

Pastor Lars Larson, PhD
First Baptist Church, Leominster, MA
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Salvation for the Gentiles

Several weeks ago we completed our study of Isaiah's "Book of Consolation", as it is commonly called. It encompassed Isaiah 40 through 55. I was weighing whether or not to continue in Isaiah unto the end, covering chapters 56 through 66. There are some subjects and themes that would be helpful and instructive for us, so we will proceed in our study of Isaiah.

Now as we approach this chapter, the first of this last portion of Isaiah, we should understand the uniqueness and nature of its language. Since 1892 biblical scholars (of the liberal variety) have regarded these chapters to have been written by someone other than Isaiah. Just as they regard Isaiah 40 through 55 to have been written by someone other than the "Isaiah", who had written the first 39 chapters, so they regard chapters 56 through 66 to have been written by a different, a third author. This is why Isaiah 56 through 66 is commonly referred to as Trito Isaiah, or Third Isaiah. Here is how one described their case:

The reasons for giving him a separate entity are in brief the following. A vocabulary appears from this point onward, not entirely new, but one that brings in quite a few new features. Besides the theological position brings with it new emphases which had not appeared in Second Isaiah. With a new vocabulary and a new theological position goes, of course, new subject matter, which neither Isaiah himself, nor Second Isaiah dealt with. As to the general tone of the material offered in these chapters it is commonly asserted that Trito-Isaiah does not display quite as high a level of inspired fervor: he is not so often swept off his feet into truly inspired and inspiring utterance. Then, among other things, the words of this writer are said to stand out against a different historical background than that of all the material preceding.¹

But these claims against Isaiah's authorship are not as significant or conclusive as those scholars argue. Historically Isaiah's prophecy has always been understood as a single collection of the prophet of the 8th century BC. The "uniqueness" of the features of Isaiah 56 through 66 are easily explainable. Here is the conclusion of the same author who above described the problem:

We do not find these arguments very impressive. New vocabulary brings in new material. But one merely needs a simple additional assumption: As the years passed the prophet attained to new insights: he kept growing all his years. The more mature prophet presented his new insight gained by continuing inspiration. Similar is the matter of a different theological position. Old truths acquired new depths under the guidance of the Spirit. Must a man remain static in his theological position? Add to all this the fact that the prophet enjoyed a rather long ministry during which the historical situation may well have changed quite a bit. Add further the fact that it is quite reasonable to believe that as Isaiah prepared his people for the Captivity, so he also prepared them by material calculated to fit the nation for the era after the Return. These are but a few of the considerations which induce us to discount the theory of Trito-Isaiah.²

In consideration of the chapter before us, Isaiah 56, some questions need answered, including these: (1) What is the relationship of chapter 56 to the previous chapters? (2) What application do these sections have for New Testament Christians respecting Sabbath Laws? (3) When have/will these prophecies been fulfilled?

¹ H. C. Leupold, *Isaiah, Vol. II, Chapters 40-66* (Baker Book House, 1971), p. 261.

² *Ibid*, pp. 261f.

(1) What is the relationship of chapters 56ff to the previous chapters?

As we stated, non-conservative scholars see a great distinction between chapters 56-66 with what went before. This is so much so that they refer to these chapters as Trito-Isaiah--having been written by someone other than Isaiah long after his time. We assert the position, however, that Isaiah was the author, although we would allow for emendations and some additions by later writers. It is the final form of Isaiah's prophecy that we would regard as Scripture, having been inspired by God.

Isaiah wrote many years before the Babylonian captivity of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC. But he looked beyond their judgment and captivity to the time of their return to their land where they were to prepare themselves for their coming Messiah who would take away their sin and establish a new covenant between them and God. They looked for the time of restoration, when God would send His Servant to save them from their sins, removing the curse of God that was upon them through the sacrifice of Himself. In the light of this prospect, the prophet instructs Israel to repent of their sins and order their lives in accord with their covenant as they await their salvation. God's mercy and the prospect of mercy should always lead to a response of repentance and obedience.

