

ISAIAH LESSON 51

The Return of the King^a
(Isaiah 56:1-12)

Isaiah 56:1-12 Revised Standard Version (RSV)

The Covenant Extended to All Who Obey^b

56 Thus says the Lord^c:

“Keep justice, and do righteousness,
for soon my salvation will come,
and my deliverance be revealed.”^d

² Blessed is the man who does this,
and the son of man who holds it fast,
who keeps the sabbath, not profaning it,
and keeps his hand from doing any evil.”^e

³ Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say,
“The Lord will surely separate me from his people”;
and let not the eunuch say,
“Behold, I am a dry tree.”^f

⁴ For thus says the Lord:
“To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths,
who choose the things that please me
and hold fast my covenant,”^g

⁵ I will give in my house and within my walls
a monument and a name
better than sons and daughters;
I will give them an everlasting name
which shall not be cut off.”^h

⁶ “And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord,
to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord,
and to be his servants,
every one who keeps the sabbath, and does not profane it,
and holds fast my covenant—”ⁱ

⁷ these 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 peoples.”^j

⁸ Thus says the Lord God^k,
who gathers the outcasts of Israel,
I will gather yet others to him
besides those already gathered.”^l

The Corruption of Israel’s Rulers^m

⁹ All you beasts of the field, come to devour—
all you beasts in the forest.”ⁿ

¹⁰ His watchmen are blind,
they are all without knowledge;
they are all dumb dogs,
they cannot bark;
dreaming, lying down,
loving to slumber.^o

¹¹ The dogs have a mighty appetite;
they never have enough.

The shepherds also have no understanding;
they have all turned to their own way,
each to his own gain, one and all.^p

¹² “Come,” they say, “let us get wine,
let us fill ourselves with strong drink;
and tomorrow will be like this day,
great beyond measure.”^q

Revised Standard Version (RSV)

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^a **The Return of the King.**

^b **The Covenant Extended to All Who Obey.**

^c **Lord - Yahweh, or Jehovah (יהוה, YHWH)**, written without vowel markings, unpronounced by Jews and referred to as the Tetragrammaton. See Note in the Introduction to this Study. **YHWH** appears here and in verses 3 (twice), 4 and 6 (twice).

^d (1) Is 1:16-19, 26:7-8, 33:5, 45:14, 46:12-13, 51:5-8, 55:7, 58:13-14, 61:8; Ex 31:16-17; Neh 10:31, 13:15-22; Ps 24:4-6, 50:23, 85:9; Jr 7:3-11; Mal 4:4; Mt 3:2, 4:17; Mk 1:15; Lk 3:3-9; Jn 7:17; Rm 1:17, 10:6-10, 13:11-14 The faithful are told to keep (שמר, *shamar*; or guard, observe, promote, preserve, maintain) justice (מִשְׁפָּט, *mishpat*; or judgment) and do (עשה, *asah*) righteousness (צְדָקָה, *tsedaqah*), connecting that to the coming salvation (יְשׁוּעָה, *yeshuah*) of God. The salvation might be conditional, that is dependent upon acting with righteousness, an interpretation supported in the following verse where those referred to the first verse are to be blessed, particularly those who faithfully keep the Sabbath. Other Christians interpret this verse as showing the Christian grateful response to the promise of imminent salvation to be to seek to act with righteousness. Verse 8 refers to an ingathering of those scattered, banished or dispersed so that, in its immediate context, this verse may refer to the return of the Exiles, and expression of God’s righteousness and mercy. In a larger sense, and particularly in the context of verses 3, 6 and 7, this must refer to a future time when gentiles will come to Jerusalem to worship the God of Abraham. Verse 8 might, therefore refer to all, Jew or Gentile, who are in a state of alienation from God because of their sin, and who will be reconciled to Him by the Messiah’s work on the cross which brings about the forgiveness of sin.

