

Isaiah 58:1-14**The True Fast**

Isaiah 58:1 - "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins."

God is imploring the prophet to reveal to the people how they are sinning in regard especially how they are misinterpreting what a fast is all about.

Isaiah 58:2 - "Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God."

"as a nation that did righteousness" = as if they were... all their religious piety is merely a show and hypocrisy.

Isaiah 58:3 - "Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours."

They were trying to manipulate God. If they fasted, He should hear their request and respond. Why am I still beset by troubles!

But worship and prayer are not transactions. They had a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof (**2 Timothy 3:5**).

Instead, they are continuing to "find pleasure" - not really pleasure because they are fasting. But their business activity continues, and their workers are still working in the fields, and they still demand payment from their debtors.

Isaiah 58:4 - "Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high."

While you are fasting, you still harbor resentments and anger, turning over arguments in your mind and use the time to plan revenge on your enemies. They seek God but still smack their servants.

If you're fasting to get God's attention and have Him listen to and agree about how right your position is, then you're missing the point.

Isaiah 58:5 - "Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?"

God had actually told the people to "afflict their soul" on Yom Kippur. But His hope was that would lead to real humility and repentance. Instead, the people were just going

through the motions.

Sackcloth and ashes was supposed to signify they identified as the sacrificial lamb or goat and deserved death. But to them it was just a ritual.

The True Fast

Isaiah 58:6 - "Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?"

The Septuagint renders it, "dissolve the obligations of contracts obtained by violence."

The traditions of the Scribes and Pharisees are called "heavy burdens, grievous to be borne" (Matthew 23:4).

Fasting is not to add some brief misery to your lukewarm state of response to God. God wants to break the bondage of our wicked nature - what the Jews call the "evil inclination" that keeps us yoked to our rebellious self.

The secret to freedom is to turn our gaze away from self toward others and GIVE.

Isaiah 58:7 - "Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?"

Give of your substance. Give of your space. Give of your time to those in need. Cover people' nakedness instead of accusing them, condemning them or making them jump through hoops of your own invention before helping them.

And by the way, while you are locked away in your closet of false piety, you've cut yourself off from your wife and children. A true fast would break you open to be transparent toward those you love - your own flesh and blood.

Transformation

Isaiah 58:8 - "Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rereward."

This is the way to understanding, to health, to righteousness and to security.

Isaiah 58:9 - "Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity;"

One of the biggest yokes we are under is our propensity to "point the finger" at others.

Accusations and blame put us in the position of innocence, and anoint us a judge, jury and executioner.

speaking "vanity" = *aven* - self-exertion rather than grace

A Promise

Isaiah 58:10-11 - "And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday: And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not."

This describes the opposite of someone who has been hungry and thirsty from fasting.

Isaiah 58:12 - "And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in."

The rabbis said the phrase "build the old waste places" meant many would turn back to the Torah.

The Sabbath Rest

Isaiah 58:13-14 - "If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honorable; and shalt honor him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it."

Jesus fulfilled the Sabbath perfectly as He lay in the grave before His resurrection. The Sabbath Rest is promised for believers:

- **Hebrews 4:9-11** - "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief."

"not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words" - This means acknowledging that we died on the cross and have become new creatures in Christ.

If we enter in, we will "ride upon the high places of the earth" where we used to worship idols.

If we will agree and undertake this "fast from self" described in this chapter, we can be fed with that heritage of Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel, as the children of Israel were fed manna in the wilderness.