(2) What application do these sections have for New Testament Christians respecting Sabbath Laws? For here in Isaiah 56 but more fully in Isaiah 58, the Lord addressed the importance of keeping the Sabbath Day.

The answer to this question will depend on how one interprets Old Testament prophecy. Many conservative (i.e. dispensationalists) view the salvation prophesied as being something that will be realized in a yet future 1,000 year millennium; therefore, they would see little direct application of these passages for Christians in this church age. Others, notably Reformed scholars, view these chapters as prophesying of the grace of God bringing salvation in Christ; therefore, the materials need to be understood and interpreted in the light of the revelation of the New Testament and the coming of Christ. As a result, some would regard the references to Sabbath keeping should be applied to Sunday observance by New Testament Christians.

This leads us to the third question:

(3) When have/will these prophecies been fulfilled? There are several possibilities:

(a) As stated above, some see these prophecies as not yet having been fulfilled but will be in a 1,000 year millennium.

(b) Some see these prophecies as pointing to the salvation we have in Christ and interpret them in a manner so as to recognize the prophet having spoken to his people in words and concepts they would have understood but which would later give way to a more clearer understanding as history unfolded.

(c) Some see these as prophecies which will yet be fulfilled in eternity (not a millennium but they describe conditions of the eternal state).

The subject matter does change in Isaiah 56 and the following chapters from what went before. Chapters 40 through 55 were directed to those Jews of the Babylonian Exile in anticipation of their release and return to their home land, that took place in the 500's BC. Through the Book of Consolation God revealed the promise of salvation through the Suffering Servant whom He would send to the returning Jews from Exile. The subject matter of Isaiah 56ff was directed primarily to those Jews who had returned from the Exile who were waiting for the promised Messiah. Here is a description of the contents of Isaiah 56 through 66:

These prophecies are addressed to the exiles returned from Babylon before the rebuilding of the temple in 520 BC (64:8-12). They still suffer from idolatry, hypocrisy, and indifference. Isaiah prophesies concerning their responsibilities toward the coming glorious kingdom and the certainty of its arrival.³

As we look over the contents of Isaiah 56, we may consider the following outline:

³ R. C. Sproul, general editor, *The Reformation Study Bible*, (Reformation Trust, 2015), p. 1229.

1. The Importance and Observance of the Law (vs. 1, 2)
2. Admission of Strangers and Eunuchs to the Congregation of Israel (vs. 3-8)
3. Israel's Degenerate Leaders (vs. 9-12)

Let us read this passage before we begin to examine its contents:

¹Thus says the LORD:

“Keep justice, and do righteousness,
For My salvation is about to come,
And My righteousness to be revealed.

²Blessed is the man who does this,
And the son of man who lays hold on it;
Who keeps from defiling the Sabbath,
And keeps his hand from doing any evil.”

³Do not let the son of the foreigner
Who has joined himself to the LORD
Speak, saying,

“The LORD has utterly separated me from His people”;
Nor let the eunuch say,

“Here I am, a dry tree.”

⁴For thus says the LORD:

“To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths,
And choose what pleases Me,
And hold fast My covenant,
⁵Even to them I will give in My house
And within My walls a place and a name
Better than that of sons and daughters;
I will give them an everlasting name
That shall not be cut off.

⁶“Also the sons of the foreigner
Who join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him,
And to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants—
Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath,
And holds fast My covenant—

⁷Even them I will bring to My holy mountain,
And make them joyful in My house of prayer.
Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices

Will be accepted on My altar;
For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.”

⁸The Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, says,

“Yet I will gather to him
Others besides those who are gathered to him.”

⁹All you beasts of the field, come to devour,
All you beasts in the forest.

¹⁰His watchmen are blind,
They are all ignorant;
They are all dumb dogs,

They cannot bark;
 Sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber.
¹²Yes, they are greedy dogs
 Which never have enough.
 And they are shepherds
 Who cannot understand;
 They all look to their own way,
 Every one for his own gain,
 From his own territory.
¹²“Come,” one says, “I will bring wine,
 And we will fill ourselves with intoxicating drink;
 Tomorrow will be as today,
 And much more abundant.”

