a form. They were just "playing church." He told them that they might think they were having fun, but it was going to become a burden to them because they would become weary trying to keep up a front before the world. God said to them, "Come clean. Demonstrate in your lives that you have reality."

Do you see why Isaiah is not popular? You will never find liberalism dealing with this part of the Bible. They like to turn to the Sermon on the Mount and pick out a few verses, such as: "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Matt. 5:7). That is great, but the important thing is to confess your sin to God and allow Christ to live His life through you. Religion is a great cover-up today. Oh, how we need a personal relationship with Christ!⁴⁷

the hungry ... the naked: For similar expressions of the duty to take care of the poor, see Job 31:16–23; Matt. 25:35, 36. The poor who are cast out refers to those whose lands and houses were expropriated in payment of debts.⁴⁸

Then, they had to start acting lovingly towards others (share your bread with the hungry ... cover those without clothing, and to not hide yourself from your own flesh). Getting right with God continues by doing loving things for other people.⁴⁹

Likewise, helping the poor is more important than helping oneself. Feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, and clothing the naked are more important to God than living well oneself. What is the point of fasting if we do not give what we would eat to others? Self-denial should be for others, not for oneself (cf. Matt. 25:35; Luke 3:11; 10:31-32; Heb. 13:2).⁵⁰

⁸Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rereward.

[thy light break forth as the morning] Your light will break forth like the beams of the sun on a clear morning.

[thine health shall spring forth speedily] You will enjoy perfect health immediately.

[thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rereward] Your righteousness will be manifest on every hand and God's glory will be your rear guard.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

⁴⁸ Nelsons Study Bible

⁴⁹ https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Isa/Isa-58.cfm?a=737001

⁵⁰ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

⁵¹ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

God could not manifest His blessing and glory to a people who practiced their religion so badly. This is one of the reasons the world today is not convinced that God is in His holy temple. The world is passing by the church. Why? They don't believe God is there. And I suspect they might be right. God says here, "I can't manifest myself because of your lives." How many of us are blocking the way! The story is told that when Alexander the Great returned from one of his campaigns, he rushed to find his old teacher, Aristotle, the great Greek philosopher. It so happened that Aristotle was taking a bath when his visitor arrived. Alexander told him about his campaign and then said, "Now what can I do for you?" The old philosopher was not at all impressed with this young upstart and continued his bathing. Alexander repeated the question, "Now what can I do for you?" Finally old Aristotle replied, "Well, you can get out of my light!" Perhaps we are saying to God, "What can I do for You?" I think God would answer, "You can get out of my light!" Let's allow His light to shine through us. That's the important thing.⁵²

8-12 If the people had inner righteousness (revealed in outward acts of justice and mercy, vv. 6-7), then... the Lord would bless them (cf. Deut. 28:1-14) with light (often a picture of blessing; cf. Isa. 58:10), healing (spiritual restoration), righteousness (high standards), protection from trouble, and answered prayer (vv. 8-9a). If they would do away with... oppression and gossip and would help others in need (cf. v. 7), then the Lord would bless them (give them light; cf. v. 8). He would give guidance, satisfaction, strength, fertility (like a spring), and physical restoration (rebuilding the ruins).⁵³

Then your light shall break forth like the morning: If God's people would couple their fasting with lives of righteousness and love, then they would see their prayers answered. They would have lives full of light, full of healing, full of righteousness, full of the glory of the LORD. When they called out to God, then the LORD will answer.⁵⁴

This type of reality would produce many good consequences. Light would dispel the Israelites' darkness. They would recover their spiritual wholeness quickly. Their righteousness (God Himself) and their right conduct (cf. 56:1) would precede them, and God's glory would protect them. The piling up of blessings for repentance is clear in the "then . . .and" lists in verses 8, 10-12, and 14.⁵⁵

Then . . . Then. God promises to meet true fasting with true blessing. Unlike false gods, the Lord responds (cf. 64:5a). your light. See 9:1-7; Eph. 5:14. your rear guard. See Ex. 13:21; 14:19-20. Here I am. God humbly offers his availability (cf. Isa. 65:1; for men responding to God's call, cf. Gen. 22:1, 11; Ex. 3:4).⁵⁶

⁵² Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

⁵³ The Bible Knowledge Commentary

⁵⁴ https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Isa/Isa-58.cfm?a=737001

⁵⁵ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

⁵⁶ ESV Study Bible

⁹Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity;

Take away every burden from others, put down all accusing fingers, and quit all boasting.⁵⁷

God wanted to hear their prayers and He wanted to bless. He wanted to open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing upon them, but their hearts weren't open to receive it. We say, "Our prayers are not answered." Why? Is it because God does not want to answer them? No! The problem is that our hearts are not open to receive the blessing God really wants to give us. God says, "The minute you cry to Me, here I am."

