

A BETTER KING, SERVANT, CONQUEROR

The Book of Isaiah

Isaiah 56—58

Verse to Remember

*For this is what the high and lofty One says—
he who lives forever, whose name is holy:
“I live in a high and holy place,
but also with him who is contrite and
lowly in spirit,
to revive the spirit of the lowly
and to revive the heart of the contrite.”*

Isaiah 57:15

We have completed the first and second sections of Isaiah: the book of the King and the book of the Servant. We are now beginning the third and final section, the book of the Anointed Conqueror.¹ Kathleen Buswell Nielson offers this helpful orientation: “Chapter 56 begins the book’s third and final section (Isaiah 56—66), in which the prophet looks ahead to God’s people returned from exile.... [We focus in this final section] on the hope of... renewal. It is a hope for an eternal city, and for the final conqueror who will bring an end to all sin.”²

Day 1 — Read Isaiah 56:1-8.

This passage shows “God’s people as they should be *and will be.*”³

1. According to this passage, what attitudes and actions characterize those who are devoted to the Lord?
2. Three times in these verses the LORD mentions the observance of the Sabbath. Honoring the Sabbath required a whole-hearted yielding of one’s life and plans to God’s control. Read Exodus 20:8–11 and Exodus 31:12–17. What is the purpose of the Sabbath? (Exod. 31:13)
3. In the Old Testament law eunuchs were excluded from the gathering of God’s people (Deut. 23:1); foreigners could enter only if they were circumcised (Exod. 12:48–49). Here, though, both eunuchs and foreigners who cling to the Lord and his covenant, as their keeping of the Sabbath shows, are welcomed and promised great blessing.
 - a. What blessings are promised to the eunuch? (Is. 56:5, in contrast to Is. 56:3b)
 - b. What blessings are promised to the foreigner? (Is. 56:7, in contrast to Is. 56:3a)


The Old Testament observance of the Sabbath foreshadowed the Sabbath rest that we have in Jesus: just as the people were called to cease from their work on the Sabbath, so we are called to cease from our “works” and rest in Christ (Col. 2:16-17; Heb. 4:9-10).

In his design for the temple, God designated a specific area for Gentiles to worship and pray to him. In Jesus’ time, this area had been taken over by buyers and sellers and money changers, making it impossible for its original intent to be realized. In Mark 11:15–17, Jesus shows he shares God’s heart for the Gentiles by driving out the merchants. As he does this, he quotes Isaiah 56:7: “My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.”

Day 2 — Read Isaiah 56:9—57:13.
This passage shows “God’s people as they shouldn’t be *but are.*”⁴

1. In 56:9–12, Isaiah uses three images for the leaders of Israel.

Images for Israel’s leaders	What is the job of a watchman/a watchdog/a shepherd?	How are Israel’s leaders described?
Watchmen		Is. 56:10
Dogs (i.e., watchdogs)		Is. 56:10–11
Shepherds		Is. 56:11–12

2. Isaiah 57:1–13 sets two opposite groups side by side: the righteous and the unrighteous. The righteous die (57:1), which might seem like a terrible injustice. But what godly perspective does Isaiah offer? (Is. 57:1b–2)
3. God charges the unrighteous with spiritual adultery—that is, idolatry. In what repulsive pagan worship practices did these idolaters participate?
 Is. 57:5a; see also Num. 25:1–3
- Is. 57:5b; see also Jer. 32:35
4. Then in 57:9 God charges the people with the sin of turning to other earthly powers for security. (Note that “Molech” in 57:9 in the NIV is probably better translated “the king.”) What do you think this sin and the sin of idolatry have in common?
5. What is the lot or portion or inheritance...
 of the idolater? (Is. 57:6, 13)
- of the one who “makes [God] his refuge” (57:13)? (Is. 57:13;  * Ps. 16:5–6)
6. Read Isaiah 57:10-11. The people are “wearied by all their ways” and yet they continue on this path. Why?


Day 3 — Read Isaiah 57:14–21.

In 57:14 “God opens the way into his reviving presence for all the penitent.”⁵

1. God is the “high and lofty One...who lives forever,” the One who lives in “a high and holy place” (57:15).
 - a. Where else does this holy One live? (Is. 57:15)

 - b. What does he do for them? (Is. 57:15)

2. God’s people have been “willful,” persisting in sin despite his anger and punishment (57:17).
 - a. What is the only hope for persistent sinners? (Is. 57:16, 18–19)

 - b. How do peace and healing come about? (Is. 53:5;  Eph. 2:13–18, which echoes Is. 57:19)


3. What does Isaiah say about the wicked? (Is. 57:20–21)

Day 4 — Read Isaiah 58:1–14.

1. Much of the description of the people in 58:2 sounds good. But what little hints do you see in that verse that all is not well?

2. What does 58:3 suggest is the motive for this pious-seeming behavior?

3. What actions by the people show that their religious observances do not stem from humble, faith-filled hearts? (Is. 58:3c–4)

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4. True fasting and Sabbath-keeping are evidence of faith and devotion to God. Fill in the chart below.

What do true fasting and Sabbath-keeping look like?	What blessings does the LORD promise?
Is. 58:6–7	Is. 58:8–9a
Is. 58:9b–10a	Is. 58:10b–12
Is. 58:13	Is. 58:14

Day 5 — Like the people who have been delivered from exile, we look back to the accomplishment of our salvation; like them, we await the ultimate fulfillment of God’s promises – the culmination of our salvation and the final defeat of sin and evil; and like them, we too are called to faith and obedience while we wait.⁶

Read 1 Peter 1:1–15 for a look at our inheritance – our “lot” – as believers.

1. What do believers have already as a result of the work of the Suffering Servant, Jesus?
2. What do we have to look forward to?
3. What is our calling while we wait?
4. How would remembering our glorious inheritance daily change the way you view and live your life? Write down one or two concrete ways this act of remembering could affect you.

*The 📖 symbol indicates verses for further study.

¹ These names for the divisions of Isaiah come from J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and a Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993).

² Kathleen Buswell Nielson, *Isaiah: The Lord Saves* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2011), 277.

³ Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr., *Isaiah: God Saves Sinners* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 376.

⁴ Ortlund 376.

⁵ *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 1345, note to 57:14–21.

⁶ J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah by the Day: A New Devotional Translation* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2011), 272.