

LEARNING TO LIVE
Summer 2020

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Isaiah 58:1-14

"Cry loudly, do not hold back;
Raise your voice like a trumpet,
And declare to My people their transgression
And to the house of Jacob their sins.

[2] "Yet they seek Me day by day and delight to know My ways,
As a nation that has done righteousness
And has not forsaken the ordinance of their God.
They ask Me for just decisions,
They delight in the nearness of God.

[3] 'Why have we fasted and You do not see?
Why have we humbled ourselves and You do not notice?'
Behold, on the day of your fast you find your desire,
And drive hard all your workers.

[4] "Behold, you fast for contention and strife and to strike with a
wicked fist.
You do not fast like you do today to make your voice heard on high.

[5] "Is it a fast like this which I choose, a day for a man to humble
himself?
Is it for bowing one's head like a reed
And for spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed?
Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to the Lord?

[6] "Is this not the fast which I choose,
To loosen the bonds of wickedness,
To undo the bands of the yoke,
And to let the oppressed go free
And break every yoke?

[7] "Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry
And bring the homeless poor into the house;
When you see the naked, to cover him;
And not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

[8] "Then your light will break out like the dawn,
And your recovery will speedily spring forth;
And your righteousness will go before you;
The glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.

[9] "Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;
You will cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.'
If you remove the yoke from your midst,
The pointing of the finger and speaking wickedness,

[10] And if you give yourself to the hungry
And satisfy the desire of the afflicted,
Then your light will rise in darkness
And your gloom will become like midday.

[11] "And the Lord will continually guide you,
And satisfy your desire in scorched places,
And give strength to your bones;
And you will be like a watered garden,
And like a spring of water whose waters do not fail.

[12] "Those from among you will rebuild the ancient ruins;
You will raise up the age-old foundations;
And you will be called the repairer of the breach,
The restorer of the streets in which to dwell.

[13] "If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot
From doing your own pleasure on My holy day,
And call the sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable,
And honor it, desisting from your own ways,
From seeking your own pleasure
And speaking your own word,

[14] Then you will take delight in the Lord,
And I will make you ride on the heights of the earth;
And I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father,
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

GOD'S HEART TOWARD A WAYWARD NATION

Isaiah 58: 1-3

Isaiah stands out among the prophetic books of the Old Testament as an oracle with long-reaching applications. Two patterns have been noted in the book.

First, there is a progression from:

- (1) apostasy (Isaiah 1-9) to
- (2) judgment (Isaiah 10-34) to
- (3) restoration (Isaiah 35-59) and to
- (4) salvation (Isaiah 60-66).

Then, there are the two major sections. Isaiah 1-39 reflects the covenant curses resulting from Israel's disobedience to God's law, while Isaiah 40-66 reflects the covenant blessings promised for the obedient remnant of Israel.

God had made a promise to Abraham. Read Genesis 12:1-2 and record the promise concerning a nation here: _____

There are several ways that covenants were made in the Old Testament. The covenant that God made with Abram was unconditional and lasted as long as God lives. That is forever! We don't have to wonder if the covenant with Abram is in full force and effect!

However, some covenants are of the "if-then" variety. Continue your reading in Exodus 19:3-6 _____

Continue your reading in Deuteronomy 28:1 and 28:15 _____

God clearly has expectations of a nation that he blesses. God's invitation for Israel to take part in the covenant was a gracious one. However, blessing under this Mosaic Covenant was conditioned on the people's obedience. The Mosaic Covenant was made with a people who had already been redeemed by God's gracious deliverance from Egypt. So the covenant was given to Israel that they might enjoy fellowship with God and be prepared to receive his blessings. One of those blessings would be the exalting of Israel above every other nation.

Isaiah 58 begins a prophecy to people who haven't held up their end of the covenant relationship with God, but who desire that God bless them as if they had. Isaiah 58:3 clearly indicates that the people think they have done their part in fasting, but believe that God isn't hearing. Do you think that God is not observing what they are doing? The opposite is true! Their problem is their attitude of heart.

Look through the books of the Law (Genesis – Deuteronomy) and see how many times the word "fast" is used. Record the number here: _____

The expression used in the Law is "humble your souls" implying the sacrifice of the personal will, which gives to fasting all its value.