When I was a boy, I had typhoid fever and double pneumonia at the same time. I lived in a little country town, and one night the country doctor thought I was going to die. My mother sat by my bed all night. I was delirious most of the time, but I can still remember coming out of it and calling her name, "Mama?" She would say, "Here I am." What a comfort that was for a little boy. And today what a comfort to know that when we go to God in prayer, He is there. He says, "Here I am." In effect, God says, "It's up to you from now on. If you come in the name of My Son, make a request that is in My will, and your heart is right, I'm going to move right along with you." When we have prayers which are not being answered, the problem is with us.⁵⁸

Prayer, Answer—God is eager to answer prayer, but He does not guarantee an answer to people who consistently oppose His will and then go through empty prayer rituals. True prayer makes us willing to help others.⁵⁹

The pointing of the finger was a sinister gesture (Prov. 6:13).

If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness: Again, the LORD gives them three things to stop doing. They must stop oppressing others, treating them as animals bound with a yoke. They must stop pointing ... the finger at others, and see where they are to blame. They must stop speaking wickedness.

These are sins of commission. They are sins that we go out and do against the LORD and against others. If we will walk right with God, we must stop and guard against sins of commission.⁶⁰

The Lord would hear their prayers, and they would enjoy His presence (cf. vv. 1-3). Making self the focus of life, in contrast, results in darkness (cf. 5:20; 8:20; 47:5; 60:2), disease (cf. 1:5), defeat (cf. 1:7), and separation (cf. 1:4). For these blessings to come, God's people needed to stop oppressing others, and to stop mocking and showing contempt for others with wicked speech (cf. 57:4; 66:5). Notice the "if . . . then" constructions in verses 9, 10, and 13-14. It is possible that "the pointing of the finger" may refer to being critical of others who are not as socially sensitive as oneself.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

⁵⁸ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

⁵⁹ Disciples Study Bible

⁶⁰ https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Isa/Isa-58.cfm?a=737001

⁶¹ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

If . . . if. God again defines the conditions of the blessing in a manner consistent with his nature. the pointing of the finger. Either in false accusation, or in destructive gossip, or both. See Prov. 6:12–15.⁶²

9b-12 Righteousness and restoration. Although some exiles returned to Zion after the Persians defeated the Babylonians in 538, the land of Israel remained for the most part in ruins. The prophet attempts to explain why the rebuilding of the cities destroyed by the Babylonians has been delayed.⁶³

¹⁰And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness *be* as the noonday:

Let your compassion go out to others who are needy, and satisfy the afflicted soul that is in want. [light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday] Your light will burst out in the midst of calamity, trials, and adversities, like the sun at midnight, and your darkness will be past.⁶⁴

God asked them to practice one specific thing that He might bless them. He only picked out one thing. He could have picked out a dozen things, but He chose only one. God promised to bless them if they would show reality in their religion.⁶⁵

If you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul: Again, the LORD gives them two things to start doing. They needed to minister to the hungry with more than food; they had to extend their soul to the hungry. They had to look for the afflicted soul and seek to satisfy it.

Failing to do these are sins of omission. They are things that we should have done, yet we have not. If we will walk right with God, we must open our eyes and do what is our loving duty before Him.

This prayer, "A General Confession of Sin," from the Book of Common Prayer (1559 edition), expresses repentance for both sins of commission and omission:

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from thy ways, like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done, and there is no health in us. But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us miserable offenders. Spare thou them, O God, which confess their faults. Restore thou them that be penitent, according to thy promises declared unto mankind, in Christ Jesu our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake, that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of thy holy name.

⁶² ESV Study Bible

⁶³ Jewish Study Bible Notes

⁶⁴ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

⁶⁵ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

Then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday: To the repentant, God promises blessing. Not only will they have light, but even their darkness shall be as the noonday!⁶⁶

Positively, God's people needed to alleviate hunger in others (more than creating it in themselves by fasting), and to pour out their lives for others. Then they would have light, even in gloom, because God would be with them, and God is light (cf. 1 John 1:5).⁶⁷

¹¹And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.

