

Isaiah 56:1-9 + 57:19

The Ten Commandments and their related statutes are listed in Exodus 21-22. In this haftarah, Isaiah hints at opening God's covenant to those who were originally excluded - eunuchs and strangers (Gentiles).

Eunuchs were prohibited from the "congregation of the Lord" (Deuteronomy 23:1). The rabbis explained: "that is to say, [he] shall not marry an Israelitish wife."

Strangers (Gentiles) originally had no claim at all on God's promises to Israel.

But here Isaiah says both can "take hold of my covenant":

Isaiah 56:3 - "Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree."

This hint of an opening would be fully realized in the New Testament, in which the gospel is specifically introduced to Samaritans (**Acts 8:14-17**), to the Ethiopian Eunuch (**Acts 8:26-40**) and to Gentiles - first through Cornelius (**Acts 10**) and later through Paul's ministry.

Both the "angel of the Lord" and the Holy Spirit are employed in guiding Philip to the eunuch, and Peter to Cornelius. The "Angel of the Lord" appeared in the Old Testament when God spoke to and guided people like Abraham, Joshua, Gideon and Moses. The Holy Spirit is the primary New Testament guide. Both are united in focusing on the Eunuch and also Cornelius.

Interestingly, Ebedmelech, an Ethiopian eunuch, is instrumental in freeing Jeremiah from the slime pit he was thrown into (**Jeremiah 38:7-13**).

Isaiah 56:7 - "Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people."

Rashi - "for all people": Not only for Israel, but also for the proselytes.

Jesus quotes this, along with **Jeremiah 7:11**, when he overthrows the tables of the moneychangers in the Temple:

Matthew 21:13 - And He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,'[a] but you have made it a 'den of thieves.'"

Then the blind and the lame come to Jesus, and he heals them.

Isaiah 56:8 - "The Lord GOD which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to him, beside those that are gathered unto him."

Rashi - "I will yet gather": of the heathens of the nations who will convert and join them.

Isaiah expresses this with a strange image:

Isaiah 56:9 - "All ye beasts of the field, come to devour, yea, all ye beasts in the forest."

Rashi - "All the beasts of the field": The beast of the field is not as strong as the beast of the forest. [Yet] All the proselytes of the nations come and draw near to Me, and you shall devour all the beasts in the forest, the mighty of the heathens, the mighty of the nations, who hardened their heart and refrained from converting.

"Devouring" may point to the days of Messiah with the Kingdom of God displacing heathen kingdoms. The picture is of more "civilized" animals taking over the "wild" areas.

Luke 13:20-21 - "And again he said, 'To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? It is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, until it was all leavened.'"

Three measures of meal was the amount used by Sarah to bake bread when she and Abram were visited by Melchizedek and the angels. It is also the amount used in baking the shewbread for the Temple.

(Some commentators regard this verse as going to the following verses against idolatry. But the rabbis linked it with this haftarah)

The haftarah ends with a verse that wraps up the message:

Isaiah 57:19 - "I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the LORD; and I will heal him."

Jesus seems to be commenting on verse 8 - "Yet will I gather others to him, beside those that are gathered unto him.":

John 10:16 - "I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them in as well, and they will listen to My voice. Then there will be one flock and one shepherd."