Read the following verses and reflect on such humbling of your soul:

Leviticus 16:29-31 _____

Leviticus 23:27 _____

Numbers 30:13 _____

The Mosaic law prescribed only one public occasion of strict fasting, namely, once a year on the great Day of Atonement. This observance seems always to have retained some prominence as "the fast." Read Acts 27:9 for the reference.

But as to the nature of the observance we are nowhere expressly informed, except that it was to be a holy convocation. Read Leviticus 23:27-29 _____

The Hebrews, in the earlier period of their history, were in the habit of fasting whenever they were in hard and trying circumstances.

Read 1 Samuel 1:7 _____

They also fasted during times of misfortune, and bereavement:

1 Samuel 20:34; 1 Samuel 31:13; 2 Samuel 1:12 _____

Fasting is also seen in times of threatened judgments of God! Read 2 Samuel 12:16 and 1 Kings 21:27 _____

Sometimes there was fasting when grievous sin was recognized: Ezra 10:6 _____

And sometimes fasting was used when the people were trying to avert calamity Esther 4:1, 3, 16 _____

Extraordinary fasts were appointed by the authorities on occasions of great national calamity in order that the people might humble themselves before the Lord on account of their sins, thus averting His wrath and getting Him to look upon them again with favor. As we complete our introduction to this study, read the following verses and record what you learn about fasts:

Judges 20:26 _____

1 Samuel 7:6 _____

2 Chronicles 20:3 _____

Joel 1:14 and Joel 2:12 _____

Jeremiah 36:9 _____

Ezra 8:21 _____

Nehemiah 1:4 _____

THE DISCIPLINES USED WRONGLY: Fasting, prayer

HOMEWORK: Reflect on why the people thought God wasn't paying attention to their fasting. Record your thoughts here: _____

GOD'S FAST

Isaiah 58:4-7

Last week, we established that a fast was a time for humbling the soul. In fact, all Christian disciplines are for this purpose.

The Lord responded by pointing out that He was more interested in their obedience than their rituals. Unfortunately they, like many people, had confused rituals with relationship and outward acts with true obedience. Their fasts did not alter their poor relationship with others. Even while fasting, they were disregarding other peoples' needs by exploiting their employees.

Read the following verses and record what you learn:

Deuteronomy 24:14-15 _____

James 5:1-6 _____

Even while fasting, they were quarreling and fighting. Therefore their prayers would not be heard because this kind of fasting was not what the Lord accepted. Their hearts, not just their heads, needed to bow before the LORD.

Fasting was intended to encourage a person to respond positively to God's commands. In the Old Testament only one fast was commanded—the annual Day of Atonement. Read the following verses and record the circumstances:

Leviticus 16:29, 31 _____

Only after the fall of Jerusalem were fast days instituted. Read the following verses for this institution:

Zechariah 7:3, 5; 8:19 _____

Ironically on the other hand many specific commands were not being followed. So the Lord reminded the people that they should be just, generous with those in need—specifically the hungry, the poor, the naked. The Israelites were to consider themselves members of one family who at one time had been slaves in Egypt. Therefore they were not to neglect each other. When someone shared with one in need, it was a reminder that everything he owned belonged to the Lord.

The rabbis taught that a fast is a day to afflict the soul; if it does not express true sorrow for sin, and does not promote the putting away of sin, it is not a fast. These professors had shown sorrow on stated or occasioned fasts. But they indulged pride, covetousness, and passion. To be liberal and merciful is more acceptable to God than mere fasting, which alone is vain and hypocritical.

Read James 2:14-26 _____

Matthew 23:23 _____

Luke 7:22 _____

Jeremiah 22:3 _____

James 5:4 _____

Fasting was to be accompanied with other disciplines such as meditation and study, and prayer. It was to be a time of submission and service.

It is interesting to realize that the very first statement Jesus made about fasting concerned the question of motivation. Read Matthew 6:16-18 and record your results here:

To use good things to our own ends or benefit is always the sign of false religion. Consequently, fasting must be God-initiated and God-ordained. God addressed this issue to the people of Zechariah's day:

Zechariah 7:5 _____

Read Isaiah 58:4 and do a word study on "contention" and "strife:" _____

Continue your study by finding the significance of sackcloth and ashes: _____

Continue your study by finding the meaning of an "acceptable day to the Lord:"

DISCIPLINES USED WRONGLY: DISCIPLINE AND SERVICE

GOD'S DELIVERANCE

Isaiah 58:8-12

The one who finds restoration and peace in covenant relationship with God will express that commitment by sharing God's love with people. His worship may contain ritual elements, fasting, and festivals. These are not wrong. But at the heart of the believer's lifestyle must be a loving representation of God to the world.

