

Isaiah 55:13 – 56:8 and Isaiah 8:18

In accordance with the numbering of Israel, this passage expands the definition of Israel to include anyone who "takes hold of the covenant" - even outcasts, eunuchs, Gentile strangers, "all people."

Jesus quotes **Isaiah 56:7** against the moneychangers in the Temple (**Matthew 21:13**).

Isaiah 55:13 - "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

This means that the curse of briars and thorns will be replaced with fruitfulness and delight.

Myrtle trees - have a sweet smell, are evergreen, flourish in watery places, and bring forth fruit. Esther's Hebrew name Hadassah comes from the Hebrew word for myrtle.

Rashi - Our Rabbis expounded [Targum Jonathan]: "Instead of the ungodly shall rise up righteous persons, and instead of sinners shall rise up such as are afraid to sin."
"briar... and... nettle": They are species of thorns; i.e., to say that the wicked will be destroyed and the righteous will take their rule.

Gentile "thorns" - enemies of Israel - would be transformed into stately and beautiful trees.

- **Ezekiel 28:24** - "There shall be no more a pricking brier unto the house of Israel, nor any grieving thorn."

A "regenerated creation," fulfilled in the days of Messiah:

- **Romans 8:22-23** - "We know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies...."

The reason this passage is tied to the Torah reading in **Numbers 2** is the word "sign"

"an everlasting sign" = *olam owth* - the same word used for the banners and flags of the tribes as they were encamped around the Tabernacle.

i.e. this miracle of replacing thorns with good trees, will serve as a defining banner to define God himself - *olam* = outside of time - just like the Shulamite says in the Song of Solomon that "His banner over me is love."

A name and an everlasting sign - His "Name" is another defining banner - God's identity and reputation

Earlier in Isaiah 55, God promised them his "everlasting covenant," the "sure mercies of David" through the Messiah who will be a witness, a leader and commander of the people. The result will be this expansion of the tent pegs for Israel:

- **Isaiah 55:5** - "Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the LORD thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee."

Isaiah 56:1-2 - "Thus saith the LORD, Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed. Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil."

NET - "Promote justice! Do what is right! For I am ready to deliver you; I am ready to vindicate you openly."

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."

See **Deuteronomy 23:1-3**

"He that is wounded in the stones, or hath his privy member cut off, shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord. A bastard shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even to his tenth generation shall he not enter into the congregation of the Lord. An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the Lord for ever:" See also **Leviticus 21:18-20**

Fulfillment: The Ethiopian Eunuch - **Acts 8:27**

And some Gentiles were forbidden from Israel, i.e. there was no way they could even become proselytes:

- **Deuteronomy 23:3** - "No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the LORD; none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the LORD"

This would change in the days of Messiah:

Isaiah 56:5 - "Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off."

A House of Prayer for All People

Isaiah 56:7-8 - "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. The Lord GOD which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to him, beside those that are gathered unto him."

“accepted upon mine altar” - Christ is not only the priest that offers up all the sacrifices of his people, but is also the altar on which they are offered up (**Hebrews 13:10**)

With a sacrifice of praise (**Hebrews 13:15**)

As a living sacrifice:

- **Romans 12:1** - “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”

Targum renders “outcasts,” "the scattered of Israel"

The phrase could be translated: "yet will I gather unto him his that are to be gathered"

Ibn Esra - “Yet, will I gather proselytes to the gathered of Israel.”

- **Jeremiah 30:17** - "For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the LORD; because they called thee an Outcast, saying, This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after."

The Jews apply this verse to the time when the son of David, the Messiah, shall come (Babylonian Talmud, Megillah, fol. 18. 1).

- **John 10:16** - "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd."

Jesus was angry with the moneychangers not only because they were making the temple a place of commercial profit that He called "robbery," but because the privilege of calling on God there was to be extended to all the peoples of the earth, something Jewish tradition had resisted.

- **Matthew 21:12-13** - "And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves."

Summary - the prophet is taking the image of the encampment banners of the tribes

with all that invoked, and applying it as a possibility for anyone to "take hold of the covenant" and be counted among Israel.

- **Romans 11:17** - "...and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree"

As Paul told the Ephesians,

- **Ephesians 2:14-16** - "That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ."
..."Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (**Ephesians 2:19**).

Isaiah 8:18 - Another Haftarah reading

Isaiah 8:18 - "Behold, I and the children whom the LORD hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth in mount Zion."

Again, the word "signs" - *owth* - recalls the banners and flags of the tribes of Israel as they are encamped around the Tabernacle. The people themselves would be the signs and banners.