I. The Importance and Observance of the Law (vs. 1, 2)

The chapter opens with God giving instruction to the people who had returned from their exile to their homeland and who were waiting for the fulfillment of the promise of the Messiah, who would redeem them from their sin. Essentially God commands them to order their lives according to the law of God with view to the coming salvation that the Messiah would bring.

The grace of God puts men under obligation to submit and respond to God, to order one’s life according to His will, keeping His commandments. In the light of the salvation which God was going to bring to His people, which He had been declaring in a number of previous chapters, they were to respond to Him in the following manner:

We read again **verses one and two**:

¹*Thus says the LORD:*

*“Keep justice, and do righteousness,
 For My salvation is about to come,
 And My righteousness to be revealed.*

²*Blessed is the man who does this,
 And the son of man who lays hold on it;
 Who keeps from defiling the Sabbath,
 And keeps his hand from doing any evil.”*

The oracle begins with the authoritative assertion, designed to invoke attention and dispose the readers to attend to what is said, “*Thus says the LORD.*” The words “*keep justice, and do righteousness*” describe the essence of what it was for the people of God to order their lives according to the laws which God had given to it. Essentially they are called on to keep the Law of God. They were to live rightly and treat one another rightly and they were to correct any and all offenses within their society.

And so, with view to the salvation that God had promised to His people, God commanded them to order their lives to “keep justice, and do righteousness.” God declared that His salvation and righteousness would be revealed. His people were to order their lives with view to that reality. What is being suggested is that these people had not been ordering their lives according to righteousness, that they were to repent of these sinful ways and begin to order their lives rightly.

The nature and manner of this instruction is significant. It reveals to us the way in which God deals with souls and it may serve in directing us also in the manner in which we bear witness to non-believers in Jesus Christ. We see that in view to the salvation that God was to bring before them, they were to order their lives according to the law of God, according to standards of His righteousness. Here are Calvin’s words:

This is a remarkable passage, in which the Prophet shows what God demands from us, as soon as he holds out tokens of his favour, or promises that he will be ready to be reconciled to us, that our reconciliation should be secured. He demands from us such conversion as shall change our minds and hearts, that they may forsake the world and rise towards heaven; and next he likewise calls for the fruits of repentance.⁴

We might consider the nature of the instruction in this way: in view and in preparation for the gospel of salvation, people should be exhorted to cease from sin and to begin to order their lives according to God's standards of righteousness, which is revealed in and through the law of God.

This assumes several biblical truths. First, that all people everywhere are under God's law and are commanded by God to order their lives according to His law. Our confession of faith states the matter clearly. In article 19 of the Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689, we read these words respecting the law of God:

1. God gave to Adam a law of universal obedience written in his heart, and a particular precept of not eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; by which he bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it, and endued him with power and ability to keep it.⁵
2. The same law that was first written in the heart of man continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness after the fall, and was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments, and written in two tables, the four first containing our duty towards God, and the other six, our duty to man.⁶
3. The moral law doth for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof, and that not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it; neither doth Christ in the Gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation.⁷
6. Although true believers be not under the law as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified or condemned, yet it is of great use to them as well as to others, in that as a rule of life, informing them of the will of God and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly; discovering also the sinful pollutions of their natures, hearts, and lives, so as examining themselves thereby, they may come to further conviction of, humiliation for, and hatred against, sin; together with a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ and the perfection of his obedience; it is likewise of use to the regenerate to restrain their corruptions, in that it forbids sin; and the threatenings of it serve to shew what even their sins deserve, and what afflictions in this life they may expect for them, although freed from the curse and unallayed rigour thereof. The promises of it likewise shew them God's approbation (approval) of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof, though not as due to them by the law as a covenant of works; so as man's doing good and refraining from evil, because the law encourageth to the one and deterreth from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law and not under grace.⁸
7. Neither are the aforementioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the Gospel, but do sweetly comply with it, the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that freely and cheerfully which the will of God, revealed in the law, requireth to be done.⁹

Secondly, it assumes that in the proclamation of the truth of God's Word to the world, both the law and the gospel need to be proclaimed. God first convicts the world of sin through His law. He then shows the remedy for that sin through the gospel.