Read John 16:7-11 and record what you learn about Jesus' view of righteousness: _____

Romans 5:20, 21: _____

Compare these verses with Isaiah 52:12 _____

Discuss what the "yoke" might be in 58:9 _____

Read Jesus' words in Matthew 11:29 _____

Do a careful word study on "desire of the afflicted" in 58:10. Discuss the meaning here: _____

After reading 58:11 carefully, compare to John 4:10 and 7:38 _____

Carefully read 58:12. What is the breach that needs to be repaired? _____

Compare 58:12 to Ezekiel 36:33-36. How do you think God views His covenant with Abraham and Israel? _____

Cross-reference to Amos 9:11-12 _____

Also cross-reference to Acts 15:16-17 _____

DISCIPLINES USED WRONGLY: MEDITATION, PRAYER, SIMPLICITY

HONORING GOD

Isaiah 58:13-14

"To keep the Sabbath in an idle manner is the sabbath of oxen and asses; to pass it in a jovial manner is the sabbath of the golden calf, when the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose again to play; to keep it in surfeiting and wantonness is the sabbath of Satan, the devil's holiday." [BISHOP ANDREWES]

Christians in our time give very little thought to the observance of the Sabbath. Today, we will be thinking through the institution of the Sabbath and it's pertinence to our time.

Read Genesis 2:2 and do a word study on the word "rested." _____

Continue your reading in Exodus 20:11 and Exodus 31:17 _____

Although many rabbis date the institution of the Sabbath to Exodus 15:25, it is more reasonable to believe that the Sabbath was instituted by Moses. It is in Exodus 16:23-29 that we find the first indisputable institution of the day, as one given to and to be kept by the children of Israel. Shortly afterward it was reenacted in the fourth commandment. Clearly the Sabbath is seen in connection with the gathering of manna. Most scholars believe that the day was already known, and in some measure observed as holy, but that the rule of abstinence from work was first given then, and shortly afterward more explicitly imposed in the fourth commandment.

According to Ezekiel the Sabbath was to be a sign between Jehovah and Israel. Read Ezekiel 20:12, 20 and record what you learn here: _____

It seems clear that the Sabbath rest was intended as a time of refreshing and elevation of the mind, in which Israel was to have a taste of a future time with God. The penalty for defiling the Sabbath was death.

Read Exodus 31:15 and Numbers 15:32-36 _____

But if the law of the Sabbath was broken through ignorance or mistake, pardon was extended after the presentation of a sin offering. At times the Jews dispensed with the extreme severity of the law. The legal observance of the Sabbath seems never to have been rigorously enforced until after the Exile and during the time of the Pharisees.

According to Mosaic Law, the Sabbath was observed:

- (1) By cessation from labor (Exodus 20:10). The idea of work is not more precisely defined in the law, except that the kindling of fire for cooking is expressly forbidden (Exodus 35:3), and the gathering of wood is treated as a transgression (Numbers 15:32-36). Read the following verses and record what you learn:

Jeremiah 17:21-27 _____

Amos 8:5 _____

Nehemiah 10:31 and 13:15,19 _____

- (2) By a holy assembly, the doubling of the daily offering by two lambs of the first year, with the corresponding meat and drink offerings (Numbers 28:9-10) and the providing of new bread of the Presence in the Holy Place (Leviticus 24:8).

Thus the Sabbath was to Israel a "day of . . . gladness," and "a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable" (Isaiah 58:13).

Read Numbers 10:10 and Hosea 2:11 _____

From these passages it appears that the essence of Sabbath observance is placed in unconditional self-denial, the renunciation of natural being and natural

desires, and unconditional dedication to God. The object of this cessation from labor and coming together in holy convocation was to give people an opportunity to engage in mental and spiritual exercises that would quicken the soul and spirit and strengthen spiritual life. In this sense that Jesus said, "the Sabbath was made for man."

Read Mark 2:27 _____

It is clear from church history that the early church continued to honor the Sabbath on the 7th day. It wasn't until the 2nd century that Sunday became the favored Christian day of worship. This was because Christ rose from the dead on the first day of the week, Sunday.

DISCIPLINES USED WRONGLY: WORSHIP, CELEBRATION