

E. WHOLENESS TO THE WISE WHO KEEP
CONVENANT WITH THE LORD, CHAPTER 58

1. HEARKEN

TEXT: 58:1-5

- 1 Cry 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.
- 2 Yet 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.
- 3 Wherefore 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.
- 4 Behold, 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.
- 5 Is 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?

QUERIES

- a. Why is the prophet not to "spare" in his crying?
- b. How could they "smite" on a fast day?

PARAPHRASE

Shout this message to the whole nation. Do not relent when they try to justify themselves. Shout clearly to the nation this

warning so the wise will acknowledge their sin and hypocrisy. Most of the people go right on tramping into the courts of the Temple daily as if they really were sincere in knowing My will. They pretend they are concerned about righteousness and obeying My commandments. On the one hand they say they want Me to give them holy guidelines for living because they enjoy doing them. And on the other hand they say, Why should we afflict our souls in fasting and obedience since it appears Jehovah is not taking notice of our righteousness and rewarding us?

Hearken to what I have to say, says the Lord: I know exactly why you fast! The truth is that you are not really afflicting your souls in penitence when you fast. You use your fasts to indulge yourselves in carnal pleasures and to defraud the poor and powerless. You do not prepare your mind and heart to worship God when you fast. Your indulgence and oppression cause you to bicker and fight one another when you are pretending to fast! Do you actually think this is the kind of fasting I have commanded? Is this what you think I call "afflicting one's soul"? Do you think by such an outward show of extreme humiliation (bowing yourself double like a reed and lying down on a bed of sackcloth and ashes) that you can hide your hypocrisy? Is this what you call fasting? Do you believe I will accept your hypocrisy?

COMMENTS

v. 1-3a HAUGHTINESS: Isaiah is told to cry a "throaty" call. The Hebrew words *kerā' vegaron* mean literally, *call with the throat*. The *Jerusalem Bible* translates, "Shout for all you are worth." Apparently the Lord knew there would be a few in Judah who would hearken to the prophet's call and wisely repent. There were some who would become covenant-keepers. Presently, however, the majority of people were covenant-breakers. Not only so, they were hypocrites as well. The Hebrew word *thakhesek*, translated *spare not*, means *do not withhold*.

The point is that Isaiah is not to hold back declaring the hypocrisy of the majority even when they may appear to be righteous by their great show of religiosity or their attempts to justify themselves (as in verse three) or by their threats against the prophet himself. Isaiah is to become a *shophar* (ram's horn or trumpet, the instrument used to sound a warning).

For the most part, the nation went right on, day after day, haughtily tramping into the courts of the Temple (cf. Isa. 1:12ff), pretending to seek Jehovah and pretending to find satisfaction in obeying His appointed fast days. Publicly they have a finely practiced facade of not being caught disobeying the rituals and ordinances of the Law. They have put on an ostentatious show. Then they reasoned that Jehovah should reciprocate with goodness toward them (material goodness, no doubt) and judgments upon their enemies. It appears they think they have fooled God with their outward show and now expect Him to reward them accordingly. They took pleasure in their religiosity because they had deceived themselves into thinking Jehovah's righteousness could be compromised by their hypocrisy. They believed they could have their sin and Jehovah's blessing at the same time. But obviously, Jehovah had not responded to their sham-fasting as they had expected. He had not healed the social depravity of the day; He had not removed the growing threat of Assyrian or Babylonian invasion of their country. They had so thoroughly calloused their own consciences they blamed Jehovah for what was very evidently about to befall them. They accuse God of insensitivity, of carelessness and unconcern. Usually, the hypocrite plays his part so well, he fools himself more than anyone else. These haughty hypocrites had so deceived themselves they were incredulous that God should not be impressed with their self-righteousness!

v. 3b-5 **HYPOCRISY:** Now Jehovah exposes the hypocrisy of their religiosity. Jehovah makes it plain that He does indeed know what they are doing! They are not fasting to afflict their souls. While they pretend to fast, they are really indulging in their favorite occupation—making money. The Hebrew words

'*atzevyekem negoshu* are from root words that literally mean, *grieve* and *oppress* respectively, but translated *labors* and *exact* respectively. Obviously, these people were not gathering at fasts to grieve and oppress their own souls so they must have been plotting business deals that would grieve and oppress one another or the poor.

