

Arise, Shine, for Your Light Has Come

The attacks of 605-586 B. C. left Jerusalem, and most of Judah's cities, looted, burned and virtually leveled. Judah's population, once about 250,000, was decimated. Thousands were lost due to battle, starvation, disease, and execution. About 20,000, mostly royalty, civil and religious leaders, fighting men, skilled craftsmen, and their surviving families, were led 700 long miles to exile in Babylon. They arrived in an alien, sophisticated culture, its corrupt lifestyle linked with worship of idols. The Jews' own worship in the far-off, ruined temple became just a memory.

Instead of being dispersed as slaves into the vast pagan population, the exiles were mostly settled together in villages near the capital city, Babylon. Though not free, they weren't prisoners. The Lord's word in Jeremiah 29:4-7 came about: they were allowed to "build homes, plant gardens, increase in numbers and seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you." They had the Scriptures and the freedom to meet, pray and be taught in their synagogues. Some grew resigned, but many longed for Zion. Among these, God raised up people of encouraging faith: Daniel, Mordecai, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, etc. *In all of this, as God had promised, He was Himself "a sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone"* (Ezekiel 11:16).

One thing was unchanged: in spite of everything, many of the exiles weren't just far from the Land; they remained far from God. Like the conquered Land, their lives were ugly, under enemy control. Now as God is about to bring the people back to the Land, He continually calls them to return to Him, then to be His own transformed people: redeemed and redemptive in their world.

Invitation to Pray: My Redeemer, as I open Your Word, send it deep into my heart. Please do Your holy work in me. I desire Your praise to be created on my lips and in my life. Amen.

Scan Isaiah 57:12-19 and read Isaiah 58:1-5. While many of the exiles persisted in idolatry, at the same time, many of them began to stress observance of the Law, with its Sabbaths and fasts.

1. a. With the verses from ch. 57 in mind, what is commanded and made clear in 58:1?
 - b. Carefully read v. 2. What word(s) hint at a problem?
2. a. If they were genuinely *seeking God day by day* (v. 2a), what truths would become clear and impact their lives? **Time permitting**, see Isaiah 6:1-8; 40:9-11; 43:1-5, 44:21-22; 48:17-18; 51:3 (and/or any of your favorites from Isaiah).
 - b. Why are the other responses in 58:2 a natural outcome, if the first step is a reality?

3. In our seeking process, notice what is revealed in Ezekiel 34:11-16, Luke 19:10 and also Psalm 27:8 NAS (which reads: *When Thou didst say 'Seek My face,' my heart said to Thee, 'Thy face, O LORD, I shall seek'*).
4. As we watch God seek them, notice He begins to sift out the truth for His “spiritual-looking” people. A specific circumstance is targeted in v. 3a. What is their claim?

The fasting here may refer to individual acts, but it's more likely a congregational Sabbath day fast connected with the Day of Atonement. *This sole required fast in the Law arose from commands God gave for that high, holy day.* More fasts like this were added in the exile.

5. a. Read Leviticus 16:29-31 in several versions. What inner attitude commanded here became the *origin* for fasting on that day, and served as a pattern for genuine fasting?
- b. Briefly scan Deuteronomy 5:12-15, Jonah 3:1-10 for more fasting, Sabbath insights.

Now re-read Isaiah 58:3-5, realizing that these people ‘righteously’ made their workers *fast* too.

6. What details are brought to light here? With vv. 2-3 in mind, what reality is God revealing? (Compare Matthew 23:25-28.)

Recall God's gracious plan in 57:12-19. *Nothing can be healed unless it is revealed.*

7. a. Personal: Are you being shown that you are also just outwardly religious? How can you enter the confidence of true relationship with Christ your Redeemer? John 3:16, 1:12.
- b. Even as believers, what are specific ways that we continue to struggle with hypocrisy and inconsistency? (For instance, see Matthew 23:5-7, James 4:1-4, 2:1, 15-16.)
- c. What help can we find in these times? Time permitting, see Psalm 139:23-24; James 1:21-22, 4:6-10, 5:16.