“A watered garden” - Cf. Jer 31:12.

God wanted to bless them

You will be supplied in times of drought and national disaster.⁶⁸

The LORD will guide you continually: This is a promise for those who do more than just empty religious rituals. To have the guidance of the LORD, empty religious ritual isn't enough. We need to seek God with both sincere hearts and sincere actions.

And satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones: Those who serve God with sincere hearts and actions enjoy a health and life of the soul that is impossible for the superficial follower of God to know.⁶⁹

God would also guide and sustain His people in their desert experiences. Strong bones contrast with bones that tremble or waste away because of fear, sorrow, or guilt. Physical health is often a byproduct of spiritual health (cf. James 5:15-16). Truly repentant people will also be a pleasant source of delight, encouragement, and nourishment to others (cf. 1:30). They will refresh others, as well as themselves, because God, the source of life within them (cf. John 4:14; 7:37-39), will manifest Himself through them.⁷⁰

then. God reaffirms his readiness to bless his obedient people. your bones. The human person (cf. Ps. 6:2; 32:3; Prov. 15:30; Isa. 66:14; Jer. 23:9). your ancient ruins. The ruins of Jerusalem in the sixth century b.c. symbolized the deeper spiritual ruins of long-standing human failure (cf. Isa. 1:5-9; 44:26-28; 61:4).⁷¹

⁶⁶ https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Isa/Isa-58.cfm?a=737001

⁶⁷ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

⁶⁸ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

⁶⁹ https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Isa/Isa-58.cfm?a=737001

⁷⁰ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

⁷¹ ESV Study Bible

¹²And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in.

The waste lands will be restored to a habitable state, and the blessings that should have been enjoyed for many generations will be yours.⁷²

Those from among you shall build the old waste places: Those who serve God with sincere hearts and actions also accomplish things for God's kingdom. They build, and are called the Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of Streets to Dwell in. You can't build anything for God's kingdom on the foundation of a superficial walk with God.

How there needs to be a rebuilding work today! "We live in a broken world. In every direction there are breaches which are wide and deep. There are broken hearts and broken homes, and that which once was sacred is but a waste place. Whereas once there was a carefully guarded fence around the sanctity of family life, sex life, and the right to personal privacy, now there is just a waste place. The wall of protection is in ruins, and life has lost all its meaning." (Redpath)

This passage shows several characteristics of a life right with God.

- It is an enlightened life: Your light shall down in the darkness.
- It is a guided life: The LORD will guide you continually.
- It is a satisfied life: And satisfy your soul in drought.
- It is a fragrant life: Like a watered garden.
- It is a freshly sustained life: Like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.
- It is a productive, healing life: You shall build up the old waste places.⁷³

True worshippers would also rebuild what their sin had previously torn down. This refers not only to the return and rebuilding of Jerusalem and Judah following the exile. It also refers to the Promised Land in the Millennium and to the restoration of other types of "ruins" caused by sin.⁷⁴

¹³If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, *from* doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking *thine own* words:

“Sabbath” - Cf. Isa 56:2; Jer 17:21-27; Mk 2:27.

The remaining two verses continue the explanation of true worship begun in verse 6, but they also conclude this chapter by returning to consider proper response to a specific aspect of the Mosaic legislation, namely: Sabbath observance.

⁷² Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

⁷³ https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Isa/Isa-58.cfm?a=737001

⁷⁴ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

[turn away thy foot from the sabbath ...] Five requirements regarding the sabbath:

1. Do not violate it.
2. Do not do your own pleasure on that day.
3. Call it a delight.
4. Call it the holy day of the Lord.
5. Call it honorable.⁷⁵

God gave the Sabbath to the nation Israel. God said, "It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever..." (Exod. 31:17). For something interesting, read the entire passage of Exodus 31:12-18. Now God turns to this specific thing that He commanded them as a people.

