

## Isaiah 56:1-9 + 57:19

As the Haftarah for **Deuteronomy 16-17**, the focus here is on the call for justice.

**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."

**Isaiah 56:4-5** - "For thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; 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."

The word for "eunuch" here is *s'ris*, which is commonly translated as "courtier" but which more commonly means "eunuch." The same word was used to describe Potipher, as well as the "officers" - the baker and the butler or cupbearer in **Genesis 40**.

The promise here about the eunuch is fulfilled in **Acts 8:26-40** when Phillip converts the Ethiopian Eunuch, who was reading **Isaiah 53:7-8**.

The eunuch is returning to the Ethiopian Kingdom of Meroe after a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for one of the feasts, and he is sitting in his chariot reading Scripture. The chariot is probably a four-wheeled covered vehicle, like an oxcart, large enough to accommodate the eunuch, his driver, Philip and possibly another servant (who would be reading the manuscript aloud if the official is not doing so himself). The carriage is moving slowly enough to allow for reading and for Philip to approach it on foot. Reading aloud was the common practice in ancient times, and was especially necessary when words were strung together on a manuscript without spacing or punctuation.

- See <http://buff.ly/2uWtwuw>

## Binding and loosing and the keys to the kingdom

- **Acts 1:8** - "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Some scholars see this verse as fulfilled through Peter using his "keys to the kingdom" to open new doors into God's kingdom for different people groups. First was the pouring

out of the Spirit at Pentecost. Then, after Philip had preached in Samaria and many believed and were baptized, Peter and John arrived they “prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.(**Acts 8:15-17**)

The third open door was with the Ethiopian Eunuch. Ethiopia was considered “the ends of the earth” by classical writers, including Herodotus.

A variant reading of this chapter reads in English: “The Holy Spirit fell on the eunuch, and an angel of the Lord caught up Philip.” Bruce Metzger, the dean of textual criticism, believes this reading is genuine, and was changed by a later scribe who believed the Spirit could only be given by laying on of hands of the apostles.

An alternative view is that the Spirit would have been given only after Peter opened the Kingdom to Gentiles through Cornelius in **Acts 10**, which would also include “to the ends of the earth.”

After these doors were opened, the theory goes, the Spirit was received simultaneously when one believes.

At any rate, the faith of the Ethiopian Eunuch fulfilled the prophecy of **Isaiah 56:4-5** that eunuchs would be included in God’s kingdom.

Eunuchs were not allowed to become Jewish proselytes, according to the Torah.

- **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**

Later, foreign eunuchs were employed in the Judean king’s palace:

- **Jeremiah 38:7** - “Now when Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs which was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon; the king then sitting in the gate of Benjamin”

This earlier Ethiopian eunuch pulled Jeremiah out of the pit where the king had imprisoned him.

Was Daniel a eunuch? It’s not stated specifically. If he and his companions were made eunuchs in Babylon, it would reflect a shift in the way eunuchs were seen, since Daniel was definitely included in the “congregation of Israel.”

According to rabbinical tradition Daniel was of royal descent; and his fate, together with

that of his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, was foretold by the prophet Isaiah to King Hezekiah in these words, "and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon" (Isa. xxxix. 7; compare Sanh. 93b; Pirke R. El. lii.; Origen, commentary to Matt. xv. 5; Jerome, commentary to Isaiah, l.c.). According to this view, Daniel and his friends were eunuchs, and were consequently able to prove the groundlessness of charges of immorality brought against them, which had almost caused their death at the hands of the king. But the evidence is not conclusive.

Josephus shows that eunuchs were important members of a regal household, especially under Herod the Great, the care of whose drink was entrusted to one, the bringing of his supper to another, and the putting of him to bed to a third, "who also managed the principal affairs of the government" ("Ant." xvi. 8, §, 1). Herod's favorite wife, Mariamne, was attended by a eunuch ("Ant." x v. 7, §, 4).