In contrast to the exiles' idea of spiritual life, **read Isaiah 58:6-14**: imagine what this could look like back in the Land. (V. 6a could be *loose the bonds of wickedness*. See note below on v.13.)

8. God's redeemed are those who have truly sought Him and know His forgiveness. *Then and now, all who rest in and follow the Redeemer increasingly reflect Him*. In vv. 6-14, tell: **His Calls to Obedience** **His Promised Provision, Fruit** as we step out in faith

9. Going through this great list, did specifics come to mind? What specially *challenged* you? *Encouraged* you? Explain. (If you wish, note James 3:9-18, 1:27; II Corinthians 8:8-11.)

10. What impact might vv. 6-14 have on the people God is addressing?

V. 13 Note: *For centuries, God's Sabbath taught that salvation and life come from Him alone, with no part of these coming from man. He called His people to rest in that reality. The Sabbath foreshadowed the provision of the Cross, where Christ paid the full price for sin, saying, "It is finished." By faith alone now we enter the rest of His salvation, resting from our futile efforts to earn that which can only be given: the righteousness of God. As believers, we count on His work of salvation, His ongoing sanctifying work in our lives and His promise to present us blameless to God in heaven. Dig deeper: Romans 4:3-8; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:4-5; Hebrews 4:9-10.*

The false spirituality of some of the exiles was blinding and deceiving them. They might be initially excited at the prospect of God's promises, but their pretend faith may not dare the journey to Zion. Even if they did return to the Land, they would not find the blessings that come only from true belief. In Judah or in Babylon, they could remain captive to the rule and ruin of sin, and face ultimate judgment. But God continues His tireless pursuit of their hearts.

11. Responding to their claims to righteousness, God tells the real story in **59:1-8**. Underline phrases here that show the scope/intensity of the problem. (Romans 3:15-20 cites vv. 7-8.)

- 12 As He often does in seeking us out, God brings along someone of real faith to share truth. In response to vv. 1-8, what does Isaiah honestly describe/model for us all in **59:9-15a**?

13. Considering this dark situation (and the exiles' earlier charge that God didn't notice or see), what do you find in **59:15b-16**? (These recall the Servant song of chs. 52, 53.)

Chapter 59's end partly pictures God bringing the exiles home. *Much more fully, it shows Messiah's atonement, provision for His own, and second coming as King, when His Spirit has full sway.* **Scanning ch. 60**, note it goes on speaking of Christ's people, His work, and earthly reign, ending with scenes of heaven. Note repeated phrases like *will come, will bring, will go up*, etc. J. A. Motyer says this passage shows "a whole world on the move...coming home to God."

The verses we'll look at now will be fully realized when Jesus comes again. But believers are being blessed already in wonderful measure by these beautiful promises.

14. After bearing all sin and guilt on the Cross (59:15b-16), so no judgment remains for those who believe (59:20), Jesus was raised in great glory and victory.
 - a. Sum up what is seen coming to pass next, in 59:21-60:3.

 - b. As He promised, tell how this has unfolded for His people today, from John 16:6-7, 12-14; II Corinthians 3:16-4:7 (Do you see a bit of Isaiah 60:7b, and 9b here?)

 - c. What further truth is given in I Corinthians 6:9-11, 19 and II Corinthians 2:14-3:6?

15. Finish by reading Isaiah 60:19-22, to see what your Lord has for you, on ahead.

It's Christ's delight to seek us and take us just as we are, cleanse us by His precious blood, give us His very Self, and make us His own. Through life, then, He personally "sheds abroad in our hearts" His love, grace and truth. He works to bless, guide, mold and use us in our own world (all by His power, in His time, in His way). So it isn't a false front or a cleaned-up story that shows His splendor, draws others to Him, and brings Him praise. It's His actual work in us. Let's fully open our lives to Him, and share His truth and ourselves with others, in humble trust.

16. Look back through this lesson and recall what He has specifically shown you. Ask Him to bring about His loving work in your life. Praise Him that He is faithful and will do it.