For us today it is a little different. We are told: "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it" (Heb. 4:1). The word for "rest" is sabbath -- we should not come short of entering into His rest. "For he that is entered into his rest [that is, the sabbath], he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his" (Heb. 4:10). Now have you entered into His sabbath, which is the rest of redemption? Have you come to the place where you completely, fully trust Christ -- that He has done everything necessary for your salvation and you are resting in His finished work? Or do you feel compelled to do something in order to earn or not lose your salvation? My friend, He wants us to fully trust Christ. To enter into His rest will mean not only great blessing for us, but it will open up an avenue of service for us. The thing that brought the apostle Paul to a life of missionary activity was to enter into the rest of redemption.⁷⁶

13-14 The day of rest should be observed and regarded not only because Sabbath-keeping is a commandment but also because it is best for us and it honors God. Keeping the Sabbath shows proper respect to God, our Creator, who also rested on the seventh day (Genesis 2:3). It also unifies our family and sets priorities for them. Our day of rest refreshes us spiritually and physically—providing time when we can gather together for worship and reflect on God without the stress of our everyday activities.⁷⁷

13-14 Sabbath observance was a barometer of one's faithfulness to the Mosaic Covenant (cf. comments on 56:4-6). By following the rules for the Sabbath a person acknowledged the importance of worshiping God and showed that he depended on God to bless him materially for that time he took off from work. By putting God first and not seeking to do as he wished, a person would have joy, not only in spiritual salvation (ride on the heights) but also in prosperity (feast on the inheritance). All this was certain because the Lord has spoken (cf. 1:20; 40:5).⁷⁸

Truly observing the Sabbath was more than not working. It was dedicating the whole day to God to such an extent that one denied his own pleasure.

If the Israelites practiced the Mosaic legislation with the right attitude and applied it properly to their lives, God would be pleased. Isaiah was not saying the Mosaic legislation was wrong, only that the legislation as his audience was practicing it was not pleasing to God. They were obeying

⁷⁵ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

⁷⁶ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

⁷⁷ Life Application Study Bible.

⁷⁸ The Bible Knowledge Commentary

to further their own selfish purposes. They should have obeyed to further God's purposes out of love for Him (cf. Matt. 6:10). For the Israelites, Sabbath observance was best suited to teach this lesson. The Sabbath day provided an opportunity for them to reorient themselves to spiritual reality once a week. It was not a fast but a feast day.⁷⁹

If . . . if . . . then. For a third time in ch. 58, God clarifies the kind of religious practice that draws down his blessing. the Sabbath. See note on 56:2. the heights of the earth. Social prestige among the nations (cf. Deut. 26:16–19; 28:1; 33:29). the heritage of Jacob. The promises to the patriarchs.⁸⁰

13-14 The Sabbath. Isaiah does not reject ritual in favor of ethical action but calls on the nation to attend to both, and focuses especially on the observance of the Sabbath. Cf. 56.6. These vv. borrow vocabulary from Deut. 32.9-13.⁸¹

14Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken *it*.

Real joy in life is doing His Will, not ours!⁸²

[Jacob thy father] It must be remembered that Jews are addressed here, not the church or Gentiles (Isa. 58:1; 1:1; 2:1; etc.).⁸³

The horizon here is extended, and the vista of the future opens before us. They may delay the approaching glory, but they cannot destroy God's plan for the coming manifestation of His glory.⁸⁴

In this chapter, God exposed the emptiness of two religious rituals as practiced in Isaiah's day: fasting and Sabbath keeping. Both of these are expressions of not doing things. In fasting, you don't eat. In Sabbath keeping, you don't work. An important aspect to this chapter is showing us that what we don't do isn't enough to make us right before God. Our walk with God shouldn't only be defined by what we don't do. What do we do for the LORD?⁸⁵

Turning from a false approach to the Sabbath, and all the Law, would mean turning to the Lord with the proper attitude of delight. Then the Israelites would experience the exaltation of being His partners and would enjoy the inheritance promised to their all-too-human ancestor Jacob (cf.

⁷⁹ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

⁸⁰ ESV Study Bible

⁸¹ Jewish Study Bible Notes

⁸² Chuck Missler, Notes on Isaiah, khouse.org

⁸³ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

⁸⁴ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

⁸⁵ https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Isa/Isa-58.cfm?a=737001

v. 1). If they would give themselves to God and others rather than pursuing selfish goals, they would experience personal and national fulfillment and receive His rewards. This was a promise from the mouth of Yahweh.⁸⁶

I wonder tonight what God would say to each of us about our religious observance. Would He say, "Yes, you're singing songs, but there's no heart of worship"? Would He say, "You're writing tithe checks, but there's no joy in your giving"? Would He say, "You're attending church regularly, but you haven't met with me in a very long time"?⁸⁷

⁸⁶ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

⁸⁷ <http://rondaniel.com/library/23-Isaiah/Isaiah5801.php>