A word about fasting may be in order here. The Hebrew word used for *fast* in the Pentateuch is '*innah* and means literally *to afflict* (the soul) (cf. Lev. 16:29). The Hebrew word most often used after the Pentateuch (and not used in the Pentateuch) is *tzum* meaning literally *to abstain*. Both words are used in verse three. Actually, fasting was commanded in the Law of Moses only once (Lev. 16:29) and that on the Day of Atonement. Apparently, the Hebrew people amplified this command and extended it to most any time of sorrow or need for repentance. The nation and individuals were capable of fasting with proper motives (cf. I Sam. 7:6; II Sam. 1:12; Judg. 20:26; I Kings 21:12-29; Psa. 109:24; Jer. 36:9; Esther 4:1-3; 4:16; Neh. 1:4). The Jewish people who came back from the captivities had doubts about the efficacy of so many fasts and inquired of the prophets and priests whether they should keep them all or not (cf. Zech. 7:1-6; 8:13). In Isaiah's day these fasts were being exploited for mercenary purposes.

The fasts, rather than providing an opportunity for men to abstain from worldly pursuits, afflict their souls and concentrate on God's holiness, provided opportunities for them to haggle, strive, contend, argue and even physically strike one another over profiteering. Leupold visualizes these verses: "The prophet follows them to their place of assembly on a fast day. There, off in a corner, two men are not evaluating their own conduct and that of their nation; they are not seeking the face of God in true repentance. They are carrying on a business transaction. Or . . . while they are publicly engaged in holy exercises, at home the laborer who is working for them is slaving under heavy burdens and is being oppressed."

Rhetorically the Lord asks, Do you think this is the kind of fast I would approve? Their humility was mockery. The

long, tender rush was easily bent double without breaking and furnished a graphic figure for the bent-over false humility of these hypocrites. Jesus described the false humility of the fasting hypocrites of His day as *skuthropos* (Greek for *sad, dejected, sullen, morose*). Jesus said the hypocrites of His day made their normal faces to disappear (*aphanizousin*, Gr.) so they might put on faces (*hopos phanosin*) of fasting, (Mt. 6:16-18). These men of Isaiah's day were extreme in their pretensions even to spreading under themselves a "bed" of sackcloth and ashes. But none of it fooled God! Let every man who reads this be forever impressed with this—God is not mocked! Religious ritual (no matter how scriptural and orthodox and correct) if it is coerced, "psyched," or played-at, if the heart is not right, is an abomination to God! We cannot put on a sad face and fool God; we cannot put on a happy face and fool God; we cannot put on *any* face and fool God!

QUIZ

1. How emphatic is Isaiah to be in crying his message to the nation?
2. What made these people continue to haughtily pretend to worship Jehovah?
3. What made them criticize God for not being aware of their religiosity?
4. What was fasting originally instituted for?
5. How were these people profaning the matter of fasting?
6. What should we all learn about pretending from this passage?

2. HOLINESS

TEXT: 58:6-12

6 Is not this the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the

oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?

- 7 Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?
- 8 Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy healing shall spring forth speedily; and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of Jehovah shall be thy rearward.
- 9 Then shalt thou call, and Jehovah will answer; thou shalt cry, and he will say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking wickedly;
- 10 and if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul: then shall thy light rise in darkness, and thine obscurity be as the noon-day;
- 11 and Jehovah will guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in dry places, and make strong thy bones; and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.
- 12 And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places; thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in.

QUERIES

- a. Why exhort them not to "hide" from their own flesh?
- b. What is "putting forth of the finger"?
- c. How would they "raise up foundations of many generations"?

PARAPHRASE

To the contrary, I do have standards for the kind of fasting that is acceptable to Me. If you will afflict your souls and truly

repent, you will cease to oppress your fellow man and make every effort to free the oppressed from any unfair exploitation they may be under. If you will feed those who are hungry, give shelter to the outcast and the needy stranger, clothe those in need of something to wear and remember to minister to the needs of your own family, then you will be repenting as I wish you to do. When you do these things, the glory of God's goodness will burst on your nation like the suddenness and brilliance of the morning sun. Your land will be cured of its chaos and wickedness rapidly. The glory of the Lord will completely surround you, protecting and sustaining you as in the days of old. Then you will be able to call upon the Lord and He will be able to answer. No longer will you be rebelling against Him and running from Him, but you will find Him and He will come to you.

Let Me repeat for emphasis, If you put an end to all the oppression, stop making contemptuous gestures and slanderous words toward people—and if you turn in sympathy to the hungry and feed them and help all who are in need, then the darkness around you now will turn to goodness and truth as bright as the noon-day sun. The Lord will guide such a people every day and will bring life and health to them. Such a people will blossom with righteousness and produce the fruit of justice and give life to all about them like an ever flowing spring in an oasis. If you people will do this you will produce offspring that will build back the messianic nation that was once founded and is now in ruins. What you build, as a result of such repentance, will lay a foundation upon which many generations of the future may be able to build the messianic kingdom. You will be known as the people who repaired the ruined walls of God's redemptive "city" and as the people who restored the way that leads to man's salvation.