^e (2) Is 56:4-6, 58:13; Ex 20:8-11, 31:13-17; Lv 19:30; Neh 13:17; Ps 1:1-3, 15:1-5, 34:14, 37:27, 106:3, 112:1, 119:1-5, 119:101, 128:1; Pr 4:13, 4:27, 14:16, 16:6, 16:17; Ec 7:18; Jr 17:21-22; Ezk 20:12, 20:20; Lk 11:28, 12:43; Jn 13:17; Rm 12:9; Rv 22:14 God commanded His people to rest and honor Him on the seventh day, Saturday (in Spanish, *sábado*), the Sabbath (Ex 20:8-11) as a memorial to God’s work in creation from which He rested on the seventh day. While we are to honor and serve Him at all times, He desires that we have one special day each week, always in Scripture Saturday, when we rest and focus our hearts on Him. In Acts, when the day of meeting is specified, it is the seventh day, frequently after the Sabbath worship at the synagogue (___). As the distance between gentile Christians and Jews increased in the early centuries after the Messiah, gentile Christians

moved their weekly worship from the seventh day to the first, Sunday, in honor of the Lord's resurrection which occurred on that day. There does not appear, however, to be any Scriptural basis for viewing Sunday as the Sabbath described in the Hebrew Scriptures. Being blessed, fortunate or happy (אֶשֶׁר, *esher*) is a state of well-being to which all men should aspire. It is promised to all who do justice and live upright lives as the recipients of God's salvation. Both the Hebrew text and the LXX use two distinct words for **man**. The first Hebrew word for man (אֱנוֹשׁ, *enosh*) seems to apply to a man in a general sense, the second (אָדָם, *adam*) harkens back to the first man. Similarly, in the LXX, whereas the first man (ἀνὴρ, *anér*) means either a man or a husband, the second, (ἄνθρωπος, *anthrōpos*) means man or mankind generally.

^f (3) Is 14:1, 39:7, 56:5-6; Nu 18:4-7; Dt 23:1-9; Jr 38:7-13, 39:16-17, 50:5; Ezk 17:24, 20:47; Dn 1:3-21; Zep 2:11; Zec 8:20-23; Mt 8:10-11, 15:26-27, 19:12-30; Lk 7:6-8; Ac 8:26-40, 10:1-2, 10:34-35, 13:47-48, 17:4, 18:7; Rm 2:10-11, 15:9-12-16; 1Co 6:17; Eph 2:12, 2:22; 1Pt 1:1 While often implied in Isaiah (), it is made absolutely clear here that whatever one's social condition (eunuchs were outcasts and non-citizens, i.e. not members of the assembly (ἐκκλησία, *ekklesia*; קָהָל, *qahal*)) or national origin (who were also historically excluded from the assembly which was limited to the circumcised; Dt 23:1; 2Ki 9:30-32; Jr 29:2, 38:7; Ac 8:27), everyone is invited to come to the Lord and join His people in worship. A Eunuch could not have children to perpetuate his name (in a sense did not have a future) but God promises blessings better than sons and daughters.

^g (4) Is 27:5, 55:3, 56:2, 56:6; Jsh 24:15; 2Sm 23:5; Ps 119:111; Jr 50:5; Wis 3:14-15; Lk 10:42; Heb 6:17 This verse is directed not at all Eunuchs, but only to those who keep the Sabbath and act justly, holding fast to the covenant with Israel. The Sabbath was a constant reminder of what was important (Mt 6:25). To profane the Sabbath is to deny the Lord and His Torah (Am 8:4-6).

