

The Israel of God (Isaiah 56:1–8)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (4/14/2019)

Introduction

1. The *blessed* state (v. 2; the happy condition of one who is in God’s favor) is for the one who obeys and perseveres (“*holds it fast*”).
 - a. This admonition was written to the faithful few in Israel who truly sought the Lord, forsaking their wicked ways and unrighteous thoughts (55:6,7) even when they did not understand what the Lord was doing (55:8, 9).
 - b. Two things are then stated as the evidence of this perseverance: (1) keeping and not profaning *Sabbath*, and (2) refraining from doing any *harm* (*evil*, either spiritual or physical).
2. In the last message, we focused on what *Sabbath* observance meant (vv. 2, 4, 6).
 - a. Sabbath is a day of rest commemorating God’s work in creation by ceasing from *one’s own works* (Hebrews 4:9, 10) in order to remember the Lord in worship and ministry (56:6).
 - b. Old-covenant Sabbath was based on God’s creation rest, laboring for six days and resting the *seventh* (Exodus 20:8–11); new-covenant Sabbath is based on Christ’s new creation work, resting the *first* day and laboring the next six in anticipation of the renewal of all things in the new earth (the promised true Sabbath, Hebrews 4:1, 3, 6, 9, 10).
 - c. The real rest of Sabbath is not *ceasing activity* but directing activity into the will of God—not doing your business but God’s business (John 5:16, 17; 5:19, 20; Matthew 11:29; 1 Corinthians 10:31, 32).

This 56th chapter describes the shift in the divine plan from national Israel under the old covenant to the “*Israel of God*” (Galatians 6:16) under Messiah and the new covenant. New covenant Israel of God includes the *foreigner* (Gentile believers) and the *eunuch* (those disqualified under the old; Deuteronomy 23:1ff).

I. Israel and God’s Business (vv. 1, 2)

1. A word to the believing remnant; a requirement and a promise (v. 1)
 - a. True Israelites are those who *keep* (*shamar*, to preserve, protect, and celebrate) justice and *do* (*asah*, to produce, make, or effect) righteousness. *Justice* and *righteousness* are God’s ideal standards of conduct, both legal and ethical. True believers are to act with integrity toward others and obedience toward God (Matthew 6:33).
 - b. To those who do what is right, God promises deliverance and rescue.
2. Qualification for the Lord’s favor (v. 2)
 - a. A disclaimer: These verses do not teach that salvation comes only to those who live right. Salvation is by grace alone through faith in Christ alone. What is described here is conduct of one who, because He is a new creature, behaves like one (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15).
 - b. One born again from above “*does this*” and “*holds it fast*”—keeps Sabbath, not profaning it with his own business, and refrains from doing *harm* (*evil*, both physical and spiritual).

II. Foreigners Welcomed (vv. 3–8)

1. Foreigners and eunuch have nothing to fear because their exclusion from the assembly in the old covenant is now reversed in the new covenant (vv. 4–5).
 - a. Gentiles were limited in their worship in the kingdom of Israel, being separated from natural citizens. Their fear is expressed in the words, “*The LORD will surely separate me from his people*” (v. 3; Ephesians 2:11–13).
 - b. Eunuchs, because they could not have children, were fearful of not being remembered in the assembly of Israel: “*Behold, I am a dry tree.*”
2. The godly eunuchs will be remembered (v. 5).
 - a. These are identified as keeping His Sabbaths, choosing what pleases Him, and holding fast to His covenant.
 - b. They are promised an everlasting heritage within the Lord’s house—“*a monument and a name,*” an enduring remembrance better than having sons and daughters.
3. The godly foreigners will be honored (vv. 6–8).
 - a. These Gentile believers are marked as ministering to Him as priests, loving Him, keeping Sabbath, and holding fast to the covenant.
 - b. They are given a glorious place in God’s *holy mountain* (the place of His home and rule) and *priesthood* in His holy temple (the new covenant assembly, the church, 1 Peter 2:4, 5, 9). Jesus cited this text when He drove the moneychangers from the temple (Matthew 21:13; see John 10:16; 17:20, 21).

What Can We Take Away?

We need to pay careful and prayerful heed to the message of the chapter. The Lord clearly and repeatedly defines the qualities of those who fall under His blessing. Each person needs to search his own heart and life, asking, “Do these characteristics of true believers mark my life?”

1. Are we those who “*join themselves to the LORD,*” not because of supposed genetic privilege, but heart-driven faith to adhere to the Lord, forsaking all other gods, rivals, and pretenders, including self (Matthew 3:7–9)?
2. Do we use our time and abilities to “*minister to him,*” joining ourselves to Him as friends to His honor and the interests of His kingdom in the world?
3. Do we “*love the name of the LORD,*” so pleased by Him and enthusiastic to study and discover all we can of Him, making Him the supreme interest of our hearts?
4. Have we truly a heart love for Him so as “*to be his servants,*” faithful in that obedience that is most acceptable to Him and a great pleasure to us, flowing from a principle of love? When we have this heart, “*His commandments are not burdensome*” (1 John 5:3).
5. Are we biblical Sabbatarians, those “*who keep the Sabbath and do not profane it*”?

The truth here is making this day, not an end in itself, but a mark of love for God (Isaiah 58:13, 14) and a mark of loyalty to the covenant (Exodus 31:13, 14).