

Pentwater Bible Church

Isaiah Message 127

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Elisha refusing the gifts of Naaman by Ferdinand Bol cir 1661

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Pentwater Bible Church

The Book of Isaiah

One-Hundred-Twenty-Seven

Heresy and False Fasting

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SHOUT OUT HERESY

Isaiah 58:1

¹Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and declare unto my people their transgression, and to the house of Jacob their sins (ASV, 1901).

The Lord considers this situation to be one of extreme seriousness. It is made obvious by the nature of the commands of God to the prophet. He is not to speak calmly and quietly about the situation, nor is he to speak to people privately. Rather, he is to shout at the top of his voice with the throat, as opposed to a whisper or quiet vocal exchange. Using an example of the contemporary means of broadcasting messages in war or peace the command is amplified: *like a trumpet lift your voice*. The *shofar*, was a musical instrument made from a ram's horn, which was the primary device used to gain community wide attention in ancient Israel, whether for alarm (Isaiah 18:3) or for communal activity (Isaiah 27:3). Its piercing blast was a sign to stop all other activity and pay attention. So, the prophet is told to make his appeal as powerful and as attention captivating as possible.

The practice of religious expression had become self-serving in Isaiah's day and today too. This is not a matter for polite exchange but for radical admonishment to those who offend God by mischaracterizing Him and His law. It is nothing short of a call to *rebellion* against these practices which calls for the most dramatic action. The purpose of the strong loud preaching, was to show *my people their transgression, and to the house of Jacob their sins*. "My people" refers to the Jews of Isaiah's time, after the return from the Babylonian captivity and, in fuller prophetic scope, those at the Messiah's first as John the Baptist did against the apostates of his day (Matthew 3:1-11), and particularly the Lord's second, advent (Malachi 4:5-6).

The exposed "sins" centered in religious superficiality and outright denial of basic doctrines. So, the prophet continues to exhort his people to improve, repent, and act righteously. It addresses outwardly pious Jews who observe the formal requirements the Law, but use this to cover their bad character traits. When God says to declare (Shout) *to the house of Jacob their sins*, it is a seeming reiteration of the same phrase at the beginning of the passage. The two phrases seem to repeat the same idea in different words. That is the nature of Hebrew poetry found in the Psalms and prophets. Isaiah often repeats an idea in different words for emphasis or poetic effect, sometimes adding something to the second parallel statement. In this case it is first declared to "My people", this further clarification is given in the second statement as the House of Jacob which are the Israelites.

Isaiah was specifically commanded to loudly chastise the leaders of the nation. The Lord called His prophets to speak His Words.

Amos 5:6

⁷Surely the Lord Jehovah will do nothing, except he reveal his secret unto his servants the prophets (ASV, 1901).

People are often reluctant — even afraid to speak out against those who teach false doctrine. So many are soothed by the false teacher's easy doctrine that when faced with the truth they turn on the one who brought the correction to them instead of repenting and turning from the lies. Jesus spoke frequently of this persecution of the prophets of God who spoke His truth. Here is one example.

Luke 11:47–51

⁴⁷ Woe unto you! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. ⁴⁸ Truly ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers: for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchres. ⁴⁹ Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute: ⁵⁰ that the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; ⁵¹ from the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation (KJV).

It is entirely appropriate to call out the denial of the Lord's word to those who misuse it and twist it to their own benefit.

THE FALSE TEACHERS PRETEND TO KNOW AND WANT GOD'S LAW

Isaiah 58:2

²Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways: as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God, they ask of me righteous judgments; they delight to draw near unto God (ASV, 1901).

This is a description of hypocrisy, as practised in worshipping God, and a false professed desire to know his ways which is entirely external appearing as just and godly people, who delight in nothing more than in drawing near to God in worship and communion with Him. The same problem exists with the Church, which is essentially an apostasy. Apostasy is leaving a faith one professes to have. It is not that they ever really had it.

Three NT passages describe the character of the apostasy.

I Timothy 4:1-3

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth (KJV).

The source of the apostasy is demons, for apostates have essentially given in to seducing spirits and are preaching a system which is a doctrine of demons. Furthermore, they speak lies through hypocrisy, and their consciences have stopped working.

The second passage is found in II Timothy.

