

## Lesson 37 Isaiah 56:9-57:21 Two Parties – Problem and Solution

### Introduction

<b>Isaiah</b> <small>"He will lift up a standard for the nations...he will set a sign among the peoples."</small>		
<b>Book of the Anointed Conqueror</b> <b>56-66</b>		
<b>The Ideal and the Actual: The Needs and the Sins of the Lord's People</b>  <b>56:1-59:13</b>	<b>The Coming of the Anointed Conqueror</b>  <b>59:14-63:6</b>	<b>Prayer and Response: Steps to the New Heaven and New Earth</b>  <b>63:7-66:24</b>

Alec Motyer. *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (InterVarsity Press, 1996).

We have begun the third major section of Isaiah, the Book of the Conqueror. In our last lesson, I gave a brief overview of the chiastic structure of this major section. There are two outstanding parallel pairs of passages. Those are the inclusion of Gentiles at the beginning and end of the book, and the description of God as Divine Warrior at the end of chapter 59 and the beginning of chapter 63. These two parallel pairs suggest a more complex chiastic structure, but we are going to keep it simple, following Motyer's three part structure of beginning, end, and middle.

Motyer's titles are a little lengthy. He calls the beginning section, "The Ideal and the Actual: the Needs and the Sins of the Lord's People." That will be 56:1-59:13. That's the section we are in right now. The middle section has a direct title, "The coming of the Anointed Conqueror." That section is the one that begins and ends with the Divine Warrior passages. It's our middle. It goes from 59:14-63:6. Motyer's ending section is titled, "Prayer and Response: Steps to the New Heaven and New Earth." That's going to come in 63:7-66:24.

<b>Isaiah</b> <small>"He will lift up a standard for the nations...he will set a sign among the peoples."</small>		
<b>Book of the Anointed Conqueror</b> <b>56-66</b>		
<b>The Ideal and the Actual: The Needs and the Sins of the Lord's People</b> <b>56:1-59:13</b>		
<b>World People, Sabbath People, Praying People</b> <b>56:1-8</b>	<b>Two Parties: Problem and Solution</b> <b>56:9-57:21</b>	<b>Sin Exposed and Confessed</b> <b>58:1-59:13</b>

Alec Motyer. *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (InterVarsity Press, 1996).

So that's our top level structure of the Book of the Conqueror. With our last lesson, we have just started the beginning section, "The Ideal and the Actual: the Needs and the Sins of the Lord's People." And we have all experienced the ideal and the actual. Jesus Christ models for us as Christians the ideal of human obedience and love. We live in the actual reality that falls far short of that ideal. That's the gap in the experience of a believer. Isaiah is speaking to a much wider gap between the ideal and the actual present in God's people of Judah. So, that's not just a gap for believers: that's a gap between the non-believing of Judah and the believing of Judah. It's the kind of gap that appears in so-called Christian nation or, over time, in a church or in a denomination that may have started off quite well, but has strayed from relationship with God and commitment to His Word, and so you find this large group of people claiming to be Christians but really, there is only a remnant within the large group that is truly believing and following God according to His Word.

Isaiah described an ideal of covenant faithfulness to us in the introductory section that we covered in our last lesson. How ought God's people live? Well, "Preserve justice and do righteousness." Isaiah developed that covenant faithfulness with the unexpected models of the eunuch and the foreigner. What is God's ideal for His people? It does not have to do with past religious behavior, physical mutilation, ethnicity. It has to do with choosing what pleases the Lord; joining yourself to Him; ministering to Him; loving His name; keeping from profaning the Sabbath; holding fast to His

Covenant, and rejoicing in the house of prayer.” The eunuch and foreigner who turn to God are able to exemplify the humble obedience of true relationship with God.

Motyer sees in this first major section a move from this ideal God that desires for Judah to a description of the actual that exists in Judah. And that first subsection, which covers the ideal, Motyer titled, “World People, Sabbath People, Praying People.” That was our last lesson. The second and third subsections covers the actual. Motyer titles the second subsection, “Two Parties: Problem and Solution,” and, “Sin Exposed and Confessed.” We will address the first of those in this lesson, looking at Isaiah 56:9-57:21.

Before we get into that text, I want to cover an important interpretation question. I am going to do this for each of our first three lessons in the Book of the Conqueror, because clarifying these three questions is going to help us a lot as we interpret what we see here.