Of course, Jesus had something to say about being a eunuch spiritually, referring to disciples determined to remain single:

- **Matthew 19:12** - "For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it."

The Ethiopian Eunuch was probably not a proselyte but a "God-fearer" who was interested in Jewish ethics and law, like many in the Roman world.

**Isaiah 56:6** - "Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant"

"keepeth the Sabbath" - For us now this means to see that Christ kept the Sabbath rest perfectly in the tomb, and now we "labor to enter into the rest"

The Sabbath, like Wisdom, is personified as feminine in the language of the synagogue. The coming of the Sabbath was perceived as a wedding:

Rabbi Hanina would wrap himself in his garment and stand at nightfall on Shabbat eve, and say: Come and we will go out to greet Shabbat the queen. Rabbi Yannai put on his garment on Shabbat eve and said: Enter, O bride. Enter, O bride. (Babylonian Talmud, Sabbath 119a)

The idea is to embrace and become one with that Rest.

- **Hebrews 4:11** - "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief."

**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."

Solomon pointed to believing Gentiles in his prayer for the newly consecrated Temple:

- **1 Kings 8:41-43** - "Also concerning the foreigner who is not of Your people Israel, when he comes from a far country for Your name's sake (for they will hear of Your great name and Your mighty hand, and of Your outstretched arm); when he comes and prays toward this house, hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to You, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name, to fear You, as do Your people Israel, and that they may know that this house which I have built is called by Your name."

Some Gentiles would be priests and Levites:

Compare **Isaiah 66:19-21** - "So they will proclaim My glory among the nations. And they will bring all your brothers from all the nations as a gift to the LORD on horses and chariots and wagons, on mules and camels, to My holy mountain Jerusalem," says the LORD, "just as the Israelites bring an offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD. And I will select some of them as priests and Levites," says the LORD."

The rabbis interpreted this as referring to the gifts brought to the King Messiah in his days. (Midrash Tillim apud Yalkut in Psal. lxxxvii. 4.)

It is saying the Gospel would be proclaimed throughout the world, and the Gentiles - preaching the gospel of Christ - would bring the diaspora Jews back into God's kingdom through conversion by their ministry.

Jesus pushed this even further:

- **John 4:23** - "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him."

And Paul also alluded to the **Isaiah 66** passage:

- **Romans 15:16** - "That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost."

### 'A House of Prayer for All People'

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

- **Matthew 21:13** - "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."

**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."

The Targum renders it, "the scattered of Israel"

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

Aben Ezra - "yet, will I gather proselytes to the gathered of Israel"

Jesus says, probably referring to this verse in Isaiah:

- **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."

**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.

But this verse marks a change - no longer describing the Messianic Kingdom, but a new section describing Israel's sins that brought on the Babylonian invasion.

The previous verse could also be interpreted:

"All the wild beasts of the field and the forest are invited to come and devour the unprotected flock."

**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."

"Fruit of the lips" in biblical language means praise and thanksgiving. Here God says that he "creates" thanksgiving in us through His salvation and healing.

Rashi - I create for him a new manner of speech. (Thus bridging walls of language between people)

- **Hebrews 13:15** - "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name."

"peace" = *shalom* - the absence of inner or outward strife and "againstness," peace, concord, contentment, safety, wholeness, integrity, health and prosperity are included.

"Peace to him that is far off and to him that is near" - the Gentiles are far away, the Jews are near. But also near and far in relation to God, on different ends of any spectrum -

age, race, language, abilities.

Rashi - Both are equal; he who is aged and was accustomed to My Torah and My worship from his youth, and he who drew near now, just recently to repent of his evil way. Said the Lord, "I will heal him of his malady and of his sins."

- **Ephesians 2:17** - "And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh."

To preach peace or shalom is to point to salvation through Christ. When Jesus said "I Am the Way" He meant He is the way to peace, to eternal shalom.

"I will heal him" = *rapha'* - to mend, repair, restore to health