^h (5) Is 2:2-3, 26:1, 48:19, 55:13, 56:7, 60:18, 62:2, 62:12, 66:20; 1Sm 1:8; 2Sm 18:18; Mt 16:18; Jn 1:12; Eph 2:22; 1Tm 3:15; 2Tm 2:19; Heb 3:6; 1Jn 3:1; Rv 2:17, 3:5, 3:12 Literally, God promises to set up a monument to, or provide a place (יָד, *yad*; Nu 2:17; Dt 2:37; 1Sm 15:12; 2Sm 18:18; Is 56:5; Jr 6:3; Ezk 21:19) for, the godly eunuchs. Although often translated as monument, there was never any provision for setting up a monument or commemoration to any particular group of people within the Temple. More likely, place is a better translation indicating that Eunuchs, and foreigners, would be accepted within the people of God. The idea of receiving a name in this context would appear to be much the same. The inclusion described would be permanent. The name of the main Holocaust (שׁוֹאָה, *Shoah*, meaning ravagement or complete destruction) memorial in Jerusalem (יָד וַשֵּׁם, *Yad Vashem*) is translated into English as "Monument and a Name" and is a direct reference to this verse.

ⁱ (6) Is 18:7, 44:5, 56:2-4, 58:13, 60:7-10, 61:5; Jr 50:5; Mk 12:30-34; Ac 2:41, 11:23; Rm 8:28; 1Co 16:22; 2Co 8:5; Gal 5:6; Eph 6:24; 1Th 1:9-10; Jas 1:12, 2:5; Rv 1:10 The foreigners are gentiles who chose to come to and worship the God of Abraham, serving Him and following Torah, particularly observing the Sabbath.

^j (7) Is 2:2-3, 11:9, 19:24-25, 60:7-11, 61:10, 65:1, 65:25, 66:19-20; 1Ki 8:41-43; Ps 2:6, 15:1; Mi 4:1-2; Zec 8:3; Mal 1:11; Mt 21:13; Mk 11:17; Lk 19:46; Jn 4:21-23, 12:20-26; Rm 12:1, 15:16; Eph 2:11-13; 1Tm 2:8; Heb 12:22, 13:15; 1Pt 1:1-2, 2:5 Jesus quotes from this verse when he casts the money changers out of the Temple (Mk 11:17; Mt 21:12-13). It is a clear reference to Solomon's dedicatory prayer for the Temple in which Solomon prays that the Temple will be a House of Prayer for all nations, and that the prayers of all, including foreigners, which are directed to the Temple, and thus acknowledge the God of Abraham, will be granted (1Ki 8:41-43). The burnt offerings, or holocausts, (עֹלָה, *olah*) of the faithful foreigner will be found acceptable. While Jerusalem will remain the Holy Mountain, Jesus will tell the Samaritan woman that there will come a time when worship need not be at any specific place, but must be "in spirit and in truth" (Jn 4:21-24). The Orthodox Christians view the Church as the "Holy Mountain" referred to in this verse.

^k **Lord God - Adonai** (אֲדֹנָי) *Yahweh*, or *Jehovah*, (יהוה, *YHWH*) combines the plural form of lord or master with the Tetragrammaton. See note on the Names of God in the introduction to this Study.

^l (8) Is 11:11-12, 19:25, 27:12-13, 43:6, 49:6-7, 49:12, 49:22, 51:5, 54:7, 55:5, 60:3-11, 66:18-21; Gn 49:10; Ps 106:47, 107:2-3; Ps 147:2; Jr 30:17, 31:10; Hos 1:11; Mi 4:6; Zep 3:18-20; Zec 10:8-10; Jn 10:16, 11:52; Eph 1:10, 2:11-16 In the *Targum of Isaiah*, the dispersed ones of Israel are identified as the exiles who would be gathered. As indicated above, in a broader sense, this could be addressed to all who feel alienated from God.