COMMENTS

v. 6-9a **REPENTANCE:** God promises wholeness to those who will keep His covenant. But Judah needs to repent before

it can meet God's standards of holiness. That is, the nation must change its direction theologically (repenting of idolatry) and morally (repenting of social transgressions). This has to be done individually, of course. If Judah will keep her covenant with the Lord as He wishes her to she will "loose the bonds of wickedness, unto the . . . yoke . . .," feed the hungry, clothe the naked, etc. The word "fast" in verse six may be used generically to mean the total relationship of man toward God which would be covenant relationship. Micah's prophecy gives an excellent parallel to Isaiah; they were, after all, contemporaries. Micah, chapters 1-3, document the atrocious sins of the powerful against the weak; chapters 4-5 promise the messianic destiny of the Jews; chapters 6-7 announce to the people of Micah's day what they must do to cooperate with Jehovah in that destiny. The essence of covenant-keeping, according to Micah, is not spectacular religious ritual or sacrifice but simply being Godlike in the everyday, mundane relationships with both God and man. Micah puts it this way, "He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

It should not be strange to the people of Judah that one of their prophets would exhort them to care for the poor. The Law of Moses was very clear on caring for the poor (cf. Deut. 14:28—15:18). The Law of Moses was also explicit as to responsibilities toward one's own flesh and blood (family relationships). In such areas as training and discipline of children, levirate law of provision for in-laws, divorce, inheritance laws, etc., the Law is plain. It seems almost incredible that people should have to be reminded to take care of their families, yet even in the New covenant scriptures Christians are admonished, "if any one does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (I Tim. 5:8). The Pharisees, rather than "honoring" their fathers and mothers by financial support in their old age, declared their assets "Corban" (devoted to God and unavailable for "social security" support). And the Pharisees

were *very* religious people who were certain that they, above every one else, were covenant people of Jehovah!

If the people will repent (change) and turn back to the instructions of God in the Law of Moses, God promises three distinct changes will take place in their society: (a) "Healing" of the wounds and sicknesses of society will take place suddenly and brilliantly like the morning sun. In the land of Palestine, the sun seems to come up instantaneously, not gradually, as in lands with an abundance of trees and other things to block the horizon. (b) The righteousness they practice will be a source of safety and security for life and at the same time Jehovah will give His glorious providential safety and security. Judah will be *surrounded* by a security of righteousness. (c) Repentance will also bring renewed access to God. Jehovah cannot countenance a kingdom in rebellion. Man is created with a free will and the freedom to choose his spiritual Sovereign. If man wishes God to be his Sovereign, man must conform to the Sovereign's rule. As long as man rebels against the sovereignty of God, he cannot (because he does not want) have access to God. Jehovah will answer all who surrender to His sovereignty and call upon Him.

v. 9b-12 RESULTS: There are grander and more gratifying results to add to the nation if it repents. The qualification is restated, but still the same: repentance. Evidently the "putting forth of the finger" was a kind of derisive, contemptuous pointing of the finger (cf. Prov. 6:13). It is listed here in connection with "speaking wickedly" and must have reference to slander or unjust accusations. God says men must repent of that. It is graphic evidence of a hateful heart—one that would despise the hungry and have no compassion on the afflicted.

But look at the promised results of repentance: (a) continual guidance of Jehovah who is absolute truth, absolute justice, absolute righteousness. To the individual who repents will come a personal satisfaction of the soul like the desert nomad's thirst is satisfied when he finds a cool, shady, bubbling spring of water. There will come personal wholeness and spiritual

integration like a man feels physically when he is young and strong and in the prime of health. (b) The man who repents and keeps God's covenant will also produce something for the benefit of others. He will become like a "watered garden" and a "spring of water, whose waters fail not." Jesus said His disciples would become "rivers of living water" (cf. Jn. 7:37-39). The disciples of Jesus are to become salt of the earth and light of the world (cf. Mt. 5:13-16). (c) The man who repents will build the kingdom of God. Obviously, the rebuilding work of those who repent here is the rebuilding of the people's covenant relationship to Jehovah in order that they may fulfill their messianic destiny and form the kingdom of God on earth (the church). Repairing literal walls and building literal foundations can in no way be the goal of this prophecy. Its only goal is to encourage the people of Isaiah's day to be instruments of Jehovah as He reaches toward the establishment of New Israel. And the church was founded on a generation of covenant-keeping Hebrews in the first century A.D. when the gospel was obeyed first in Jerusalem, then in Judea, then in Samaria and then in the uttermost parts of the earth.

