

Segment 11: Isaiah 56:9-12; 57

Isaiah 56:9

God calls to the wild animals to devour. This harkens back to Isaiah 5:1-7 when God called His people a vineyard. He withdraws His “hedge of protection,” and the ravenous beasts devour the fruit.

Verse 10

The watchman’s job was to stand on the wall and sound the alarm when danger approached the city. This early warning system gave the inhabitants a fighting chance to repel the intruders. Without it, defeat was all but certain. God’s prophet is His watchman (Ezekiel 33:1-9). Isaiah calls the watchmen blind, mute, and sleepy. These are the three worst possible qualities for a watchman.

Verse 11

Now Israel’s leadership—those entrusted with the safety of the people—are called greedy dogs and stupid shepherds. They are selfish; each has turned to his own way, to his unjust gain. They are oblivious to the moral crisis in their midst.

Verse 12

Isaiah offers a concrete example of the problem. The leaders are devoid of their God-given purpose and instead turn to alcohol to fill themselves. They are stuck in a rut, slaves to their passions, doomed to repeat the exercise day after day. The picture is one of purposelessness (1 Cor 15:32).

Isaiah 57:1

Now we find out the obvious issue of which the watchmen are ignorant: the righteous are dying out.

Verse 2

It is difficult to tell if the “rest” spoken of here refers to the sleep of death or actual sleep. Either way, the righteous are characterized by peace; whereas, the wicked fall headlong into debauchery.

Verse 3

Now the focus returns to the wicked. Rather than allowing them to rest in their ancestral pedigree—Abraham and Sarah—God focuses attention on more recent history. Their parents, just like them, are sorcerers, adulterers, and prostitutes. This probably refers to idolatry.

Verse 4

On the bullying impulse within all of us, John Oswalt writes:

“The description of their behavior...calls to mind pictures of crowd behavior that are all too vivid, whether it is of German soldiers taunting an elderly orthodox Jew, or a lynch mob in the United States cavorting around the body of a black man, or children in a school yard mocking a new child who dresses strangely. These are the people in control, people of power and position, and all that is demonic in us bursts forth as we collectively seek to exorcise our own fear of being powerless, outcast, and alone. Here it seems likely that they have been mocking the righteous: odd people on the margins of society, silently drifting toward oblivion.”¹

Here God rebukes this behavior, exposing the ridiculers to the reproach that is their birthright.

Verse 5

These verses focus on idolatry, especially fertility worship and child sacrifices. In primitive religions, creation is mistaken for the creator. Rather than worshipping the tree-maker who can satisfy their needs, they copulate under the branches of the fertile tree in an effort to gain the power of fertility for themselves. Then once they have attained offspring, rather than cherishing them, they sacrificed them in the dried up river beds. The people have succumbed to the madness of idolatry.

Verse 6

God is supposed to be the people’s portion, not the smooth stones of the ravine. Why are they worshipping rocks instead of the living God who gave them the rocks?

Verse 7-8

Now we lift up our eyes from the lowest cracks and crevices to the highest hills and mountains. What do we observe? The same behavior! Again, sexual behavior and idolatry intertwine in startling ways.

Verses 9-10

Dissatisfied with what her own land can offer, like an addict Israel searches for new ways to satisfy her desires. Even though journeying was a dangerous matter in ancient times, she is willing to make the trip. Intent on finding some exotic foreign satisfaction, she ignores the exhaustion and presses onward away from Yahweh, her true lover.

Verse 11

His people fear another more than God (Matthew 10:28). How absurd! God may be merciful and kind, but He is also the one whose voice melts mountains like wax (Nahum 1:1-7).

Verse 12

¹ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1998), p. 476.

Although God has remained silent, He now exposes their “righteousness” and bares their deeds for all to see.

Verse 13

In the day of calamity, He will not hear their prayers. The idols that they serve in good times are responsible for their safety in bad times. However, God will take care of the remnant who takes refuge in Him. He will give to this faithful minority the Abrahamic blessing to inherit the land (Genesis 12:7; Romans 4:13; Matthew 5:5; Galatians 3:29).

Verse 14

The picture is one of building a highway (40:3; 62:10) so that God’s people can return to Him.

