

Israel's Sinful Condition and Future Restoration

Isaiah 58-59

Isaiah 58:1-7 - *“Cry aloud, spare not! Lift up your voice like a trumpet! Tell My people their transgression, and 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 did not forsake the ordinance of their God. They ask of Me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching God. ³ ‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?’ ‘In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your laborers. ⁴ Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high. ⁵ Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? ⁶ ‘Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? ⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out? When you see the naked that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?’”*

Background Notes

In Isaiah 58 and 59, God's program for Israel started with the bad news of Israel's sinful and immoral condition during Isaiah's day - but it culminated with the good news of Israel's spiritual and moral restoration when the Lord returns to earth in the future.

Doctrinal Point (for Isaiah 58)

Israel's false worship in the Land will be changed to true worship of the Lord.

Isaiah was to proclaim like a warning trumpet - to tell the people in no uncertain terms that they had fallen far short of what God was looking for - in their individual lives, and in their life as a nation. Many of them thought that they were doing just fine. After all, they were not like the wicked people described in chapter 57, who were openly practicing idolatry and immorality. They were going to the Temple services and (supposedly) seeking the Lord (v2). They were even observing religious fasts (v3).

“Wasn't God impressed with that?” they asked. No, He was not impressed - because it was all **religious ritual**. They were just going through the motions, with **no heart commitment** and **no true relationship** with the Lord. They were doing whatever they wanted during their fasts, even fighting with one another (v3-4). Oh, sure - they bowed their heads and sat in sackcloth and ashes (v5) - but it was all hypocrisy and show – and the Lord was not looking for that kind of

“fast.” He was looking for “fasting” from wickedness, and “fasting” from oppression of the poor and needy (v6-7). He wanted them to share the food and other items of their fast with the homeless.

Isaiah 58:10-14 - *“If you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday. ¹¹ The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones. You shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. ¹² Those from among you shall build the old waste places. You shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach and the Restorer of Streets to Dwell In. ¹³ “If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, ¹⁴ then you shall delight yourself in the Lord. And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the Lord has spoken.”*

In verses 10-14 Isaiah gave Israel the good news! If the people of Israel would change their ways, then God would hear them, and answer them - and bless them! Has the good news of these verses been fulfilled yet? Have the ancient ruins been rebuilt (v12)? Have the Jewish people been blessed with the enjoyment of the heritage that was promised to their father Jacob (v14) - including the Land? Not yet. The rebuilding that took place after the Babylonian captivity was only a foretaste of what's to come in the future, when the Lord returns. Then Israel will be restored to the Land – and to the Lord!

By the way, the spiritual blessing in Christ that believing Jews and Gentiles experience today in the Church is **not** the fulfillment of this prophecy. It is **not** “the rebuilding of the ancient ruins” (v12)! The *context* of this chapter does not support this idea. And Jacob is never referred to as the “father” of Christians (v14), as is sometimes taught. No. The *context* of the blessings of Isaiah 58 is the **future** restoration of the godly remnant of Israel. Israel's false worship in the Land will be changed to true worship of the Lord.

Isaiah 59:1-8 - *“Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. ² But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear. ³ For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity. Your lips have spoken lies; your tongue has muttered perversity. ⁴ No one calls for justice, nor does any plead for truth. They trust in empty words and speak lies. They conceive evil and bring forth iniquity.*

⁵ They hatch vipers’ eggs and weave the spider’s web. He who eats of their eggs dies, and from that which is crushed a viper breaks out. ⁶ Their webs will not become garments, nor will they cover themselves with their works. Their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands. ⁷ Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity. Wasting and destruction are in their paths. ⁸ The way of peace they have not known, and there is no justice in their ways. They made themselves crooked paths; whoever takes that way shall not know peace.”

Background Notes

Once again in Isaiah 59, there is good news and bad news. In verses 1-8 Isaiah gave the bad news of Israel's sinful condition. The problem was not that the Lord couldn't hear their prayers, or that the Lord didn't have the power to save (v1). The problem was Israel's continuing sin. Their sin had separated them from the Lord. Bloodshed, falsehood, perversion of justice, violence, evil thoughts, and corruption characterized this sinful nation, as we see in these verses. However, beginning in verse 9, Isaiah gave them the good news of Israel's redemption and restoration after her confession of her sins.

