

CHAPTER 56

INTRODUCTION TO ISAIAH 56

This chapter contains a prophecy of the conversion of the Gentiles, and their accession to the church, and of the corrupt state of the church afterwards, especially of its rulers, which brought in men comparable to wild beasts to devour. It begins with an exhortation to the duties of judgment and justice, enforced by the nearness of Christ's salvation, and the clear relation of his righteousness in the Gospel, and by the blessedness of the man that does those duties, and lays hold on those blessings, and observes the whole of religion, instituted and moral, (~~256B~~ Isaiah 56:1,2), when encouragement is given to eunuchs, and strangers or Gentiles, sensible and religious persons, to hope for acceptance with God, and that they shall be welcome to his house, with an answer to their objections, and promises of special favours, (~~256B~~ Isaiah 56:3-7) to which is subjoined a promise or prophecy of future additions, both of Jews and Gentiles, to the church of God in the latter day, (~~256B~~ Isaiah 56:8) and then follows a call upon some savage people, comparable to wild beasts, to come and devour, which will be previous to the above prophecy, (~~256B~~ Isaiah 56:9), the reason of which is the sad corruption of the rulers of the church, their ignorance, negligence, avarice, and drunkenness, (~~256B~~ Isaiah 56:10-12).

Ver. 1. *Thus saith the Lord, keep ye judgment, and do justice, &c.]*

Observe the word of the Lord, which comes from the God of judgment, is the best informer of the judgment, and the only rule of faith and practice; and which should be kept in the heart, mind, and memory, be held fast, and abode by; and so likewise all the ordinances of the Lord, which are his statutes and judgments; these should be all of them kept as they were delivered, in faith, from love, and with a view to the glory of God and Christ; all matters of judgment and justice between man and man, whether public or private, should be observed and done; all that you would have men to do to you, do to them; all works of righteousness required by the Lord, though not to be depended upon for justification in his sight, but regarded as fruits and evidences of faith and repentance; for works of

righteousness cannot be done but by regenerated persons. The reasons enforcing a regard to these things follow:

for my salvation is near to come; which are either the words of God the Father concerning Christ and his salvation, whom he appointed, called, and sent to effect it; who, when this prophecy was given out, was to come, and was to come as a Saviour, and was near at hand; and whose salvation, as to the efficacy of it, was come, all the Old Testament saints being saved by it; and, as to the impetration of it, was near at hand, he being ready to come, and in a short time, comparatively speaking, did come, and work out this salvation God had resolved upon, chosen his people to, and in which his glory was greatly concerned; and therefore calls it his own: or they are the words of Christ, who is the sole author of spiritual and eternal salvation, and in whom alone it is, and from him alone to be had; and which was near, being performed by himself, published in his Gospel, applied by his Spirit, and enjoyed by his people here and to all eternity:

and my righteousness to be revealed; and which also are either the words of God the Father concerning his faithfulness in the performance of his promise of Christ, and good things by him; concerning his justice, which was glorified in the work of redemption by Christ; or concerning the righteousness of Christ, called his, because he sent him to bring it in, he approves of it, imputes it to his people, and justifies them by it; or they are the words of Christ concerning his own righteousness, which he has wrought out, and brought in, in the room and stead of his people, and for their sakes; and which is revealed, not by the light of nature, nor by the law of Moses, but by the Gospel of Christ, and that from faith to faith, or only to believers. Now these being used as arguments to engage to the keeping and doing judgment and justice, show that the doctrines of salvation by Christ, and justification by his righteousness, are no licentious doctrines.

Ver. 2. *Blessed is the man that doth this*, &c.] That does justice, and keeps judgment; he hereby exercises a good conscience both towards God and men; he enjoys communion with God in his ways, worship, and ordinances, he attends unto, and has an evidence of his right to eternal happiness:

and the son of man that layeth hold on it; on the salvation of Christ, and his righteousness; which supposes a sense of the insufficiency of a man's own righteousness, a view of the excellency and suitableness of Christ's righteousness; and is expressive of a strong act of faith upon it, embracing and retaining it as a man's own:

that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it; by doing any servile work on it, and attending to all religious duties, private or public. This is put for the whole of instituted worship under the Gospel dispensation, and for any day or time in which the church of Christ meet together for religious worship:

and keepeth his hand from doing any evil; committing any sin against God, or doing injury to the persons or properties of men, including the whole of moral duty.

