

15:32–36). But verses 13–14 go beyond getting the timetable right; they are dominated by the word *delight* (13c, 14a). The heart is so captivated by God that the day set apart is a joy. This is the reason for the Sabbath emphasis in chapters 56–66; it is the symbol of a whole life and heart devoted to the Lord” (Motyer 1993: 478).

vv13-14 “Here we reorient the compasses of our spirits to the true north of God’s gracious character, remembering as we give one-seventh of our time to him and his concerns that all our time is his. For those who approach the Sabbath in this way, the day is a precious gift (the sense of *’ōneg, delight*, v. 13). It is a special day, a *holy* one, to be guarded jealously, not because God will destroy us if we lift a pencil or throw a ball, but because here we have another chance to remind ourselves about what matters and what does not, about what passes away and what survives, about the fact that all we are and have is his, a gift freely given and freely to be returned to the Giver” (Oswalt 1998: 508-9).

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Does God see a difference between your external practice and your internal devotion? Are you more obedient to God at church than elsewhere?

Do you oppress others?

Should you fast? When and why? If you have not fasted in recent years, should you do something *today* to act upon your conviction so that it does not become a quickly forgotten Sunday School lesson?

### SOURCES CITED

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## ISAIAH 58: THE FASTING GOD DESPISES AND DESIRES

### 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 58

- I. The Fasting God Despises (vv. 1-5)
  - A. Call to Attention (v. 1)
  - B. Religious Appearance (vv. 2-3b)
  - C. Ethical Failure (vv. 3c-5)
- II. The Fasting God Desires (vv. 6-14)
  - A. God’s Delight: Help the needy (vv. 6-7)
    - B. God’s Blessing (vv. 8-9a)
  - C. God’s Delight: Cease oppressing and help oppressed (vv. 9b-10a)
    - D. God’s Blessing (vv. 10b-12)
  - E. God’s Delight: Keep the Shabbat (v. 13)
    - F. God’s Blessing (v. 14)

## NOTES

vv1-3 “Why are they engaging in this behavior? Is it to express gratitude and submission to God? No, for as their quotation in verse 3 indicates, they are engaging in the behavior for the very same reasons the pagans do, to manipulate God to act in their favor” (Oswalt 2003: 625).

vv2-3 “The danger is that we engage in them in order to wring blessings from a God who, we feel, is disinclined to give blessings unless we manipulate him in some way. Insofar as these attitudes, either consciously or unconsciously, govern our behavior, to that extent our religion is nothing more than idolatry. By contrast, to the extent that our religious life is characterized by self-forgetful service, freely given with no return expected, to that extent it is mirroring the life of God” (Oswalt 2003: 627).

vv2-3 “In this regard, there is cause for concern over the phenomenal popularity at present of the so-called ‘Prayer of Jabez’ (1 Chron. 4:9-10). While there is no indication this is the intent of those who have popularized it, the idolatrous use of this prayer is a real danger. To repeat a set of words as though its mere repetition guarantees divine favor is the furthest thing from biblical faith. Yet one hears this use of the prayer touted in many quarters. People say things like, ‘I’ve said that prayer every day for a month, and my business has never been so good.’ Surely the idea is not to repeat Jabez’s words but to emulate his attitude of committing himself to God. We do not find strength to deny ourselves and cultivate the life of the Holy Spirit by repeating words. We find such strength in abandoning ourselves to the sanctifying grace of God” (Oswalt 2003: 627).

v3 “But repentance is not for the purpose of getting God to do anything; it is an expression of the conviction that my ways are wrong and God’s ways are right, whether he does anything for me or not” (Oswalt 1998: 497).

vv3-4 “God dwells with the crushed and the lowly, and these proud religionists definitely do not fit in that category. They may be afflicting their bodies, but they are not afflicting their souls” (Oswalt 1998: 498).

vv6-12 “What evidence can the Israelites give that they are in such a relationship? Ethical behavior. Only twice in the Old Testament does God command persons to fast. But in hundreds of places he commands his people to treat other people, especially those weaker than they, with respect, justice, and kindness. So here God tells the people that if they want to stop doing something, they can stop oppressing the poor (58:6-7)” (Oswalt 2003: 625).

v6 “God’s nature is to give himself away to those who can never repay him. There is no clearer evidence of the presence of God in a person’s life than a replication of that same behavior” (Oswalt 1998: 503).

vv8-9a “If persons will live out God’s freedom in their relations with one another, then the satisfaction that they have been seeking in their religion (vv. 1-3a) will be theirs. If we make that satisfaction an end in itself, trying to grasp it for ourselves, it will elude us. But make God our focus through others, and it will fall on us” (Oswalt 1998: 504).

v10 “The people whom Isaiah addresses think that an important way of showing devotion to God is to deprive oneself of food for his sake—to make oneself *hungry*. The prophet says God would much rather we show our devotion to him by *alleviating* hunger in others. The one act is primarily self-oriented and the other is primarily self-forgetful” (Oswalt 1998: 506).

vv13-14 “For in every sense the Sabbath brings us to the heart of the matter. It is a real test of ‘heart’-religion to give a whole day to God and to do it with delight. The Sabbath is, first, a call to consecrate life’s timetable to God, to adopt a style for six days which allows the seventh day to be a day apart (Ex. 16:22-30; Nu.