⁴ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 8, Isaiah 33-66 (Baker Book House, reprinted 1993), p. 175.

⁵ See Genesis 1:27; Ecclesiastes 7:29; Romans 10:5; Galatians 3:10, 12.

⁶ See Rom. 2:14, 15; Deut. 10:4.

⁷ See Rom. 13:8-10; James 2:8, 10-12; James 2:10, 11; Matt. 5:17-19; Rom. 3:31.

⁸ See Rom. 6:14; Gal. 2:16; Rom. 8:1; Rom. 10:4; Rom. 3:20; Rom. 7:7, etc.; Rom. 6:12-14; 1 Peter 3:8-13.

⁹ See Gal. 3:21; Ezek. 36:27.

What God is commanding and what is being illustrated before us is that the proclamation and demands of the law of God precedes and prepares people for the reception of the gospel of salvation. When people make efforts to order their lives according to God's law, they become aware of their sin and sinfulness and their need for salvation to be bestowed by a merciful God according to His grace alone.

We see the same pattern of proclamation described here in Isaiah 56:1 and 2 in the ministry of **John the Baptist** in his preparing the people for the coming of the Messiah. We read of his ministry in Luke 3:

Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, ²while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. ³And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, ⁴as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying:

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the LORD;
Make His paths straight.
⁵Every valley shall be filled
And every mountain and hill brought low;
The crooked places shall be made straight
And the rough ways smooth;
⁶And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

⁷Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. ⁹And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

¹⁰So the people asked him, saying, “What shall we do then?”

¹¹He answered and said to them, “He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise.”

¹²Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?”

¹³And he said to them, “Collect no more than what is appointed for you.”

¹⁴Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, “And what shall we do?”

So he said to them, “Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages.”

¹⁵Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not, ¹⁶John answered, saying to all, “I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.”

¹⁸And with many other exhortations he preached to the people. (Luke 3:1-18)

With view to the soon appearance of salvation through the Messiah, John the Baptist called for people to repent of their sin and to begin to order their lives according to the law of God. John prepared the people for the gospel by first proclaiming the law of God.

This explains why the Lord Jesus gave this instruction to the young man who came to Him asking how he might gain everlasting life. We read in **Matthew 19:16ff**:

¹⁶Now behold, one came and said to Him, “Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?”

¹⁷So He said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.^[g] But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.”

¹⁸He said to Him, “Which ones?”

Jesus said, “‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ¹⁹‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

²⁰The young man said to Him, “All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?”

²¹Jesus said to him, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”

²²But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

This is the means and manner in which God commonly convinces people of their sinfulness and their need for salvation that God bestows solely by His grace. God first convicts people of sin by the proclamation and application of God’s law. He then brings to them the gospel of salvation which they then perceive as “good news” to the sinner, that he can be saved freely from His sins by Jesus Christ.

This is in accordance with what reformed theology has referred to as the first of the three uses of God’s law. This first use of the law is that God uses it as a mirror, which reflects to us the perfect righteousness of God and our own sinfulness and shortcomings. As Augustine once wrote, “the law bids us, as we try to fulfill its requirements, and become wearied in our weakness under it, to know how to ask the help of grace.”¹⁰ This is what was being employed by the Lord Himself in these opening verses of Isaiah 56.

In **verse 2** we read of the Lord’s specific instruction regarding the observance of the Sabbath. Verse 2 reads,

***²Blessed is the man who does this,
And the son of man who lays hold on it;
Who keeps from defiling the Sabbath,
And keeps his hand from doing any evil.”***

God was addressing His words directly to the Jewish exiles that had returned to their homeland. They were to observe the Sabbath as God had established it with the nation of Israel on Mount Sinai through the Mosaic covenant. Now later we will consider more fully the manner of observing the Sabbath when we arrive to Isaiah 58. But here he people’s Sabbath observance was with view to the Mosaic covenant that God had established with Israel.