Ver. 3. *Neither let the son of the stranger, &c.]* A Gentile, that is so by birth, the son of one that is an alien from the commonwealth of Israel, a stranger from the covenants of promise, and so had no right to come into the congregation of the Lord under the former dispensation; but now the middle wall of partition being broken down, in the times to which this prophecy belongs, such are encouraged to expect admission:

that hath joined himself to the Lord; who, having a spiritual knowledge of him in Christ, loves him, believes in him, gives up himself to him, to walk in his ways and ordinances, and cleaves unto him with full purpose of heart; (see ^{<2416>}Isaiah 44:5 ^{<2416>}Jeremiah 1:5) such an one should not speak,

saying, the Lord hath utterly separated me from his people; by a law of his, (^{<6218>}Deuteronomy 23:3), for now the wall of separation, the ceremonial law, is destroyed, and God declares himself to be the God of the Gentiles, as well as of the Jews; and of all that fear God, and believe in Christ, of every nation, who are accepted with him; and that they are all one in Christ, and all partakers of the same promises and blessings; so strangers, and the sons of strangers, were to have an inheritance among the children of Israel in Gospel times; (see ^{<3472>}Ezekiel 47:22,23) and therefore should have no reason to speak after this manner:

neither let the eunuch say, behold, I am a dry tree; having no children, nor could have any; and to be written childless was reckoned a reproach and a curse; nor might an eunuch enter the congregation of the Lord, (^{<6218>}Deuteronomy 23:1), and yet such a man, having the grace of God, and acting agreeably to it, as in the following verse, should not distress himself on the above accounts.

Ver. 4. *For thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, &c.]* That fear and serve the Lord; religiously observe all times of divine worship, and walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord;

show regard to all the institutions of the Gospel, and perform all religious exercises, private and public, on Lord's days, and at other times:

and choose the things that please me; who do that which is wellpleasing unto God, which he has declared in his word to be acceptable to him; and do that from right principles, with right views, and of choice; not forced to it by those who have authority over them, or led to it merely by example and custom:

and take hold of my covenant; not the covenant of circumcision, as Kimchi; for what had eunuchs to do with that? but the covenant of grace, the everlasting covenant, the covenant of peace before spoken of (²³¹⁴⁰Isaiah 14:10 55:3), made between the Father and the Son, on account of the elect; which may be said to be taken hold of when a person by faith claims his interest in God as his covenant God; comes to Christ as the Mediator of the covenant; and deals with his blood, righteousness, and sacrifice, for pardon, justification, and atonement; regards all the promises and blessings of the covenant as belonging to him and lives by faith on them, as such; so David by faith laid hold on this covenant, (⁴²¹⁵2 Samuel 23:5).

Ver. 5. *Even to them will I give in mine house and within my walls, &c.]* The Targum is,

“in the house of my sanctuary, and in the land of the house of my Shechinah;”

meaning the temple at Jerusalem, in the land of Judea; but a Gospel church state is here meant, which is the house of God; the materials of which are true believers; the foundation Christ; the pillars and beams of it are the ministers of the word; the windows the ordinances, the door into it faith in Christ, and a profession of it; the provisions of it the word and ordinances; the stewards of it the preachers of the Gospel; where are saints of various sorts, fathers, young men, and children; where Christ is as a son over his own house, and acts as Prophet, Priest, and King, there. This is the Lord's house, it is of his building, where he dwells, which he keeps, repairs, beautifies, and adorns; here he promises to give the persons before described

a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters; a “place” of entrance and admission into his house, for continuance to dwell in; a place of honour, profit, and pleasure; a place of comfort, rest, ease, and

