



"THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME"
ISAIAH 61:1

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THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

CHAPTERS 56-57

AND HIS NAME
WILL BE CALLED
WONDERFUL COUNSELOR,
MIGHTY GOD,
EVERLASTING FATHER,
PRINCE OF
PEACE.
ISAIAH 9:6

Isaiah is called "The Book of Salvation." The name *Isaiah* means "the salvation of the Lord" or "the Lord is salvation." Isaiah is the first book containing the writings of the prophets of the Bible. And the author, Isaiah, who is called the Prince of Prophets, shines above all the other writers and prophets of Scripture. His mastery of the language, his rich and vast vocabulary, and his poetic skill have earned him the title, "Shakespeare of the Bible." He was educated, distinguished, and privileged, yet remained a deeply spiritual man. He was committed to obedience over the long haul of his 55-60 year ministry as a prophet of God. He was a true patriot who loved his country and his people. Strong tradition suggests that he died a martyr's death under the reign of King Manasseh by being placed within the hollow of a tree trunk and sawed in two.

Isaiah's calling as a prophet was primarily to the nation of Judah (the southern kingdom) and to Jerusalem, urging the people to repent from their sins and return to God. He also foretold the coming of the Messiah and the salvation of the Lord. Many of his prophecies predicted events that occurred in Isaiah's near future, yet at the same time they foretold the events of the distant future (such as the coming of the Messiah), and even some events still to come in the last days (such as the second coming of Christ).

In summary, the message of Isaiah is that salvation comes from God—not man. God alone is Savior, Ruler and King.

Commentary on the book of Isaiah is by noted theologian Rev. William G. Most (1914-1999). His contributions to theology have been recognized all over the world. He published 12 books and a host of articles on topics ranging from biblical studies to Mariology and Latin grammar.

Book of Isaiah

Summary of Chapter 56-57

Various Prophecies for Restored Israel. Chapter 56. Summary and Comments

We are now at the start of what many call Third Isaiah. They claim there are three Isaiah's. One for chapters 40-55 looking forward to exile; a second for chapters 40-55, in exile; third, chapters 56-66 for restored Israel. We have not found any convincing proof that there are three Isaiahs. Really the patterns described here are simply the so-called Deuteronomomic pattern: sin and threat, punishment, repentance and restoration. Without knowing anything of the future Isaiah could have written all three except for the detail about Cyrus. Those who reject everything supernatural of course have to reject that. But we do not have to.

This new block of chapters has puzzled many commentators. For in the last block before this we saw the most glowing promises about the restoration. Now it looks a bit different. We have to remember the very strong Semitic hyperbole, of which we have spoken many times. We recall the apocalyptic language he used for the fall of Babylon, of Edom, and of Egypt, which sounds just like the last signs in nature of Matthew 24.

No, we must face the realities, as those who returned did. Their city had been ruined, they needed to rebuild it. The same for the temple. If we read the little Book of Haggai, only two chapters, we see they were sluggish in rebuilding it, and finally, in 520 (they returned in 539) God had to send them a strong message through Haggai. In the first chapter He said: Look at the things you are doing, you are sowing much, reaping little, putting on clothes, but you do not get warm, etc. The message: No wonder things are not prosperous, you are not doing what you should do: rebuild the temple. They had had trouble and interference from neighboring people, which was finally resolved. So they did go ahead to rebuild. Haggai said the glory of this new house will be greater than that of the old. But that clearly did not match the reality:" The glory was to come when Christ entered the temple.

Haggai spoke of the coming of Christ in 2:6-7, if we adopt St. Jerome's translation: Just a little while and I will move heaven and earth, and the one desired by the nations will come in." (There has been a doubt because the Hebrew word <hemdat> which we translated as the desired one, is singular in ending, while the verb is plural. But such shifts are not unknown elsewhere in the Old Testament). Jerome was following the tradition of the rabbis with whom he associated). We noticed Haggai spoke in 520, yet said "a little while" on the Lord's time scale, from 520 to the birth of Christ is really only a little time. One day is like 1000 years, and 1000 years like one day.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah show conditions after the return were not ideal. There were religious faults, severe ones. The old administration needed to be rebuilt, for the line of Davidic kings had not survived the exile - though even after it they always had some kind of leader from the tribe of Judah - as Gen 49:10 foretold - until the time of the Messiah.