QUIZ

1. What is the word "fast" used for generically in verse six?
2. What does the Law of Moses have to say about treatment of the poor?
3. What does God promise to do for the nation and the individual who repents?
4. How does covenant-keeping enter into this section?
5. What may the individual enjoy personally as a result of his repentance?
6. What may the individual produce for the benefit of others by repentance?

3. HERITAGE

TEXT: 58:13-14

13 If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, and the holy of Jehovah honorable; and shalt honor it, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words:

14 then shalt thou delight thyself in Jehovah; and I will make thee to ride upon the high places of the earth; and I will feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of Jehovah hath spoken it.

QUERIES

- a. Why is the sabbath so important?
- b. How will they "ride" upon the high places?

PARAPHRASE

You people must stop kicking around My sabbath day and wiping your feet on it as something that can be desecrated by exploiting it for your own greedy gain. You must cherish My sabbath as that which is exquisitely precious, that which you delight in and honor. You must honor My sabbath by ceasing to take the day to concentrate on your own indulgence and talking of everything but Me. If you will take this attitude toward My sabbath and cherish Me, then I will exalt you and make you conquerors. I will give you the spiritual birthright which I promised to your ancestor Jacob. That will sustain you for all eternity. These are the words of Jehovah the omnipotent God!

COMMENTS

v. 13 DEVOTION: The Hebrew word *oneg* (v. 13) or *te 'annag* (v. 14) is translated *delight* but means literally, *delicate, exquisite, luxurious*. The Lord is insisting that His people *cherish* His sabbath. They are presently trampling it under foot, so to speak, as of no more value than something to wipe their feet on. It is being used as a day for planning self-indulgence. They are gathering on God's holy day, a day set aside to think and talk of Him, to talk of making money and plan ways to circumvent His Law (Amos 8:5).

Why is the Sabbath so significant? It was the one condition or requirement that could provide a covenant-keeping relationship that would bring the Hebrew closer to Jehovah than any other. The Sabbath was instituted and set aside as holy unto the Lord long before the Mosaic law. It was consecrated from the beginning of creation. It was given as a type and symbol of the cessation from labor (or rest) into which one enters when entering into covenant relationship provided by Christ. In other words, the old sabbath was an experience symbolic of the Christian experience. The sabbath rest "remaining" in Hebrew 4:9-10 was "being entered" by the "ones believing" (Gr. *oi pisteusantes*, present tense) of Hebrews 4:3. In other words, the one who believes Christ and becomes a Christian does (present tense) enter the *rest* God symbolized by the old sabbath day (cf. also Mt. 11:28-30). Of course, the Christian's present *rest* will some day be finally and ultimately consummated in the new heaven and new earth when he will cease from his labors (cf. Rev. 14:13, etc.). That is why proper relationship to God for those of Isaiah's day be expressed by proper attitude toward God's sabbath day! It had to do with all that God was going to do in salvation and redemption in the Messiah and His kingdom.

v. 14 DOMINION: Proper attitude and action toward God's revealed will (in this case the Sabbath law) logically results in proper attitude and action toward the personhood of God. If a man cherishes God's laws (Psa. 119:1ff), he will cherish

God. Actually the relationship is cyclical. We must first cherish God in order to cherish His law. But the more we cherish His law, the more we will cherish Him! The more we luxuriate in God and His will, the "higher" we will "ride"! The phrase, ". . . make thee to ride upon the high places of the earth . . ." symbolizes victory, conquest, dominion. If we have faith as a grain of mustard seed (cf. Lk. 17:5-6) we can do mighty, victorious, conquering things. The mustard seed means qualitative, not quantitative. It is not a *small* or *big* faith that counts but a *living, producing, working* faith (like a seed has life and production in it). To that kind of faith God will fulfill His promises of victory. It may not be the kind of victory measured by worldly standards; it may not be *physical* victory or dominion in this life. Physical victory in this life was what the majority of the Jews anticipated from the glorious promises of their prophets (e.g., Isa. ch. 60-66). But God intended to give those who were faithful victory and dominion over sin and death through the Messiah. The "heritage of Jacob" was, of course, the birthright. The birthright was a physical thing that had to do with perpetuation of the Hebrew family's inheritance of land and goods through the eldest son. But it had as its ultimate goal the preservation of a people whose destiny was messianic! The birthright was really a spiritual thing. It was to result in the redemption of the whole human race through a human family from a particular human nation.

The promises of verse 14 may find a temporary fulfillment in the return of the Jews from the captivities, but like all other promises concerning the Jewish people and their land and their nation, the ultimate fulfillment was in the "seed" (singular) (cf. Gal. 3:16ff), the Christ and the New Israel (Gal. 6:16). The redemption of man will be consummated when God restores man to the dominion man was given at creation which Christ earned for man (cf. Heb. 2:5-18).