Verse 15

Three attributes combine to define God’s character: transcendence, eternity, and holiness. All three of these contrast to humans who are imminent, finite, and common. However, God calls up to Himself those who are contrite—who recognize their need for Him.

Verses 16-18

As in 54:7-8, God’s nature is not to nurse a grudge or seethe with wrath indefinitely. He will pour out His indignation like a furious fire that burns with unquenchable heat but then gives way to healing and restoration. He knows our frame; He knows we are dust; He knows without His aid our spirit will fail (Psalm 13:14; Genesis 8:21). Even in His justice, God restrains Himself. He promises healing after the storm.

Verses 19-20

God will get what He wants: people who recognize Him for who He is and who in turn bask in His *shalom*. Whether one is a foreign eunuch or a son of David, God proclaims peace and healing. However, the wicked, trapped in their self-imposed chaos, cannot receive it. For them, there is no peace.

Segment 12: Isaiah 58:1ff; 59:1ff

Isaiah 58:1

“...Declare to My people their transgression; And to the house of Jacob their sins.”

The rest of this chapter describes two religious activities – fasting and keeping the Sabbath. Without true repentance, without a desire to change one’s heart, these are merely pious actions that look religious but do not have God’s involvement. This is the same issue that was brought up in the very first chapter of Isaiah (Isaiah 1:10-17).

Isaiah 58:2-12

They fasted but not with the proper motive. The only fasting required in the law was on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29, 31; 23:27, 32 - “humble or afflict your souls”). The Old Testament has many examples, other than the Day of Atonement, where men and women fasted on their own when seeking God or when mourning. Fasting was a freewill offering of self humiliation. (Hannah – 1 Samuel 1:7 and 8; David and his men after Saul died – 2 Samuel 1:12; David at Abner’s death - 2 Samuel 3:35; David for the child of Bathsheba – 2 Samuel 12:13-16; Ahab in self-humiliation – 1 Kings 21:27-29; Jehoshaphat before battle – 2 Chronicles 20:3; Ezra 9:5; Nehemiah 1:4; Esther 4:3, 16; 9:31 – part of Purim; Daniel 9:3)

However, to fast without the proper motivation is simply religious activity. Jesus taught on this hypocrisy (Matthew 6:1, 16-18; Luke 18:9-14).

Loosen the bonds of wickedness, undo the bands of the yoke, divide your bread with the hungry, bring the homeless poor into the house, and cover the naked.

When we fast, we are to be truly seeking God’s will, and we are to care for people. God has always wanted His people to have love and concern for others (Exodus 22:21-27; Leviticus 19:9-18; Zechariah 7:4-14).

Isaiah 58:13-14

As with fasting, keeping the Sabbath was not supposed to be for their own pleasure. Rather, it was to be a delight, a holy day, set aside to honor Yahweh. It was not to be a burden but a delight for the people to set aside a day for God (Amos 8:4-6).

Isaiah 59:1-16

Man does not do righteousness and does not seek justice. God’s people did wickedly.

Adders, snakes, and spider webs: Psalm 58:1-5; Job 8:13 and 14

John the Baptist and Jesus referred to the Pharisees as a generation of vipers – Matthew 3:7; 12:34.

These acts of wickedness are a testimony of mankind. They are an abomination to Yahweh.

Proverbs 6:16-19; Ezekiel 22:26-31; parallel Psalms – Psalm 14:1ff; Psalm 53:1ff

Isaiah 59:15-20

God looked at man's situation and saw that there was none that could help. God's arm will bring salvation. A Redeemer will come to Zion. To the adversaries He will repay, and to those that run from transgression, redemption! It will be a salvation brought about by Yahweh because there was not one that could bring this about. No man could do it! It is a justification by faith (Romans 3:10-28).

Isaiah 59:21

"God's spirit is upon you...." His spirit would be upon His anointed one, the servant of Yahweh (Isaiah 11:2; 42:1; 61:1; Luke 4:18).

God's covenant with the people of God: Isaiah 49:8; 55:3; Jeremiah 31:31-34; 32:37-42; Hebrews 8:6-13; 9:15