Doctrinal Point (for Isaiah 59)

Israel's confession of sin will result from the return of the Lord.

Isaiah 59:9-15 - *"Therefore justice is far from us, nor does righteousness overtake us. We look for light, but there is darkness! For brightness, but we walk in blackness! ¹⁰ We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes. We stumble at noonday as at twilight. We are as dead men in desolate places. ¹¹ We all growl like bears, and moan sadly like doves. We look for justice, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us. ¹² For our transgressions are multiplied before You, and our sins testify against us; for our transgressions are with us, and as for our iniquities, we know them. ¹³ In transgressing and lying against the Lord, and departing from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood. ¹⁴ Justice is turned back and righteousness stands afar off, for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. ¹⁵ So truth fails, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey.*

Isaiah gave the good news of Israel's confession of her sins in verses 9-15. What a great confession! Isaiah spoke for the people of Israel, as they confessed their sins of social injustice and spiritual blindness (v9-10). They were angry like bears, but sad like moaning doves (v11). They acknowledged their multiplied transgressions and iniquities that were the result of turning away from justice and truth (v12-15).

Isaiah 59:16-21- *"He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor. Therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him, and His own righteousness, it sustained Him. ¹⁷ For He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head. He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak. ¹⁸ According to their deeds, accordingly He will repay, fury to His adversaries, recompense to His enemies. The coastlands He will fully repay. ¹⁹ So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and His glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him. ²⁰ "The Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob," says the Lord. ²¹ "As for Me," says the Lord, "this is My covenant with them: My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants," says the Lord, "from this time and forevermore."*

In verses 16-21 Isaiah gave the people the further good news of Israel's redemption and restoration. The biggest question that comes to mind after reading the good news of this chapter is, 'When'? When, as to the confession of Israel's sins as a nation (v9-15)? When, as to the Lord bringing salvation to Israel (v6)? When, as to the worldwide enemies of Israel being repaid with righteous vengeance (v17-18)? When, as to the universal worship of the Lord (v19)? When, as to the Redeemer coming to Jerusalem, taking away Jacob's transgression and fulfilling the new covenant forever (v20 -21)? (Remember, once again, that "Jacob" is to be understood as **Israel!** "Jacob" is **not** the Church!)

Answer: All of these "Whens," except one, await to be fulfilled in the future, when the Lord returns. But the "when" of verse 16 was fulfilled at the **first coming of Christ**. *"He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor. Therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him, and His own righteousness, it sustained Him."* When the Lord saw that there was no qualified human mediator who could bridge the gulf between a righteous God and a sinful people, **He Himself** came into this world! He became Man in order to die and provide the way for salvation from the penalty of sin.

His death was the basis for the "New Covenant" that God made with Israel that will be completely fulfilled with the restoration of Israel when the Lord returns. His death is the basis for all the other blessings that will come to Israel (and the world) in the future (Romans 11). Israel's confession of sin will result from the return of the Lord.

Practical Application

Don't have "works" like snake eggs and spider webs!

Verse 5 says that sinful Israel was involved in "hatching snake eggs" and "weaving spider webs." The point is that Israel's works were dangerous and poisonous – like multiplying snakes. Furthermore, they were as frail and thin as a garment made from spider web material. Such a garment would not provide much of a covering - and that was exactly Isaiah's point. With such a thin covering, they were naked before God.

The same is true for us, if we don't know the Lord. In reference to the unbeliever, Romans 3:13 says that the poison of snakes is under their tongue. Human works will not save a person - to God they are as thin as a spider's web. They won't cover a single sin.

I trust you don't think that your "good works" will get you into Heaven. If you don't know Jesus Christ as your Savior, your "religious works" are worthless. Don't trust in your good deeds to save you – they're like snake eggs and spider webs!