II Timothy 3:5

¹But know this, that in the last days grievous times shall come. ²For men shall be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, haughty, railers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, ³without natural affection, implacable, slanderers, without self-control, fierce, no lovers of ⁵holding a form of godliness, but having denied the power thereof: from these also turn away (ASV, 1901).

In verses 1-4 there is a description of the general character of the world in the last days, and it is obvious that these elements are true in this present day. Verse five centers on the religious front, where the last days will be characterized by men having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof. Apostate ministers, retaining the clerical garb and church titles, have a form of godliness as do those who dress as young teen agers trying to be with it. But they deny the power thereof, for they have denied the true power of godliness. They claim to trust in God but are actually trusting in worldly methodologies.

The third passage is found in II Peter

II Peter 2:1-22

But there arose false prophets also among the people, as among you also there shall be false teachers, who shall privily bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master that bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. ²And many shall follow their lascivious doings; by reason of whom the way of the truth shall be evil spoken of. ³And in covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose sentence now from of old lingereth not, and their destruction slumbereth not. ⁴For if God spared not angels when they sinned, but cast them down to hell, and committed them to pits of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; ⁵and spared not the ancient world, but preserved Noah with seven others, a preacher of righteousness, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; ⁶and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, having made them an example unto those that should live ungodly; ⁷and delivered righteous Lot,

sore distressed by the lascivious life of the wicked ⁸*(for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their lawless deeds):* ⁹*the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment unto the day of judgment;* ¹⁰*but chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of defilement, and despise dominion. Daring, self-willed, they tremble not to rail at dignities:* ¹¹*whereas angels, though greater in might and power, bring not a railing judgment against them before the Lord.* ¹²*But these, as creatures without reason, born mere animals to be taken and destroyed, railing in matters whereof they are ignorant, shall in their destroying surely be destroyed,* ¹³*suffering wrong as the hire of wrong-doing; men that count it pleasure to revel in the day-time, spots and blemishes, revelling in their deceivings while they feast with you;* ¹⁴*having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; enticing unstedfast souls; having a heart exercised in covetousness; children of cursing;* ¹⁵*forsaking the right way, they went astray, having followed the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the hire of wrong-doing;* ¹⁶*but he was rebuked for his own transgression: a dumb ass spake with man's voice and stayed the madness of the prophet.* ¹⁷*These are springs without water, and mists driven by a storm; for whom the blackness of darkness hath been reserved.* ¹⁸*For, uttering great swelling words of vanity, they entice in the lusts of the flesh, by lasciviousness, those who are just escaping from them that live in error;* ¹⁹*promising them liberty, while they themselves are bondservants of corruption; for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he also brought into bondage.* ²⁰*For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the last state is become worse with them than the first.* ²¹*For it were better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment delivered unto them.* ²²*It has happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog turning to his own vomit again, and the sow that had washed to wallowing in the mire (ASV, 1901).*

As we read the passage, we don't see Peter having any attitude of love or tolerance toward the apostates. The Bible and particularly the Lord Jesus do not display ANY toleration toward apostasy and both castigate it very severely, as these verses clearly show.

God in this day and age has given us commandment to deal with these false prophets and teachers. We all know that God is not the author of confusion (I Corinthians 14: 33). We must separate from them. The Lord has commanded it.

1. Separation is not an optional part of Christianity; it is a commandment (Romans 16:17-18; II Corinthians 6:14-17; 1 Timothy 6:5; 2 Timothy 2:16-18; 3:5; Titus 3:10; II John 7-11; Revelation 18:4).
2. Separation is not mean or unloving; it is obedience to God.
 - a. "Mark them . . . avoid them" (Romans 16:17)
 - b. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with" (II Corinthians 6:14)
 - c. "Have no fellowship with" (II Corinthians 6:14)
 - d. "Come out from among" (II Corinthians 6:17)
 - e. "Withdraw thyself" (I Timothy 6:5)