*How does Isaiah develop his theological theme of righteousness and grace?*

We already addressed one significant interpretation question in our last lesson. It was this, “What theological contribution does this final book make to the whole of Isaiah?” That’s a big-picture question we want to ask as we observe any book of the Bible. Moving from one major section to another, we want to pause and ponder, “Why does the author keep going? What more does this text add?”

Isaiah ended the Book of the Servant, chapters 40-55, so profoundly that we could imagine him just stopping at chapter 55. He gave us in chapter 53 the revelation of an atoning human sacrifice for the sins of God’s people, and then in chapters 54 and 55 an open invitation of grace for all peoples to come to God’s table without cost. So, why not end there? What more does Isaiah have in mind?

I mentioned in our last lesson a couple of important areas of theological development that seem to be indicated by an overview of this last book. First, Isaiah has more to say about the Messiah. He has pictured Him as the ideal King and as the ideal Servant. In this final book, the Messiah will be pictured as an Anointed Conqueror.

A second theological theme whose development we follow through Isaiah is the theme concerning righteousness. In the Book of the King, Judah was called to righteous obedience but found wanting. A solution was hinted at but not described. In the Book of the Servant, Isaiah declared righteousness as a gift from God. The death of the Servant justifies the many. That is how God’s people are declared, righteous. Now we have a classic problem. If righteousness is provided by someone else, is there any requirement to live righteously? And if there is requirement to live righteously, is there any motivation to do so? Knowing that sin will be covered by grace, why live up to the requirement?

And there is a requirement. The requirement does still stand. Grace does not remove the obligation of doing right from God’s people. We got that in the first verse of the Book of the Conqueror.

“Preserve justice and do righteousness,  
For My salvation is about to come  
And My righteousness to be revealed.

The righteousness to be revealed through the Suffering Servant is not a reason to abandon personal righteousness. Rather, it is a reason to do righteousness. We might rightly ask, how so? Or why? If grace covers sin, why not sin? That’s the first interpretive question we want to keep in mind as we go. How does Isaiah move forward the theological development of grace and righteousness in this final book?

*Who is Isaiah’s primary audience?*

The question interpretive question I want to address, the one we are going to address in this lesson is basic to all good interpretation, and that is the question of audience, “Who is Isaiah’s primary audience?”

Identifying the audience is critical to interpretation. The text means what the author intended it to mean for the original audience. We naturally tend to interpret the Biblical text according to what it means to us. For example, we New Covenant believers tend to interpret the word, “redemption,” in

the Book of the Servant as always meaning, “redemption from sin.” Whereas the Jews who had already seen the Northern Kingdom exiled to foreign lands, would better understand that redemption can mean, “national deliverance from foreign oppression.” We have to understand the original meaning each time the word, “redemption,” is used according to the primary audience. Then we can apply that meaning to our New Covenant context.

The question of primary audience is a bit complicated in Isaiah because the literary audience is varied throughout the text. And I am using that phrase, “literary audience,” to define the person or persons spoken to in a particular passage. For example, when Isaiah addresses King Ahaz directly, his words are meant for Ahaz. Ahaz is the literary audience. But the whole story about Ahaz is included into the book of Isaiah not for Ahaz but for who? Who is the audience that receives the completed work of Isaiah? And why did Isaiah want them to know about Ahaz? What was he communicating to them through the story of Ahaz?

Ahaz is not the only literary audience in the book. The Book of the King has addresses to Ahaz, to his son Hezekiah, to the Northern Kingdom Israel, to the Southern Kingdom Judah, to the disciples of Isaiah, and to a plethora of Gentile nations, such as Edom, Moab, Philistia, Assyria, and Egypt. These audiences are all directly addressed in the Book of the King. They are the literary audiences in the work.

Moving into the book of the Servant, God’s call to comfort His people looks ahead to future audiences that have not yet been born. Isaiah speaks to the generation that will experience the Babylonian exile; further ahead to the generation that will experience national redemption and return to Israel; and even further ahead to the people who will fail to esteem the Servant of God who gives his life for them. Just as the generation of Ahaz is not the primary audience, so also the future generations of exile, return, and deliverance are not the primary audience of Isaiah.