quietness; a place of fulness at the table of the Lord; a fixed, abiding, settled place; or “a hand”^{f1 104}, which may signify a part, portion, lot, or inheritance, (¹⁰⁹³2 Samuel 19:43) or a statue or pillar, (¹⁰⁸⁸2 Samuel 18:18 ³⁵⁷²Ezekiel 47:22,23 ⁶⁸¹²Revelation 3:12), and a “name”, not of office, for all in it are not officers; nor a mere name in a church book, which to have only is of no avail; nor the mere name of a professor, which men may have, and be dead; but a good name, as a church member: and such an one is he who keeps his place in the church; seeks to maintain peace and brotherly love in it; lays himself out for the welfare of it; is ready to contribute according to his ability for the support of it; and whose life and conversation is becoming the Gospel of Christ; moreover, by this name may be meant the name of the people of God, he being their covenant God; or of the priests of God, as all the saints are under the Gospel dispensation; or of Christians, as they are now called; or rather of the sons of God, which is the new name that is given them, and is a more excellent name

than of sons and daughters; that is, than to have sons and daughters, the want of which the eunuch complained of; or than to be the sons and daughters of the greatest potentate on earth:

I will give them an everlasting name, that shall never be cut off; such is their good name in the church, and is spoken well of in later ages, is had in everlasting remembrance, and will be confessed by Christ at the last day; and such is their name as the children of God, for, once sons, no more servants, the name and relation will always continue; and both this name and place are the gift of God; it is he that brings them to his house, and gives them a place there, and enables them to behave well in it, so as to have a good name; and it is he that gives them the name, privilege, power, and relation of children, which shall never be cut off by any act of their own, or his, or by men, or devils; such a name had the eunuch, converted and baptized by Philip, (⁴¹²⁷Acts 8:27-39).

Ver. 6. *Also the sons of the stranger that join themselves to the Lord, &c.]* Having answered the objection and removed the discouragement of the eunuch, he now returns to the sons of the stranger, who also join themselves to the Lord, as the eunuch had done; (see ²⁵⁰⁴Isaiah 56:4) and who do this,

to serve him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be his servants; who give up themselves to him, not only to be saved by him, but to serve him in righteousness and holiness, with reverence and godly fear, and from a

principle of love to him; being heartily desirous, and accounting it an honour, to be his servants:

everyone that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; (See Gill on “²⁸⁰⁴Isaiah 56:4”).

Ver. 7. *Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, &c.]* The church, called a “mountain” for its height, visibility, and immovableness; (see ²⁸¹⁰Isaiah 2:2), especially for the latter; the true members of it being such who are interested in the unchangeable love of God, in the immovable grace of election, in the unalterable covenant of grace, are on the Rock Christ Jesus, and are secured by the favour and power of God; and it is called a “Holy One”, because in it holy men are, holy doctrines are preached, holy services performed, and the holy God, Father, Son, and Spirit, grant their presence: and hither the Lord “brings” his people; he shows them the way thither; he inclines their minds, and moves their wills, to come hither; he removes the objections that are in their way; he constrains them by his love; and he does it in a very distinguishing way, takes one of a city, and two of a family, and brings them hither; and he who says this is able to do it; and, when he has brought them there, will do for them as follows:

and make them joyful in my house of prayer; or “in the house of my prayer”^{f1105}; not made by him, as say the Jews^{f1106}; but where prayer is made unto him, and is acceptable with him; every man’s closet should be a place of private prayer; and every good man’s house a place of family prayer; but a church of God is a house where saints meet together, and jointly pray to the Lord: and here he makes them joyful; by hearing and answering their prayers; by granting his gracious presence; by discovering his love, and shedding it abroad in their hearts; by feeding them with his word and ordinances; by giving them views of Christ, his love and loveliness, fulness, grace, and righteousness: by favouring them with the consolations of his Spirit, and his gracious influences; and by showing them their interest in the blessings of grace and glory:

their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar: which is Christ, who 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, (²⁸³⁰Hebrews 13:10), and is the only One, and the most Holy One, which is greater than the gift, and sanctifies every gift that is upon it, and makes both the persons and the offerings of the Lord’s people acceptable unto