^m **The Corruption of Israel's Rulers.** The Watchmen and Shepherds were Israel's supposed prophets, priests and leaders who should be keeping watch for danger, and leading the people in the way that they should go. But uncaring of the needs of the people, they satisfied their own appetites and spoke comforting words that people wanted to hear () rather than telling them hard truths. In contrast with the comfort offered to eunuchs and gentiles, the comfortable are taken to task. Rather than seeking the Lord's guidance in leading the people, they act as though judgement, the Day of the Lord, will never come (Mt 24:45-51; Lk 12:13-21). While this was likely directed to the Jewish leadership of the day, it is a lesson for all in a position of leadership to always keep their responsibilities to the people, and to their God, front and center. In another reading, these verses, together with Is 57:1-13 may be the condemnation of the Canaanite death cult which had been adopted by some Jews before the Exile. If true,

the references are obscure and indirect. The rites referred to combined aspects of funeral practices with fertility rites associated with the worship of Baal (Nu 25:3). This possible reading will be explored in greater detail in the following lesson.

ⁿ (9) Is 18:6, 46:11; Dt 28:26; Jr 12:8-9; Ezk 29:5, 34:8, 39:17; Rv 19:17-18 This verse is a “throwback” to a time prior to the Exile in which foreign invaders, beasts, of field and forest, are invited to ravage Jerusalem, and perhaps an omen of a future time when the nations shall rage against the Lord, and against His anointed (). The *Targum of Isaiah* views the beasts as the kings of the nations that assemble to oppress Jerusalem. Or perhaps, following the next verse, the beasts are the leaders referred to in the following verse. Some have suggested that the “beasts of the field” are called to devour the “beasts of the forest.” If so, the “beasts of the field” refer to a conquering army, and the “beasts of the forest” to the Jews. This view seems less likely, however.

^o (10) Is 3:12, 9:15, 21:6-12, 29:9-14, 52:8, 58:1, 62:6; Pr 6:4-10, 24:30-34; Jer 2:8, 2:26-27, 5:4-5, 5:31, 6:13-17, 10:21, 14:13-14, 23:1-2, 23:11-14; Ezk 3:15-18, 3:26-27, 8:11, 13:16, 33:1-9; Hos 4:6, 9:7-8; Hab 2:1-3; Jnh 1:2-6; Nah 3:18; Mt 15:14, 23:16-26; Mk 13:34-37; Lk 6:39-40; Php 3:2 The watchmen, likely referring to spiritual leaders such as priests and prophets, are blind, asleep or unaware, and give no warning of the approaching disaster. IQIsaa specifically identifies the watchmen as “seers.” Watchmen should be alert to, and warn the people of, grave sin. They should be an example for the people of conduct pleasing to God. They should call upon the people to abandon their lawless ways to, if possible, stave off judgement. Instead, these watchmen were corrupt and useless. They are likened to lazy dogs who pursue only their own appetites.

^p (11) Is 1:3, 28:7, 53:6, 57:17; Ex 23:3; 1Sm 2:12-17, 2:29; Ec 5:10; Jr 6:13, 8:10, 10:21, 12:10, 22:17, 23:1-4, 25:32-38; Ezk 13:19, 34:1-3; Mi 3:5-11; Zec 11:4-17; Mal 1:10; Mt 13:14-15; Jn 8:43; Ac 20:29-33; 2Co 4:4; Php 3:2, 3:19; 1Tm 3:3-8; Ti 1:7-11; 1Pt 5:2; 2Pt 2:3, 2:14-16; Jude 1:11, 1:16; Rv 22:15 In addition to the watchmen, the shepherds, leaders, are also condemned for their voracious appetite because of which they will ultimately devour the flock they are charged to protect (Mk 12:39-40; Ac 20:29).

^q (12) Is 5:11-12, 5:22, 22:13-14, 28:7-8; Ps 10:6; Pr 23:35, 27:1, 31:4-5; Jr 6:17, 18:18; Ezk 33:7; Hos 4:11; Am 6:3-6; Mt 24:49-51; Lk 12:18-20, 12:45-46, 21:34; 1Co 15:32; Ti 1:7 This verse is absent in the LXX and in most Orthodox Christian translations of the Scriptures. It expresses the sentiments of the shepherds and watchmen, to satisfy their desires, and enjoy themselves, because their time of power, wealth and dominion will not end.