We noticed in our last lesson that one of the features of the Book of the Conqueror is how sermonically the passages seem to be, especially in the first chapters. Isaiah seems to be speaking directly to his primary audience. He has written about the past and the future in order to communicate directly to his present generation. This is not the first time he has done this. He has spoken directly to the people of Judah throughout. Though, having come to the end, I think we can be more confident that he is now talking directly to the present generation.

And which generation is that? Who is the “you” of chapters 56-59? Our first indication came in the very first verse of Isaiah which characterizes the book as, “The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, concerning Judah and Jerusalem which he saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, Kings of Judah.” So, he has brought together the visions, the prophecies of his ministry through these four kings into a final master work. The primary audience is not living in the days of Uzziah, or Jotham, or Ahaz but in the days of the final king, Hezekiah. This is when the book of Isaiah gets produced in its end form that we have it in. And judging from the narrative about Hezekiah at the end of the Book of the King, I assume that we are now in the later years of his reign. That’s Isaiah’s primary audience. This is the generation that received the completed work of Isaiah. The people to whom he wrote were the people of Judah who were living at the end of Hezekiah’s reign.

And though the next king Manasseh is not figured into that first verse of the book, I think we need to recognize him as an important presence in this time period. As often happened with Jewish kings, Manasseh co-reigned with his father Hezekiah for 10 years until his father’s death. The description of the people of Judah that we are about to encounter in this lesson fits well with the description of Manasseh’s reign. In fact, the terrible swing from Hezekiah’s faithfulness to Manasseh’s apostasy makes more sense if the leadership and people were already headed into that direction under which Manasseh would openly lead them.

Manasseh was only 12 years old when he became king with his father in 696 BC. So in that beginning he wasn’t really reigning. Perhaps he was declared king early because of Hezekiah’s awareness that his time on earth was limited. We read about that in chapter 39, that Hezekiah had this near-death

experience through sickness and then he was promised an additional 15 years, and so maybe he has drawn his son into co-reign with him because of awareness of his coming death. So this is a time for Manasseh to be prepared to take over. We can only guess at Manasseh's influence over the next 10 years. I don't think we can discern how much Manasseh influenced the culture around him versus how much he was influenced by that culture. By the time he took over the rule of Judah at 22 years of age, he had completely rejected the faith of his father. Here is an account of his reign from 2 Kings 21:1-16 that also gives us a sense of this generation that Isaiah is writing to.

<sup>2</sup> [Manasseh] did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD dispossessed before the sons of Israel. <sup>3</sup> For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he erected altars for Baal and made an Asherah, as Ahab king of Israel had done, and worshiped all the host of heaven and served them. <sup>4</sup> He built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "In Jerusalem I will put My name." <sup>5</sup> For he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. <sup>6</sup> He made his son pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and used divination, and dealt with mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD provoking *Him to anger*. <sup>7</sup> Then he set the carved image of Asherah that he had made, in the house of which the LORD said to David and to his son Solomon, "In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever. <sup>8</sup> And I will not make the feet of Israel wander anymore from the land which I gave their fathers, if only they will observe to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that My servant Moses commanded them." <sup>9</sup> But they did not listen, and Manasseh seduced them to do evil more than the nations whom the LORD destroyed before the sons of Israel...<sup>16</sup> Moreover, Manasseh shed very much innocent blood until he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another;

That's where this generation is headed. As we will see in the following text, they may have already been there with only the faithfulness of Hezekiah holding back the full embrace of idolatry at the top. Judging this generation as the primary audience of Isaiah's master work, we recognize that he is writing a rebuke that is also a warning, an offer, and an invitation. Isaiah exemplifies the role of the lawsuit prophet. He is not mediating a new covenant. He is calling the people back to the existing covenant. He is warning them of the danger inherent in their covenant rebellion against God and paints a picture of the covenant blessing available to those who will walk with God.

This is where you are and this is where you are headed. Wake up. Return to the Lord. Receive His grace. Live for Him. Judah falls far short of the ideal communicated in 56:1-8. Isaiah is now describing the actual state of Judah in our present passage of Isaiah 56:9-57:21. We have generally identified our audience as the generation of Judah living at the end of King Hezekiah's reign. This passage is going to give us more insight into that generation. Motyer calls this subsection, "Two Parties: Problem and Solution." As we read through, we can expect to see two distinct groups or parties. Isaiah starts with a description of Judah's leadership, and then moves on to a description of Judah's people. Those are not the two parties. This is not the distinction between leadership and people. The two parties exist among the leadership, and the two parties exist among the people. We begin with the failure of leadership in 56:9-12.