God; for by these offerings and sacrifices are not meant legal but spiritual ones; good deeds, acts of beneficence, rightly performed, with which sacrifices God is well pleased; sacrifices of prayer and praise; and even the persons of saints themselves, their bodies and their souls, when presented, a holy, living, and acceptable sacrifice unto God, (^{<835>}Hebrews 13:15,16 ^{<511>}Romans 12:1), the prophet here speaks in figures, agreeably to his own time, as Calvin observes, when speaking of Gospel times; so he makes mention of the sabbath before, instead of the Lord's day, or any time of worship under the Gospel dispensation:

for mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all people; Gentiles as well as Jews; the sons of the strangers, as others, are all welcome to the church of God, to come and worship, and pray to the Lord there, and that is in any place where the saints meet together; for holy hands may be lifted up everywhere, without wrath or doubting, (^{<518>}1 Timothy 2:8). The Jews apply this verse to the time when the son of David, the Messiah, shall come^{f1107}.

Ver. 8. *The Lord God, which gathereth the outcasts of Israel, saith, &c.]* Not the outcasts of literal Israel, the captives in Babylon, and elsewhere; but of spiritual Israel, and who are cast out, not by the Lord, but by the men of the world; who cast out their names as evil, who call them outcasts, and account them the offscouring of all things, (^{<307>}Jeremiah 30:17) or rather this character of them may represent what they appear to be in a state of nature, when they seem to be neglected, and not taken notice of by the Lord, as if they were not his people, or beloved by him; and are like the infant cast out into the open field to the loathing of its person; and yet such as these the Lord looks upon, takes notice of, and gathers in by an effectual calling. The Targum renders it, "the scattered of Israel"; and so the Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, Syriac, and Arabic versions; who, while unregenerate, are in a state of distance and alienation from God; are without God and Christ, and destitute of the Spirit; aliens from the people of God; wandering out of the way of God; are like lost sheep, scattered abroad by the fall of Adam, and their own actual transgressions: now the Lord God is the gatherer of these; which agrees with Christ, as the surety that engaged to look them up, and bring them in; and as he is a shepherd that gathers the lambs in his arms; and as he is the Saviour that came to seek and save that which was lost; and who, in consequence of having redeemed his people, gathers them by his Spirit and grace, through the ministry of the word; (see ^{<606>}John 10:16 ^{<341>}Isaiah 40:11 ^{<290>}Luke 19:10

<3108>Zechariah 10:8), it may be here meant of God the Father, whose purpose, plan, and contrivance, it was to gather together all his elect in one, even in Christ; and whose promise it is, that to him should the gathering of the people be; and who set him up as an ensign for that purpose, (<4010>Ephesians 1:10 <0490>Genesis 49:10 <2310>Isaiah 11:10,12) he now says:

yet will I gather others to him besides those that are gathered unto him; that is, to Israel; either to Christ, to whom these outcasts and scattered ones belong, who is sometimes called Israel, (<2340B>Isaiah 49:3), or to the church of God, whither they are brought when gathered, as in (<2806>Isaiah 56:5,7), this is done in the effectual calling, when God's elect are called and gathered out of the world, among whom they have been, and are brought to Christ as their Saviour; as the Lord their righteousness; as the Mediator of the new covenant; and to his blood for pardon, justification, and salvation; and as the ark where they only can find rest for their souls; and as their King, to whom they become subject; and so they are gathered into the church as to a fold and good pasture. Now great numbers of these, both among the Jews and Gentiles, were gathered in at the first preaching of the Gospel, in the first times of the Gospel dispensation; and it is here promised that others besides them should be gathered in, even all that remain of the election of grace uncalled; the rest of those that the Father has given to Christ; the residue of those he has redeemed by his blood; such of the children of God as are yet scattered abroad, even all the remainder of the Lord's people, whether Jews or Gentiles; which will be fulfilled in the latter day, when the forces and fulness of the Gentiles shall be brought in, and the nation of the Jews converted at once. The words may be rendered, "yet will I gather unto him his that are to be gathered"^{f1108}; the other sheep uncalled; as many as are ordained unto eternal life; not one shall be lost or left behind. Kimchi mentions it as an exposition of his father's,

