

Study Guide: 16 September 2018

Sermon Series: Isaiah

Text: Isaiah 58

Hello! This guide is provided to help facilitate a clear understanding of the Bible passage with a focus on applying God's truths to our lives individually and corporately. As such we encourage you to budget sufficient time for application questions. A recommendation would be to spend at least half your time pondering and discussing questions that are application focused. The guide has been bulked up to help you lead a discussion, but please remember that you will still need to prepare for the study by reading and praying through the passage; and reading through the guide, thinking about how to best lead the discussion for your group. The sample answers are not model answers, but possible answers that people may give, that help you understand how the discussion might go.

OVERVIEW OF ISAIAH

Background and Context

Isaiah ministered for more than 40 years, through the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. His office of prophecy began in the final days of Uzziah's reign, through the war between Judah and the united kingdoms of Israel and Syria, Judah's defeat and exiled by Assyria, and the Babylonian captivity.

Isaiah Chapters 1-35

The first part of Isaiah speaks about God's judgement on Israel and Judah by Assyria. Isaiah railed against the leaders for their hypocrisy (1:10-15), greed (5:8), self-indulgence (5:11), and cynicism (5:19). The rich prospered while the poor was oppressed. The people confessed the Lord as their king with their lips, their hearts was as far from Him and their temple sacrifices were a mere sham.

Isaiah chapters 40-66:

The second part focuses on the remnants' return from Babylon and their ultimate deliverance in the remote future and the fall of pagan Babylon (46:1-47:15). More than a century before Cyrus the Persian came to power, Isaiah named him as God's anointed agent to restore the remnant to the land (44:24-45:13). He challenged the people to renew their loyalty to the Lord after they return to the land (56:1-8) and to avoid repeating idolatry and evil acts (57:3-13).

Christ in Isaiah

Beyond this future act of salvation Isaiah predicted the coming of a Servant and Savior much greater than Cyrus. This Servant would fulfill Israel's original destiny by bringing justice to the nations (42:1-4) and becoming a light to the Gentiles (49:1-7). The Servant would suffer willingly to take away the sins of His people (52:13-53:12) and thus establish a new covenant between the Lord and the new Israel (42:5-7).

BIG IDEA OF THE TEXT

In chapter 57, God promises peace and comfort to those among Israel who repent of sin in genuine contrition and lowliness of spirit. In chapter 58 he tells them that their outward rituals (religious festivals; wearing sackcloth; regular fasting) prove to be false because they still fight and exploit one another. Instead, true contrition is living a life of love and right relationships with people, without greed and self-indulgence, because of God's grace. If they turn back to God in true humble repentance and trust him, they will see him bless and provide for all their needs and empower them to do true justice for the poor. Ultimately God will satisfy us with the richest feast through Jesus who gave himself entirely for us and provides the true Sabbath.

INTRODUCTION

The passage talks about Israel's outward rituals. What are some analogous practices for Christians today?

True and False Fasting

58 *"Cry aloud; do not hold back;*

lift up your voice like a trumpet;

declare to my people their transgression,

to the house of Jacob their sins.

² *Yet they seek me daily*

and delight to know my ways,

as if they were a nation that did righteousness

and did not forsake the judgment of their God;

they ask of me righteous judgments;

they delight to draw near to God.

³ *'Why have we fasted, and you see it not?*

Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?'

Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure,

and oppress all your workers.

⁴ *Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight*

and to hit with a wicked fist.

Fasting like yours this day

will not make your voice to be heard on high.

⁵ *Is such the fast that I choose,*

a day for a person to humble himself?

Is it to bow down his head like a reed,

and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him?

Will you call this a fast,

and a day acceptable to the LORD?

⁶ *"Is not this the fast that I choose:*

to loose the bonds of wickedness,
to undo the straps of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?

⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover him,
and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

⁸ Then shall your light break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up speedily;
your righteousness shall go before you;
the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.

⁹ Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;
you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.'

If you take away the yoke from your midst,
the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,

¹⁰ if you pour yourself out for the hungry
and satisfy the desire of the afflicted,
then shall your light rise in the darkness
and your gloom be as the noonday.

¹¹ And the LORD will guide you continually
and satisfy your desire in scorched places
and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water,
whose waters do not fail.

¹² And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to dwell in.

¹³ "If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath,
from doing your pleasure on my holy day,
and call the Sabbath a delight
and the holy day of the LORD honorable;
if you honor it, not going your own ways,
or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly;

¹⁴ then you shall take delight in the LORD,
and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth;
I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

OBSERVATION & MEANING QUESTIONS

Q1. (Context) Consider v1-3. What is the basis for Isaiah calling out Israel for their sins? (you will have to consider the context, esp Isaiah 56-57)

Q2a. What was wrong with the way the people of Israel were fasting? (v2-5)

Q2b. What was their motivation for fasting?

Q3. What sort of fasting does God really want? (v6-7)

Q4. (Application) How does this passage encourage you to care for the needs of people around you?

Q5a. What were people doing on the Sabbath? (v13-14)

Q5b. Why is the Sabbath important to God?

Q6. What does God promise Israel if they care for the poor and needy and honour the Sabbath? (v8-12)

Q7. Christians observe the Sabbath differently to the Jews in Old Testament times. How does Jesus help Christians to truly rest and turn the Sabbath into a delight?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

Q8. When have you done good things like going to church or reading scripture, but missed God's heart in the way you did them?

Q9. How should Christians fast in a way that is acceptable to the Lord?

Q10. How can we encourage each other to do disciplines like fasting, worshipping, prayer etc for the right reasons?