### **The Failure of Leadership (56:9-12)**

<sup>9</sup> All you beasts of the field, Come to eat.	All you beasts in the forest,
<sup>10</sup> His watchmen are blind, All of them are mute dogs Dreamers lying down,	All of them know nothing. unable to bark, who love to slumber;
<sup>11</sup> And the dogs are greedy, And they are shepherds They have all turned to their own way,	they are not satisfied. who have no understanding; Each one to his unjust gain, to the last one.
<sup>12</sup> "Come," they say, "let us get wine, And tomorrow will be like today,	and let us drink heavily of strong drink; only more so."

Imagine a village or town with open gates and no watchmen. No one sees the danger. No one is able to raise an alarm. This passage begins with an invitation to predatory forces.

<sup>9</sup> All you beasts of the field, Come to eat. All you beasts in the forest,

Judah is vulnerable to human or spiritual aggression, because her leaders lack discernment. They are not able to respond to the dangers threatening their society. They do not see the danger.

<sup>10</sup> His watchmen are blind, All of them know nothing.

And even if they did see the dangers, they are not able to respond.

All of them are mute dogs unable to bark,

They see reality incorrectly as those in a dream. They prefer the dream.

Dreamers lying down, who love to slumber;

The lack of discernment and diligence is a consequence of their own immoral lifestyles.

<sup>11</sup> And the dogs are greedy, they are not satisfied.  
And they are shepherds who have no understanding;  
They have all turned to their own way, Each one to his unjust gain, to the last one.

This is a poetic link back to chapter 53 with a little twist: there, we were sheep who have all gone our own way and we need someone to redeem us, to die in our place. These are the shepherds who have all gone their own way. These shepherds have no understanding because they have given themselves over to insatiable greed. They have rejected the law of God as the governing force of society. They have turned to their own way to get what they want. Isaiah says they have turned to unjust gain. Not just gain but “unjust gain.” Gain could be unjust by violating civil law, such as outright theft. It could also be unjust by staying within civil law but violating moral law, using deceptive practices in businesses, or leveraging the less wealthy off their land, or delaying payment to poor workers, or overworking children.

The leaders of Judah focus on their own wealth and short-term enjoyment with no consideration of the long-term consequences of their irresponsibility.

<sup>12</sup> “Come,” they say, “let us get wine, and let us drink heavily of strong drink;  
And tomorrow will be like today, only more so.”

That’s what is going on at the top levels of Judah. The leaders are drivers of hardship in society. Their failure to lead with integrity and responsibility opens society to threat, imagined by Isaiah as beasts. Society is vulnerable. The leaders bear significant responsibility. They are supposed to be watchmen and shepherds, looking out for dangers to the people. They are supposed to warn, and guide, and protect. The good shepherd cares for the well-being of the flock. These leaders care for their own selfish desires. They abuse the sheep unjustly. We began the passage with an invitation to beasts to “Come and eat.” We end the passage with the leaders feasting in oblivion to the danger they invite into society. And in their narrow minded, self-centered greed, they dream that they will feed off society day after day with no consequences.

The failure of godly leadership at the top of society does nothing to address a deeper problem spreading at the ground level of society. The leaders are not the only problem. The people of Judah have left behind Covenant with God to seek other sources of spiritual power. A shift in who a people worships is always accompanied by a shift in thinking and a shift in behavior. This society has turned to its own way, worshiping contrary to the way of God, thinking contrary to the way of God, and behaving contrary to the way of God.

Isaiah describes the pervasive problem in 57:1-21. Two different parties are present in the society of Judah, the righteous and the wicked. The passage has an interesting A, B, A, B structure. Isaiah starts with a two-verse introduction of the righteous who are promised peace. Then he gives us a longer description of the wicked, described as the “prostitute’s children.” He follows that with a longer description of the righteous, described as “God’s household.” And he ends with a two-verse

description of the wicked who are promised no peace. The pattern is short description of righteous with peace, long description of the wicked, long description of the righteous, short description of the wicked with no peace. We start with the short description of the righteous in 57:1-2.