“after I have gathered the outcasts of Israel; yet will I gather, against them that are gathered, others against his gathered ones, and they are Gog and Magog;”

to which sense, he says, the following verse inclines: but much better is the sense of Aben Ezra, “yet, will I gather proselytes to the gathered of Israel;”

for his “gathered ones”, he says, refers to Israel. But it is best of all to interpret it of the nations gathered and added to the Christian churches in the times of Constantine, who before had been treated as outcasts, and persecuted for their profession of Christ; and of the conversion of various other people, as the Goths, Vandals, &c. in later ages. So Vitringa.

Ver. 9. *All ye beasts of the field, come to devour*, &c.] Which may be understood either literally of savage beasts being called to devour the slain, signifying a great slaughter that should be made, like that in (^{<68917>}Revelation 19:17,18) to which the fowls of the heaven are invited, as to a supper; and so Kimchi interprets it of such creatures being called to feed upon the carcasses in the camp of Gog and Magog, agreeably to (^{<26917>}Ezekiel 39:17,18), but it seems better to understand it figuratively of people and nations, comparable to the beasts of the field for their strength, cruelty, and voraciousness. The Targum of the whole is,

“all the kings of the people that shall be gathered to oppress thee, O Jerusalem, shall be cast in the midst of thee; they shall be for food to the beast of the field, the beast of the forest shall be satisfied with them.”

Though it seems most correct to interpret these beasts of the kings of the people themselves; by whom some understand the Chaldeans, Babylonians, and other nations along with them, and under them, who spoiled the people of the Jews, and carried them captive; but rather the Romans are intended. And so the prophet, after he had foretold the gathering in of the remnant, according to the election of grace, among the Jews, and the addition to them from among the Gentiles, proceeds to give an account what should become of the rest of the Jewish nation that rejected the Messiah and his Gospel; that the Romans should be brought in upon them, who should devour them; which destruction would be owing to the following sins abounding among their principal men. But I am inclined to the opinion of Cocceius and Vitringa, that the barbarous nations of the Goths and Vandals, and others, coming into the Roman empire, become Christian, though greatly corrupted, are here meant^{f1109}; since this seems to be a prophecy of what should happen between the first gathering of the Jews and Gentiles to Christ in the first times of the Gospel, and the later gathering of them in the latter day; and the following words aptly describe the ignorance, stupidity, avarice, and intemperance of the priests of the apostate church of Rome; and the following chapter, which is a

continuance of this prophecy, better agrees with the idolatry of the church of Rome than with the Jews, who, especially at the time of their destruction by the Romans, were not given to idolatry. Yea,

all the beasts in the forest: a herd of them, which, like an inundation, ran over the Roman empire, and tore it to pieces, and spread ignorance and corruption every where, next described; for now the beast of Rome arose with his ten heads. Some think that a new chapter should begin here.

Ver. 10. *His watchmen are blind*, &c.] A sad character of watchmen; who, of all men, ought to have good sight, to see who is coming, to discover an enemy, to discern approaching danger, and so be capable of giving notice thereof. This some apply to the Scribes and Pharisees, who are often called blind guides, and blind leaders of the blind, (~~4054~~ Matthew 15:14 23:16,17,19,24,26) and well suits the character of the Popish clergy, bishops, and priests, those ecclesiastical watchmen, whose business should be to look after the souls of men, and feed them with knowledge and understanding; but very ill qualified for it, being blind and ignorant as to the knowledge of things divine and spiritual. The first letter in this clause is larger than usual, perhaps designed to strike the eye, and raise the attention to what follows, as being something remarkable and extraordinary, as indeed the character given of these men is, and directing to beware of them. The first word, which is the word for “watchmen”, has the letter “jod” wanting; which, being a note of multitude, shows, it is observed^{f1110}, that all the watchmen were universally deficient in the light of their minds, and not one of them did their duty, as it follows:

they are all ignorant; or “know not”^{f1111}, or “nothing”, not the Scriptures, and the meaning of them; the Gospel, and the doctrines of it; Christ, and the way of salvation by him; the Spirit of God, and his operations on the souls of men; and so very unfit to be spiritual watchmen, or to have the care of immortal souls. A Popish bishop in Scotland declared he did not know neither the Old nor the New Testament; and Bishop Albert, reading the Bible, could not tell what book it was, only he found it was contrary to their religion.

They are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; and so useless; as a house dog, or one that is set to keep the sheep, if it barks not at the noise of a thief, or the approach of a wolf, to give notice to the family, or the shepherd, it is of no service. It may design such who call themselves ministers of the word, and yet either cannot or will not preach, such as are non-preaching bishops;

or in their ministry do not reprove the errors and vices of men, and warn them of their danger:

sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber; as dogs do; slothful, indolent, do not care to be concerned in business, but take their ease and pleasure, and are very improper persons for watchmen. The first word^{f1112} used is observed to signify speaking vain things in dreams, things delirious; and agrees well with the dreaming doctrines and delirious notions of the Romish clergy.

Ver. 11. *Yea, they [are] greedy dogs, &c.*] Or “strong of soul”^{f1113}; of great appetites, and are never satisfied: or “strong of body”; the soul is sometimes put for the body; large bodied, fat bellied men, such as the priests, monks, and friars, that live upon the fat of the land; gluttons, epicures, men of a canine appetite, like dogs,

which can never have enough; know not fulness^{f1114}, or what it is to be filled to satisfaction, always craving more. Though some think this denotes their insatiable avarice, their greedy desire of money, not being satisfied with what they have, in order to support their voluptuous way of living.

And they are shepherds that cannot understand; or, “and they are”, or “are they shepherds?” these blind and ignorant watchmen; these dumb and greedy dogs; these pretend to be the shepherds of the flock, and to feed them?

yet they know not to understand^{f1115}, or “know not understanding”; have no knowledge and understanding of divine things, and therefore unfit and incapable of feeding the people therewith:

they all look to their own way: to do that which is most pleasing to them, agreeable to their carnal lusts; they seek that which is most for their worldly profit and advantage, having no regard to the glory of God, the interest of Christ, and the welfare of the flock:

everyone for his gain from his quarter; from the province, city, or town he is in; from his archbishopric, bishopric, or parish; making the most of his benefice, of his tithes and revenues; increasing his salary as much as he can; getting as much as possible from all sorts of persons, rich and poor, high and low, that are under his jurisdiction; and this is the case of everyone, from the greatest to the least. The Targum is,

“everyone to spoil the substance of Israel;”

as the Pharisees devoured widows’ houses, (~~4134~~ Matthew 23:14).

Ver. 12. *Come ye, say they, &c.*] Either to their fellow bishops and priests, when got together, jovially carousing; or to the common people, encouraging them in luxury and intemperance:

I will fetch wine; out of his cellar, having good store of it, and that of the best, hence called “priests’ wine”; and so, at Paris and Louvain, the Popish priests called their wine “vinum theologicum”:

and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; fill their bellies and skins full of it till drunken with it; the drunkenness of priests in Popish counties is notorious, which seems here to be taxed and prophesied of:

for tomorrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant; the morrow shall be as good, and merry, and jovial a day as this, and better; and we shall have as much wine and strong drink to drink, or more; this they say to encourage their companions to drink, and not spare, and to put away the evil day far from them. The Targum is,

“saying, come, let us take wine, and be inebriated with old wine; and our dinner tomorrow shall be better than today, large, very large.”