- f. “Shun” (II Timothy 2:16)
 - g. “Purge oneself from” (II Timothy 2:21)
 - h. “From such turn away” (II Timothy 3:5)
 - i. “Reject” (Titus 3:10)
 - j. “Receive them not into your house neither bid them Godspeed” (II John. 10)
3. We are to separate even from brethren who are walking in disobedience (II Thessalonians 3:6).
 4. Separation is a wall of protection against spiritual danger. Failure to separate from error leaves one open to the influence of error (1 Corinthians 15:33). The reason a shepherd separates the sheep from wolves is to protect them. Likewise, a faithful and godly Bible teacher will seek to separate his flock from spiritual dangers that are even more destructive than wolves. The Doctor of souls will do all he can to keep heresies out of the church. They are to the Church of Jesus Christ what disease is to a Medical Doctor that cares for human bodies in time and space. Both legitimate Doctors will do all they can to prevent or stop heresies/diseases in their respective bodies. Unfortunately, there are more quacks in the spiritual realm than in the physical temporal one. This is because the prize for pure spiritual truth is eternal life. It is the greatest prize on earth to receive. Nothing has greater value. As evidence of this we see many false prophets, corrupt denominations and seminary teachings. As a result, few find eternal salvation. Then Satan has accomplished one of his goals; the eternal destruction of human souls.

INAPPROPRIATE FASTING

Isaiah 58:3–5

³Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find your own pleasure, and exact all your labors. ⁴Behold, ye fast for strife and contention, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye fast not this day so as to make your voice to be heard on high. ⁵Is such the fast that I have chosen? the day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a rush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to Jehovah (ASV, 1901)?

THE QUESTION OF FASTING

Zechariah 7:1-7

¹And it came to pass in the fourth year of king Darius, that the word of Jehovah came unto Zechariah in the fourth day of the ninth month, even in Chislev. ²Now they of Beth-el had sent Sharezer and Regem-melech, and their men, to entreat the favor of Jehovah, ³and to speak unto the priests of the house of Jehovah of hosts, and to the prophets, saying, Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years? ⁴Then came the word of Jehovah of hosts unto me, saying, ⁵Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and in the seventh month, even these seventy years, did ye at all fast unto

me, even to me? ⁶And when ye eat, and when ye drink, do not ye eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves? ⁷Should ye not hear the words, which Jehovah cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, and the cities thereof round about her, and the South and the lowland were inhabited? (ASV 1901)

This revelation came in 518 B.C. to Zechariah. While the nation Israel had been in captivity, they had begun to observe some days of national sorrow in commemoration of the destruction of the Temple and the desolation of the land of Israel. This issue of these commemorations being established in Israel was raised and sent to the priests and prophets asking for direction. They wanted to know if the practices they had begun in Babylon should be continued. Jehovah's response came to Zechariah and does not directly answer their questions but discusses the character of false worship.

The people from Bethel now clearly acknowledged Jerusalem as the proper capital of all ecclesiastical Jewish activity and not Bethel as it had been in apostate northern Israel under Jeroboam and the subsequent eighteen kings, all of whom were evil. So they were sent to the Temple with a specific request for instruction. They asked the priests and the prophets if they should *weep in the fifth month, separating myself*, (הִנָּזֵר—*hinnazer*—like the Nazirite who 'separated himself,' or abstained from strong drink and other bodily indulgences); *as I have done these so many years?* The pronoun (*I*) is used to refer to all of Bethel as a personification of the city. The prophets are generally not given easily to godly rebuke unless it is clear and warranted. They realize that that rebuke and correction must be administered with God's Word alone and not of personal preference. This certainly requires a thorough knowledge of God's Word in order to carry out this responsibility properly. This reveals the essence of the issue that they were faced with. That is, what is the purpose of the Jewish practices and later found in the Church as well. Do we continue to practice self-developed rituals or do we discontinue them? It is important to realize that the Bible does not command the continual practice of fasting. This request was in itself sinful because it revealed an attitude regarding the fast that was not done for God's glory and purely motivated for self-indulgence or penance.

The fast of the fifth month which is called *Av* (formally, *Tisha B'Av*, *no rejoicing*, August in the Gregorian calendar) is a holiday that is still observed by Jewish custom because of many calamities, which the Nation Israel had experienced on that day. Two of those prior to Zechariah's time are:

1. On that day the decree went forth from God in the wilderness that the people should not enter the land because of their unbelief after hearing the report of the twelve spies Moses sent to Canaan returned from their mission (Cir 1400 B.C.)
2. The destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonians (586 B.C.)
3. The murder of Gedaliah who was the first postexilic governor of Jerusalem appointed by Nebuchadnezzar after the fall of Jerusalem. The death of Gedaliah was a traumatic event for the Jews who were already crushed almost to annihilation by the destruction of the Temple, the ruin of the Jerusalem, and the deportation of most of its leaders (Fast of the seventh month 581 B.C.)