**The Failure of the People (57:1-21)**

*The Peace of the Righteous (1-2)*

<p><sup>1</sup> The righteous man perishes, And devout men are taken away,</p>	<p>and no man takes it to heart; while no one understands. For the righteous man is taken away from evil,</p>
<p><sup>2</sup> He enters into peace;</p>	<p>They rest in their beds, Each one who walked in his upright way.</p>

The suffering of the righteous indicates a breakdown in the society of Judah. The righteous perish and the majority fail to recognize the significance of this to the broader culture. What has become of a society when the righteous perish and the devout are taken away, and nobody cares? What has become of a society that no longer values the stability and health provided by those who live according to the wisdom of God in truthfulness, and compassion, and morality? Though the righteous suffer, they still have access to the shalom or well-being of life with God.

<p><sup>2</sup> [The righteous person] enters into peace;</p>	<p>They rest in their beds, Each one who walked in his upright way.</p>
---	---

Contrary to leaders who love to slumber in the dreams of a world they have created, the Covenant faithful lay down in peace, knowing that they walk in relationship with God. They experience a spiritual well-being in this life and look ahead to eternal well-being with God.

These are not the majority. The majority of Judah has turned away from Yahweh. They are described in 57:3-13 as “the prostitute’s children.”

*The Prostitutes Household (3-13)*

<p><sup>3</sup> “But you come here,</p>	<p>sons of a sorceress, Offspring of an adulterer and a prostitute.</p>
<p><sup>4</sup> “Against whom do you jest? Are you not children of rebellion,</p>	<p>Against whom do you open wide your mouth And stick out your tongue? Offspring of deceit,</p>
<p><sup>5</sup> Who inflame yourselves among the oaks, Who slaughter the children in the ravines,</p>	<p>Under every luxuriant tree, Under the clefts of the crags?</p>
<p><sup>6</sup> “Among the smooth stones of the ravine Even to them you have poured out a drink offering,</p>	<p>Is your portion, they are your lot; You have made a grain offering. Shall I relent concerning these things?</p>
<p><sup>7</sup> “Upon a high and lofty mountain You also went up there</p>	<p>You have made your bed. to offer sacrifice.</p>
<p><sup>8</sup> “Behind the door and the doorpost Indeed, far removed from Me, you have uncovered yourself, And you have made an agreement for yourself with them,</p>	<p>You have set up your sign; And have gone up and made your bed wide. You have loved their bed,</p>
<p><sup>9</sup> “You have journeyed to the king with oil You have sent your envoys a great distance</p>	<p>You have looked on their manhood. And increased your perfumes; And made them go down to Sheol.</p>
<p><sup>10</sup> “You were tired out by the length of your road, You found renewed strength,</p>	<p>Yet you did not say, ‘It is hopeless.’ Therefore you did not faint.</p>
<p><sup>11</sup> “Of whom were you worried and fearful and did not remember Me Was I not silent even for a long time</p>	<p>When you lied, Nor give Me a thought? So you do not fear Me?</p>

- <sup>12</sup> "I will declare your righteousness and your deeds,  
But they will not profit you.
- <sup>13</sup> "When you cry out, let your collection of idols But the wind will carry all of them up,  
deliver you. And a breath will take them away.  
But he who takes refuge in Me will inherit the land And will possess My holy mountain."

The sexual language of "adulterer" and "prostitute" are spiritual metaphors here. Like a man who has turned from the covenant of marriage to a prostitute, so are the people of Judah who have turned from Covenant relationship with Yahweh to the worship of false gods. The prostitute's children are described as disrespectful, rude, bullying children in 3-5.

- <sup>3</sup> "But you come here, sons of a sorceress,  
Offspring of an adulterer and a prostitute.
- <sup>4</sup> "Against whom do you jest? Against whom do you open wide your mouth  
And stick out your tongue?  
Are you not children of rebellion, Offspring of deceit,
- <sup>5</sup> Who inflame yourselves among the oaks, Under every luxuriant tree,  
Who slaughter the children in the ravines, Under the clefts of the crags?"