The Sabbath Day was observed by Israel on the seventh day of each week—Saturday. For Israel its observance was a sign of their covenant with God. It was designed to distinguish Israel from all the nations of the world. We read this in **Exodus 31:12ff**:

¹²And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹³“Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: ‘Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. ¹⁴You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. ¹⁵Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the

¹⁰ “A second function, the “civil use,” is to restrain evil. Though the law cannot change the heart, it can to some extent inhibit lawlessness by its threats of judgment, especially when backed by a civil code that administers punishment to proven offenses (Deut. 13:6-11; 19:16-21; Rom. 13:3, 4). Thus it secures civil order, and serves to protect the righteous from the unjust. Its third function is to guide the regenerate (i.e. true Christians) into the good works that God has planned for them (Eph. 2:10). The law tells God’s children what will please their heavenly Father. It could be called their family code. Christ was speaking of this third use of the law when He said that those who become His disciples must be taught to do all that He had commanded (Matt. 28:20), and that obedience to His commands will prove the reality of one’s love for Him (John 14:15). The Christian is free from the law as a system of salvation (Rom. 6:14; 7:4, 6; 1 Cor. 9:20; Gal. 2:15-19; 3:25), but is “under law toward Christ” as a rule of life (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2).” This from the theological note in *The Reformation Study Bible*, R. C. Sproul, general editor (Reformation Trust, 2015), p. 273.

Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. ¹⁶Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. ¹⁷It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.”

When God commended these people to keep His Sabbath, He was urging them to live in accordance with the covenant relationship they enjoyed with God. They were to order their lives according to His law.

And so, the Sabbath, or the Seventh Day, which was Saturday, was a special day in the life of Israel. It is to be “remembered” as set forth in the fourth of the Ten Commandments. The people were to do no work on that day, but they were to rest from their labors. The meaning and nature of Sabbath observance in Israel was due to God resting after the six days of creation as He reflected on all His works of that week. In the same way the people of God were to give themselves to resting and reflecting on their work and the works of God on their behalf. It was designed for the benefit of man. But it was also given as an identifying mark to the nation of Israel to distinguish it as a nation belonging to God which was special and unique from all other nations. In this sense it was a “sign” of the covenant which identified Israel as God’s people (Exodus 20:8-11; 31:12-17; Ezek. 20:12ff).

We would argue that the fourth commandment is still binding upon Christians. We view the Lord’s Day, as has the church since the earliest of times, as the Christian Sabbath. It is on Sunday due to the resurrection of Christ. We look primarily forward to the new creation which the resurrection of Christ signaled, rather than looking back at the old creation to which the seventh day observance pointed. But more will be said of this when we arrive to Isaiah 58.

II. Admission of Strangers and Eunuchs to the Congregation of Israel (vs. 3-8)

These next few verses give instruction to Israel on how to regard and treat persons who had formerly no place among the people of God in their formal worship of God. The “stranger” is first addressed. This would have been a Gentile proselyte to the Jew’s religion. And then secondly the status of the eunuch is considered. These two groups, the stranger, or the “son of a foreigner”, and the eunuch are to be regarded as fully participating members of the covenant people of God.

The hope of the Old Testament was largely focused in the life of one’s offspring. One’s life was seen to continue in one’s descendants. One’s “name” and memory would live on through descendants. But a eunuch, not being able to father children, was without hope of the memory of his name enduring to subsequent generations. Here, the Lord assures the eunuch that he would have a perpetual dwelling in the house of God. His memory would far surpass his expectations even if he had many sons and daughters.