During the exile, the only religious thing they could still hold on to, lacking a temple, was the observance of the Sabbath.

Encouragement for those who keep the Law. 56:1-8. Summary and Comments

God tells them: Do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand. Salvation of course here means temporal benefits. So the foreigners who have bound themselves to the Lord by becoming proselytes, or nearly that, we should not think God would exclude them. No, He accepts them. Similarly eunuchs - formerly, as in Dt. 23:1 eunuchs were not allowed to be in the Lord's community -- should not say they are only a dry tree (no possible offspring), nor think God would reject them. No, He now is willing to accept even them. Also, many probably had been made eunuchs during the exile, while in the Babylonian royal court. Such courts had a use for them, for obvious reasons. So now God will let them in and if they keep the Sabbath, they can come to the temple, and their name will be continued, in that sense they will have a memorial in the temple.

Some think the lines about eunuchs were not to be taken at face value right after the return: that they referred to a later time, when Jesus would say (Mt 19:12) that some have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of His kingdom, or even the final eschatological time.

Sinful leaders and people. 56-9 - 57:21. Summary and Comments

But not all really did keep God's law. So now Isaiah says that Israel's watchmen, the leaders, are blind, like dogs that are mute and so do not warn of coming danger. Or they are like faithless shepherds, who just want to drink beer and wine.

As a result, the righteous are oppressed, and no one wonders about it. The righteous are taken away by death, to be spared from such evils. So those who live uprightly do enter into peace, at least with their deaths. This is remarkable if we interpret it as we have just done: it refers to future retribution in the next life, a concept that in general is not thought to have been known in the time of Isaiah or even the so-called third Isaiah.

So God calls the people sons of a sorceress, who mock Him, who burn with lust among the oak groves sacred to Baal (pagan rituals might involve ritual sex), who even sacrifice their children to the idol Moloch. 2 Kings 21:6 tells that King Achab immolated His son by fire (cf. Micah 6:7).

Instead of the Lord as their portion, they have chosen idols, and poured out drink offerings and brought grain offering to the idols. They have made their bed on a high hill- may refer to the high places of Canaanite idolatry.

They have put pagan symbols on their doorposts - instead of the text that God had ordered in Dt. 6:9 (which at least later became the Mezuzah).

They went to their idol Molech (the word is another spelling of <melech>, king, a Canaanite deity). To him they brought offerings of olive oil and perfumes. They sent ambassadors far off. Does this mean embassies like those they formerly sent to Egypt? Possibly, more likely it meant embassies to the netherworld, by sacrificing to idols.

So He asks: Who did you fear and reverence so much that you have been false to me, your real God? (We do know that fear was one of the motives of the old idolatry: cf. Judges 6:10). So God will expose their "righteousness" an ironic use of the word. Properly it means doing what God ordered; here it is used to mean what the pagan gods ordered. But when they cry for help, these idols will not save them.

Ezekiel in chapter 8 (dated in 592 when he was already in exile, between the first and second invasions of Nebuchadnezzar) saw in a vision, the abominations being done even in the temple. He saw images all over the walls, of animals, even creeping things, which 70 of the Elders were worshipping even in God's temple. He saw about 25 men with their backs to the temple, facing east and bowing down to the sun.

In contrast, the man who makes God his refuge will inherit the land and possess Mount Zion. A voice will be heard: Make straight the way on which the Lord will lead His people. God lives on high, but also with those who are lowly in spirit. God will not always be angry, if they repent. God was angry because of their sinful greed, and so punished them. But now He wants to heal them. and restore comfort to them. In contrast, the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest. There is no peace for them.

End of Chapters 56-57