

place? Is it that the condition of emasculation, or being an Ammonite or a Moabite, is intrinsically evil? Hardly. It is to make a theological point (as the ceremonial laws did). With respect to the eunuch, the purpose of the prohibition is clearly to teach the goodness of nature as we find it in creation. Sexuality is a good part of God's creation, and while we are not to worship it, neither are we to condone its destruction. When one understands and incorporates that point into one's thinking, one should not use the law to crush people under its weight. Similarly, with the Ammonites and Moabites a point about historical responsibility was being made. We must not forget that actions have consequences, especially when those actions are in opposition to God's plan to bring his salvation into the world. But again, once the point has been made, a greater point can take precedence: God intends to 'make a feast for all peoples'" (Oswalt 1998: 458).

"Again, Isaiah seems to say, the great temptation in the return will be to rest in the glories of unconditional election and strong hope. But to do that would be to miss the point of the election and to frustrate the hope. You are called, he says, to a kind of righteousness that is possible only for those who live in humble reliance (57:15; 66:2) on the strength of God, the Warrior. Those who do this, even if they are a Moabite or a eunuch (56:1-8), are more truly the servants of God (56:6) than some purebred Israelite who is exulting in eschatological hope and depending on the holiness procured by his sacrifices (which are pagan and worthless, 65:2-7; 65:3)" (Oswalt 1998: 464).

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Do you "maintain justice" and "do what is right" – with your family, in your work, with the Lord?

What does this passage teach us about the character of the Lord?

Does your attitude or actions towards "outsiders" need to be revised in light of the Lord's design?

ISAIAH 56: A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL NATIONS

OUTLINE OF ISAIAH 40-66

- III. The Holy One of Israel is sovereign over the restoration and salvation of his people (40:1-66:24).
 - A. The Holy One of Israel vindicates his glory over idols by predicting the restoration of his people from Babylon (40:1-48:22).
 - B. The Servant of the Lord will suffer to save his people (49:1-55:13).
 - C. The Holy One of Israel will return blessing to the righteous and retribution to the evil (56:1-59:21).
 - 1. The Lord will reward the righteous and expose the wicked (56:1-57:21).
 - a) **Invitation to worship the Lord extended to eunuchs and foreigners (56:1-8).**
 - b) Judgment decreed for the leaders and the people (56:9-57:13).
 - c) Restoration promised to those who are contrite (57:14-21).
 - 2. The Lord will recognize those righteous in heart (58:1-59:21).
 - D. The Holy One of Israel will restore his people to a glorious new home (60:1-66:24).

OUTLINE OF ISAIAH 56

- I. Invitation to worship the Lord extended to eunuchs and foreigners (56:1-8).
 - A. The Lord desires righteous living in light of his coming (56:1-2).
 - B. The Lord welcomes all who are faithful to him (56:3-7).
 - 1. Eunuchs are promised great blessing if they keep the covenant (56:3-5).
 - 2. Foreigners are promised great blessing if they worship the Lord (56:6-7).
 - C. The Lord will restore to himself not only exiles of Israel but also others (56:8).

NOTES

“This oracle seems to be dealing with a couple of questions raised by the wide-open invitation for everyone to come to enjoy what God offers through his everlasting covenant in chap. 55. Can just anyone come, enjoy this covenant relationship, and worship at God’s Holy Mountain (56:7; 60–62)? What are the central things God requires of Gentiles who come and want to worship at this temple?” (Smith 2009: 525).

v1 “Here is the key to the entire division: the righteousness that chs. 1–39 called for, but that the people could not produce, can be produced by means of the righteousness of God that chs. 40–55 revealed (cf. 53:1)” (Oswalt 1998: 455).

v1 “The hope of enjoying God’s salvation (“my salvation” *yěšû’ātî*) should motivate people to live according to kingdom principles both now and in the future because in this new kingdom justice and “my righteousness” will reign and govern all behavior (9:7; 60:17)” (Smith 2009: 529).

vv4-5 “This is another way of expressing co-equal (not second-class) participation. To them the Lord grants access to his presence (*temple ... walls*), personal acceptance (*memorial ... name*), more than abundant recompense for deprivations (*better than*) and eternal security (*everlasting ... not cut off*)” (Motyer 1999: 397).

v4 “The repetition of the first person pronouns is important, because they speak of relationship. These people are on God’s side (Exod. 32:26). They love what he loves, hate what he hates, want what he wants. They do not keep the Sabbaths because they must or they will be destroyed. They keep them because they are the Lord’s Sabbaths. Their behavior is an expression of a relationship. This is what God longs for in his people, and if anyone will do this, their parentage or their body has nothing to do with their acceptability” (Oswalt 1998: 458).

v5 “Instead of being limited to what little posterity children could give him, the eunuch who trusts God will live forever in God’s

house (Ps. 23:6).... The Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:27–39) is an example of what this verse is about. He has been remembered because of his faith far longer than if he had simply had sons and daughters” (Oswalt 1998: 459).

v5 “The future blessings promised to the eunuchs who hold fast to the covenant are not recounted in full. Since these people will have no children, no continuing dynasty, and no pictures on the walls of future homes to remember them, God promises that there will be a future memory of their faithfulness within God’s temple environment (within the temple walls of his house)” (Smith 2009: 534).

vv6-7 “Being “joined to God” implies that they have forsaken all of their former gods and have chosen to bind themselves to God alone and worship (an act of “temple service” as in 60:7; 61:6) only Israel’s God. They do not just identify with God in some general cultural or external way; they love God’s name and show this in their worship. Each of these characteristics expresses the depth of their devotion and the seriousness of these foreigners’ commitment to honor God” (Smith 2009: 535).

v7 “This is what Solomon had envisaged long before (1 K. 8:41–43), and what Malachi would see as inevitable (1:11). God had not chosen Israel and given them all that he did in order to shut out the world, but to bring in the world. All of Israel’s separation from the world was in order to keep Israel from being absorbed into the world and thus losing the ability to call the world out of itself into the blessings of God. But should Israel ever come to believe that its separation was so that Israel could keep her God and his blessings to herself, then all was lost. It is precisely this attitude that infuriated Jesus (Matt. 21:13) and that Isaiah is countering in this segment and in this division” (Oswalt 1998: 460–61).

“Deut. 23:1–8 is explicit on these points: neither eunuchs nor Ammonites nor Moabites are to have any place in the congregation.... How can one scripture so flatly contradict another?... The issue is: What is the point of this law in the first