And so, under the Mosaic covenant, foreigners (Gentiles) were excluded from the citizenship of Israel. It is true that Gentiles could become proselytes, but even then, they were not regarded as full Jews and free to participate in all aspects of religious life. The eunuch, also, was not permitted full citizenship and participation in the community. But here a promise is given that the time when they, too, would become full members of the community. There would be no exclusion for anyone who has “joined himself to the Lord”

Here are **verses 3** through **8**:

*³Do not let the son of the foreigner
Who has joined himself to the LORD
Speak, saying,
“The LORD has utterly separated me from His people”;
Nor let the eunuch say,
“Here I am, a dry tree.”
⁴For thus says the LORD:
“To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths,
And choose what pleases Me,*

*And hold fast My covenant,
5Even to them I will give in My house
And within My walls a place and a name
Better than that of sons and daughters;
I will give them an everlasting name
That shall not be cut off.*

*6“Also the sons of the foreigner
Who join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him,
And to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants—
Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath,
And holds fast My covenant—
7Even them I will bring to My holy mountain,
And make them joyful in My house of prayer.
Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices
Will be accepted on My altar;
For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.”
8The Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, says,
“Yet I will gather to him
Others besides those who are gathered to him.”*

Where these kinds of people were formerly prohibited from having full participation in the life and worship of Israel, here God holds forth hope for them that the time is coming when they will be equal and full members among the covenant people of God.

Here is a lengthy commentary on these verses that sets forth the truth and the remarkable nature of this passage:

First, instead of focusing on the orphan and widow, this section focuses on the foreigner and the eunuch. The foreigner was excluded from the people of God. The eunuch was also excluded from the worship of God according to Deuteronomy 23:1. In addition, the eunuch had no descendants or posterity to carry on his name and leave a memorial for him. And yet these verses very explicitly show the foreigner joined to the Lord and the eunuch keeping the Sabbath, and that both are included in the one people of God. May passages have, to this point been somewhat vague. They could be interpreted to mean that Israel conquers the nations and takes over their lands. But not these verses. We shall look at them more closely.

First we see the foreigner and the eunuch cut off from the people of God. In verse 3 the foreigner is complaining that the Lord will surely separate him from his people. The eunuch is complaining that he is a dry tree. Instead of being a tree that bears fruit and produces seeds that result in reproducing itself, he is a dry tree.

Second, according to verse 3 and verse 6, we see foreigners joining themselves to the Lord. According to verse 6 they are ministering to the Lord and loving his name. The verb “to minister or serve” is most commonly used in the Old Testament of the work of the Levites and the priests in the temple. So these foreigners are not just permitted in the temple, they are involved like the Levites and priests. At the end of verse 6 they become servants of the Lord (cf. Isa. 54:17; 56:6; 63:17; 65:8, 9, 13, 15; 66:14). We were shocked to discover in 54:17 that those are included in the new covenant community are called the servants of the Lord. The sins of the many have been born by the servant, and the victory of the one servant is shared by the many and in the end they become servants too. Now, we are further shocked because it is foreigners who are called the servants of the Lord. The end of verse 6 shows them as Sabbath keepers. The same sort of things are said about the eunuch. In verse 4 he is choosing what pleases the Lord and laying hold of his covenant. As a result, God gives to him a memorial and a name in his house (i.e. temple) and within his walls, which is better than sons and daughters. His name is carried on for eternity and will never be cut off. We see, then, that those who

were formerly outside of the people of God and excluded from worshipping in the temple are now joined to the Lord and characterized as true worshipers.

Third, not only are individuals who are extreme examples of excluded people now characterized as true worshippers of the Lord, they are considered to be included in the covenant community. Notice the expressions in verses 7 and 8: God will bring them to his holy mountain; he will give them joy in his house of prayer, and they will offer acceptable burnt offerings and sacrificers. There is progression in these statements of belonging and being included. First, they are brought to God's holy mountain as the place where the Lord is to be found. Second, they are welcomed into his presence and into his family, as indicated by bringing them to celebrate in his house of prayer. Third, they participate in those ordinances which guarantee acceptance and fellowship—they bring offerings and sacrifices that are accepted at his altar. Nothing could be clearer on just how far in the in-group are these foreigners! Verse 8 makes it even clearer. The first line speaks about gathering the exiles of Israel. Then the second line says that God will gather others in addition to his gathered ones. We have here clearly specified what was also indicated in 49:6. First God will gather his own people. Then the servant(s) will be a light to the nations.¹¹