I assume these children are making fun of the children of God who live according to God's ways. Isaiah calls them, "children of deceit." They scoff at the wisdom of God, but the dreams they call true are destroying society. The charge of inflaming themselves among the oaks is not a pure spiritual metaphor. Canaanite religion recognized the tree as a symbol of fertility. The fertility cult encouraged sexual rites as an act of worship. The practitioner sought to earn a god's favor through sex with a temple prostitute in order to have children, or to increase the fruitfulness of crops, or to gain some other benefit. 2 Kings 23:7 reports that sometime during the reign of Manasseh or his son Amon, temple prostitution had even made its way into the Temple of God.

The connection between false worship and ungodly sexual practices is a long one. Idolatry and illicit sexual activity were connected 700 years before Isaiah by Moses in Leviticus 18-20, and 700 years after Isaiah by Paul in Romans 1:18-32. It's not easy to explain whether false worship leads to perverted desires, or whether perverted desires lead us to false worship. On one hand, we fashion our gods to fit our desires, And on the other one, we become like the gods we serve.

This is true of present Western society. One of the reasons to turn from God to paganism is to give free reign to sexual desire. Sexual restriction is considered oppressive. What God calls good is made out to be bad. So, society either molds God into a new permissive image, or turns to other gods, or rejects the idea of spiritual authority altogether. Leaders of this kind of thinking are like those blind watchmen who invite beasts to come in and feed. While giving free reign to their own desires, they fail to discern the threat to society that comes with false gods they have set up to validate their behavior. They dream a false and destructive dream.

The Judeans have largely turned to the more permissive pagan gods. Illicit sex is not the worst of their sins. The children of the prostitute have embraced the Canaanite practice of child sacrifice associated with the god Molech. "They slaughter the children in the ravines under the clefts of the crags." There is hardly a better example of self-destruction in a society. I think we see it in a different way in modern Western society. For example, to imagine a society that would allow prepubescent children to go through gender re-assignment. We are sacrificing children to the gods that allow our own permissive behavior. It's a dream; it's an unhealthy dream. It's a false view that threatens society.

In verse 6, the second person pronoun, "you," shifts to a feminine singular. So, from the plural, "you all," to the singular, "you." Isaiah is moving from a description of the prostitute's children to a description of the prostitute. Motyer says we should understand this passage as the urge in human beings to turn away from the goodness and stability of life with God to find stability and satisfaction of desire elsewhere. That is the spirit of the prostitute. Human flesh is wayward in and of itself. At the same time, Satan and his demons

work in society to manipulate our wayward hearts. The spirit of the prostitute can be understood as both the human propensity to go our own way and the demonic influence of paganism that urges us on.

Verse 6 speaks of the smooth stones of a river bed set up as idols.

<p><sup>6</sup> “Among the smooth stones of the ravine Even to them you have poured out a drink offering, Shall I relent concerning these things?</p>	<p>Is your portion, they are your lot; You have made a grain offering.</p>
---	--

Isaiah always speaks of pagan idolatry in a derogatory way. They are but “stones picked up from a ravine.” That’s your inheritance. The Hebrew word for “smooth” also means, “slippery.” Motyer thinks that’s an intentional word play. Your gods are merely smooth stones. They are also slippery, deceitful, waiting to throw you off into the ravine.

Moving from smooth stones in the river valleys to high and lofty mountains, Isaiah communicates the scope of idolatry in Judah. It covers the land from low to high. Both Motyer and Oswalt comment on the trickiness of interpreting verses 7-8.

<p><sup>7</sup> “Upon a high and lofty mountain You also went up there <sup>8</sup> “Behind the door and the doorpost Indeed, far removed from Me, you have uncovered yourself, And you have made an agreement for yourself with them,</p>	<p>You have made your bed. to offer sacrifice. You have set up your sign; And have gone up and made your bed wide. You have loved their bed, You have looked on their manhood.</p>
--	--

Door and doorpost seem to be a reference from the Deuteronomic law to write God’s word on the doorposts of the house. Scholar’s debate whether this means a pagan sign has been set up on the doorposts in place of God’s word, or whether God’s word is kept, but hidden on the inside of the doorpost in a complacent attempt to join in the cultural shift to paganism while holding on to God. Even without precise interpretation, we understand Isaiah’s accusation here, that a majority of people in Judah have turned from God to openly engage in pagan ritual and sinful behavior.

Turning from God to pagan worship has a political effect on the nation seen in verses 9-10.