Over time the mourning and fasting they practiced for these actual Biblical events was increased to cover any event they considered a persecution. Some of those are:

1. The Romans destroyed the Second Temple. (70 AD)
2. On that day, after the rising under Bar Cochba, the city of Bethar was taken, “in which were thousands and myriads of Israel. (134 AD)
3. Following the Bar Cochba revolt, Roman commander Turnus Rufus plowed the site of the Temple and the surrounding area. (135 AD)
4. The First Crusade in which a total of 1.2 million Jews were slaughtered. (1096 AD)
5. The Jews were expelled from England. (1290)
6. The Jews were expelled from France. (1306)
7. The Jews were expelled from Spain (1492)
8. Germany started WW I which led to the Holocaust (1914)
9. Heinrich Himmler approved the Final Solution (1941)
10. German began a mass deportation of Jews to death camps (1942)

What needs to be pointed out here is that these *perpetual* mourning practices are nowhere *commanded* in the Bible. There is only one *implied* continual fast commanded in the Bible for the Jews but, none for the Church. It is on the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippor (Leviticus 6:29). And there the text says to *afflict your souls*. Other one-time special fasts are commanded such as in Joel 1:13-14 but not *continual* fasts. In fact, while God does not condemn them, he wants obedience to Him and His Word far more than He wants adherence to a ritual even if He has ordained it (Isaiah 1:1; Amos 5:22 etc.).

Similar practices are inherent in many churches as well. Legalism, which is the imposition of unbiblical practices tied to one’s salvation or sanctification, is outside of the Word of God, His Bible. Some examples of those are:

1. Keeping the Sabbath
2. Infrequent communion
3. Penance
4. Requiring Sunday meeting
5. Transubstantiation
6. Purgatory
7. Expanding the Bible to include non-canonical writings as Scripture
8. Reducing the Bible by not teaching all of it as authoritative

Israel and the Church need to let God be in charge instead of each forcing his own agenda and not paying careful attention to the Bible.

SELFISHNESS AND LEGALISM EXPOSED IN THE JEWS FASTING

All of the sorrows and troubles of the Jews were brought on by their disobedience to the Words which Jehovah. had spoken to them through the former prophets which are Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. Jehovah God is saying to the Jews through Zechariah, “*All these fasts you held these seventy plus years were not to me!*” They were all self-serving. They did it as some sort of outward

manifestation of the distress they experienced. They were sorrowful that they were experiencing difficulty. They did not fast in obedience to God. He therefore did not take any of these so-called fasts into account as any atonement for their sins. Their fasts were basically a penance of sort. They were expressing a “woe is me” attitude regarding their state and not looking to God for both the reasons why the calamities came upon them or exhibiting true repentance and asking God for forgiveness for what they had done to deserve their punishment.

GOD’S REMINDER TO PAY ATTENTION TO HIS WORD

These false fasts were nothing more than hypocrisy. In other words, their religious activity was self-centered and self-fulfilling. It failed to satisfy the demands of a holy and loving God. This is a strong condemnation in the form of a rebuke in a typical prophetic sense. Zechariah is saying, “you knew better yet you didn’t listen to God before and preferred your own self-serving obedience.” The prophet does not come alongside the sinner and commiserate with them. He tells them they brought it on themselves.

The message Zechariah is proclaiming, here is not a new message. It is an old one that led to their persecution by the Babylonians and the Assyrians, Philistines and others before this time. It has been the reason they have been persecuted throughout their history as a nation. They don’t obey or recognize God, and not they do not confess the Lord Jesus as their Messiah.

The Negev (south and lowlands) was the desert area in the south of Judah. Its towns were historically in constant danger from the Philistines and other marauders who could easily penetrate their defenses. Only when Israel and Judah were strong could the conditions Zechariah describes prevail. His point is this: If mighty and prosperous Jerusalem and Judah were overthrown because of their disobedience to the words of the earlier prophets, how much more important was it for this group to pay attention to those words when their community, a fledgling one, was trying to restore as a nation. They must not engage in hypocritical self-indulgence.

Next message: RIGHT FASTING

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