This passage, therefore, looks forward to the salvation that the Messiah would bring through which the membership of "Israel", the covenant people of God, would undergo significant change. This looks to the people of God under the new covenant that our Lord Jesus established. This same truth is proclaimed by the apostle Paul as realized through the death of Jesus Christ. We read in Ephesians 2

¹¹Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh-- who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands-- ¹²that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, ¹⁵having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. ¹⁷And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. ¹⁸For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²²in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (Eph. 2:11-22)

There is a New Testament account in which this prophecy of the inclusion of the eunuch is shown to have been fulfilled. We read of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. Here is the account:

²⁶Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is desert. ²⁷So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot."

³⁰So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

³¹And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. ³²The place in the Scripture which he read was this:

¹¹ Peter J. Gentry, and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant; A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Crossway, 2012), pp. 447-449.

“He was led as a sheep to the slaughter;
And as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
So He opened not His mouth.
³³In His humiliation His justice was taken away,
And who will declare His generation?
For His life is taken from the earth.”

³⁴So the eunuch answered Philip and said, “I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?” ³⁵Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. ³⁶Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?”

³⁷Then Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.”

And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

³⁸So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. ³⁹Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing. (Acts 8:26-39)

This eunuch from Ethiopia was a prominent man with a prominent position. He was “a eunuch of great authority” who was in charge of the treasury of the queen of the Ethiopians. He had come to worship in Jerusalem, which means that he was Jewish. But being a eunuch, he would have had very limited privilege of movement and involvement with respect to the Jewish temple. He would not have been permitted to enter the assembly of the Lord. But here in Acts 8, as a result of hearing the gospel through Philip, he is converted and is brought into covenant relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. He was baptized as all disciples are baptized. He went on his way rejoicing, knowing that he was a full and equal member of the covenant people of God.

Philip had explained to the eunuch the gospel from the Fourth Servant Song of Isaiah 53. I wonder if Philip had unrolled that Isaiah scroll just a little more to show the eunuch the blessing that he was coming to enjoy that was prophesied in Isaiah 56.

Before we move on, let us look again at **verse 7**. Here we read that the people of God are brought to dwell as citizens in the kingdom of God. This is the promised kingdom of the Messiah that Israel had anticipated throughout its history.

***⁷Even them I will bring to My holy mountain,
And make them joyful in My house of prayer.
Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices
Will be accepted on My altar;
For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.”***
***⁸The Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, says,
“Yet I will gather to him
Others besides those who are gathered to him.”***

The expression, “My Holy mountain” is a euphemism of “Jerusalem”, which is a symbol of the Kingdom of God (Israel). Gentiles too, will have a place in the kingdom and will be allowed entrance into the temple to worship there. And so, the prospect of Israel’s return from Babylon held forth hope for all peoples, not Jews only. They could look forward to the time when citizens from all nations would worship the God of Israel.

The kingdom of God is commonly depicted as a “mountain.” A city-state kingdom would often be centralized on a mountain. A large and strong kingdom would be situated on a large tall mountain. The kingdom of God is depicted in this way. Here is a reference to the kingdom in

Now it shall come to pass in the latter days
That the mountain of the LORD'S house
Shall be established on the top of the mountains,
And shall be exalted above the hills;
And all nations shall flow to it.
³Many people shall come and say,
"Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
To the house of the God of Jacob;
He will teach us His ways,
And we shall walk in His paths."
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
⁴He shall judge between the nations,
And rebuke many people;
They shall beat their swords into plowshares,
And their spears into pruning hooks;
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
Neither shall they learn war anymore. (Isa 2:2 NKJ)

But the prophet also depicts the coming kingdom as a "house" that is a "temple" in which prayer to God is made. It will be a house of prayer for "all nations." The Lord Jesus made reference to this idea when He cleansed the temple in Jerusalem.

Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. ¹⁶And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple. ¹⁷Then He taught, saying to them, "Is it not written, '*My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations*'? But you have made it a 'den of thieves.'" (Mark 11:15-17)

It is in the context of this promised coming kingdom of God that God will gather the "*outcasts of Israel*" along with "*others besides those who are gathered to him.*"

Isaiah 56 ends with an indictment against Israel's leaders.

III. Israel's Degenerate Leaders (vs. 9-12)

⁹*All you beasts of the field, come to devour,
All you beasts in the forest.*
¹⁰*His watchmen are blind,
They are all ignorant;
They are all dumb dogs,
They cannot bark;
Sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber.*
¹²*Yes, they are greedy dogs
Which never have enough.
And they are shepherds
Who cannot understand;
They all look to their own way,
Every one for his own gain,
From his own territory.*
¹²*"Come," one says, "I will bring wine,
And we will fill ourselves with intoxicating drink;*

***Tomorrow will be as today,
And much more abundant.”***

The Lord denounced the leaders of His people, the nation of Israel. Rather than serving the Lord’s people, seeking their wellbeing, they are as wild beasts of the field, seeking to devour the very ones that they should be feeding. They are as unfaithful watchmen on the walls of the city who are blind and ignorant, unable to awaken those in danger from invading marauding enemies. They have no concern for their people. They are only seeking their own interests at the expense of the Lord’s people.

The leaders of Israel, who are likened to watchmen on the walls who were to warn the city of approaching invaders, have failed to warn the people of God’s coming judgment. They are as blind watchmen; they just do not see the true picture. They are blind, ignorant, mute, and sleeping. Can any worse description of a watchman be given? What good is a watchman who cannot see? What good is a leader who is ignorant of God and His ways? What good is a watchdog which cannot bark? What good is a guard who is sleeping? The leaders were absolute failures in the function they were to provide the people. Every one of them was corrupt and selfish, “*to the last one.*”

This is setting the stage for their replacement. Our Lord Jesus would do so, removing the leaders of the Jews from their positions of authority, giving the authority to govern His people to His 12 apostles. Through a parable our Lord announced the wresting of authority from the Jewish leaders. He declared to them what God would do: “He will come and destroy those vinedressers and give the vineyard to others” (Luke 20:16).

But to His apostles, He promised that they would rule over “Israel”, the kingdom of God, as His judges. This is spoken about in Luke 22:28ff in which He declared to His apostles:

²⁸“But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. ²⁹And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, ³⁰that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

This theme of denouncing Israel’s leaders will continue into Isaiah 57, which we will address more fully next week, Lord willing.

In conclusion, let us affirm several principles:

(1) Let us embrace wholly the biblical teaching that the grace of God leads us to live righteously, to order our lives according to God’s law. The true teaching of God’s grace does not result in licentious behavior. The Scriptures declare that it is impossible for an unconverted person to live according to the law of God. But they also declare that Christ has come to give us life so that we can live according to God’s law

³For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, ***4that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*** ⁵For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. ⁶For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. ***7Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.*** ⁸So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ***9But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit,*** if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. (Rom. 8:3-8)

Those “in the Spirit” are the true children of God. And they are ones who order their lives according to the law of God, for they are subject to God’s law through the power of the Holy Spirit given to them by Jesus Christ.

(2) Let us be always repenting of sin in view to the grace of God that shall be revealed in us. Just as these people were admonished to live in righteousness with view to the coming salvation through the messiah, similarly, we are to live lives of righteousness with view to the appearing of our Savior.

“For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles-- when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries.” (1 Pet. 4:3)

⁷“Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. ⁸You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. ⁹Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! (James 5:7-9)

(3) Let us pray for our church leaders that they may be faithful to their Lord and to His people. Let us acknowledge their great responsibility and their accountability before the Lord and then pray for them accordingly.