<p><sup>9</sup> “You have journeyed to the king with oil You have sent your envoys a great distance <sup>10</sup> “You were tired out by the length of your road, You found renewed strength,</p>	<p>And increased your perfumes; And made them go down to Sheol. Yet you did not say, ‘It is hopeless.’ Therefore you did not faint.</p>
---	---

Seeking stability in foreign powers was a theme earlier in the Book of the King. In chapter 7, Ahaz made covenant with Assyria. And in chapter 28-35, Hezekiah’s counselors made covenant with Egypt. Looking for help from foreign kings is connected to pagan spiritual practice. Powerful kings are assumed to have favor with powerful gods. Ahaz gave us an example. After making covenant with Assyria, he set up an Assyrian altar in the Temple of God. He wanted Judah to be like Assyria and concluded Judah should worship Yahweh according to the ways of Assyria.

The people of God do not trust the Word of God anymore. Success is found in the spiritual practices of other people, symbolized by the prostituted, or success is found in the political and economic practices of other people, symbolized by the foreign king. Isaiah’s language foreshadows John’s vision in Revelation of the king and the prostitute that reign over the city of man. There is a turning towards spiritual practices, economic practices, political practices to find success.

The people of Judah are so motivated by the success of foreign cultures that they renew their strength and they do not faint the further afield they search. They don’t see that the further away from God they go, the more hopeless it is. They are driven by the spirit of the prostitute to seek out new avenues of spiritual power apart from the God whose Temple is right there among them. They



have His Word, but they go farther and farther afield. Their tireless search parodies the promise of God in 40:31 that,

those who wait for the LORD	Will gain new strength;
They will mount up <i>with</i> wings like eagles,	They will run and not get tired,
They will walk and not become weary.	

But these find renewed strength, they do not faint in their vain search for something else. God asks, about their motivation in verses 11-12.

<sup>11</sup> "Of whom were you worried and fearful and did not remember Me Was I not silent even for a long time	When you lied, Nor give Me a thought? So you do not fear Me?
<sup>12</sup> "I will declare your righteousness	and your deeds, But they will not profit you.

Fear, respect, awe of the Lord, that's the beginning of wisdom. So says Proverbs, so says Job, so says Ecclesiastes. But the fear of the Lord has ceased to motivate this society. They have no sense of the real presence of God. Verse 13 concludes this longer description of the wicked.

<sup>13</sup> "When you cry out, let your collection of idols deliver you. But he who takes refuge in Me will inherit the land	But the wind will carry all of them up, And a breath will take them away. And will possess My holy mountain."
--	---

The spirit of the prostitute deep within the human heart leads the people of Judah away from God to the failed security of false gods. That last line of verse 13 transitions us towards a description of God's house. That last line of verse 13 transitions us from the wicked to the righteous. The language of the beatitudes is present there in more than one place in this passage. Isaiah says, "he who takes refuge in Me will inherit the land." Jesus says in Matthew 5:5, "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." The Kingdom of God belongs to the meek, to those who take refuge in Him. They will be declared children of God. The description of God's household is in verses 14-19.

*God's Household (14-19)*

<sup>14</sup> And it will be said, "Build up, build up, prepare the way,	Remove every obstacle out of the way of My people."
<sup>15</sup> For thus says the high and exalted One "I dwell on a high and holy place, In order to revive the spirit of the lowly	Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, And also with the contrite and lowly of spirit And to revive the heart of the contrite.
<sup>16</sup> "For I will not contend forever, For the spirit would grow faint before Me,	Nor will I always be angry; And the breath of those whom I have made.
<sup>17</sup> "Because of the iniquity of his unjust gain I was angry	and struck him; I hid My face and was angry,  And he went on turning away, in the way of his heart.
<sup>18</sup> "I have seen his ways, but I will heal him;	I will lead him and restore comfort to him and to his mourners,
<sup>19</sup> Creating the praise of the lips.	Peace, peace to him who is far and to him who is near," Says the LORD, "and I will heal him."

The righteous were introduced as a persecuted people in Judah who somehow had access to the peace of God. In this passage, that inheritance of peace is connected with the future coming of the Messiah.

<sup>14</sup> And it will be said, "Build up, build up, prepare the way,	Remove every obstacle out of the way of My people."
---	--

That clear way for the people of God is connected to the clear way of the Messiah who is coming. Specifically, it will be said by John the Baptist who comes as the forerunner to Jesus, declaring the

