

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Isaiah: Jahweh Is Salvation

Part LXVII: God's Call For True Versus False Worship

(Isaiah 58:1-14)

I. Introduction

- A. As it was in Isaiah's time, a lot of people today devote themselves to performing religious activities in hope of gaining God's blessing only to face a seeming dearth of God's leading and blessing in their lives.
- B. Isaiah 58:1-14 addresses this matter with a timeless, valuable lesson for us believers in Christ (as follows):

II. God's Call For True Versus False Worship, Isaiah 58:1-14.

- A. A great misunderstanding existed in Israel regarding God's relationship with her in Isaiah's era, Isaiah 58:1-2:
 - 1. God directed Isaiah to cry aloud and not to hold back, to lift up his voice like a trumpet and to show His people, the house of Jacob, their sins, Isaiah 58:1.
 - 2. Conversely, God realized that Israel's people daily sought Him to delight to know His ways as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake His commands, Isaiah 58:2a. God noted that they asked of Him just decisions and seemed eager to come near to God, Isaiah 58:2b ESV, NIV.
 - 3. This misunderstanding of God is voiced by Israel's people who asked Him, "Why have we fasted, and You see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and You take no knowledge of it?" (Isaiah 58:3a ESV)
- B. God then explained the cause of this misunderstanding, giving the remedy for it in Isaiah 58:3b-14:
 - 1. God had actually commanded only one fast, that of the annual Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29, 31), and only after the fall of Jerusalem did Israel institute other fasts (Zech. 7:3, 5; 8:19), B. K. C., O. T., p. 1113.
 - 2. However, even in adding all these ritual fasts, the people of Israel were seeking their own pleasure and exploiting their hired workers (Isaiah 28:3b), quarreling and fighting, hitting with wicked fists, Isa. 58:4a. Such actions on their fast days would not cause God to hear their prayers in heaven on high, Isaiah 58:4b.
 - 3. God asked the people if the fast He ordered had been intended merely to make them humble themselves, to bow down in seeming contrition, to spread sackcloth out and put ashes under them as mourners, Isa. 58:5.
 - 4. In reality, all such actions were useless to God if they were not accompanied by their loosing the bands of wickedness in letting unjustly held slaves go free (Isaiah 58:6; E. J. Young, The Book of Isaiah, 1974, v. III, p. 419), sharing one's food with the hungry (Isaiah 58:7a), bringing the homeless poor into their home (Isaiah 58:7b) and giving the destitute clothing to wear (Isaiah 58:7c).
 - 5. If these actions were performed, God said that Israel's light would break forth like the dawn that promises a greater light of the ensuing day, that Israel's healing would be sped up, her righteousness go before her and the glory of the Lord would be her rear guard, Isaiah 58:8.
 - 6. With such a change of heart exhibited by acts of righteousness toward others, Israel's people would call and the Lord would answer, they would cry, and He would say, "Here I am," Isaiah 58:9a.
 - 7. Indeed, in making such changes, Israel's light would rise in the darkness and her gloom be as the noonday for the brightness of God's blessing, Isaiah 58:9b-10.
 - 8. God would then guide her continually versus her current lack of His guidance, He would satisfy her desire in even scorched places where such desire would otherwise not be possible, He would make her bones strong (health) and she would be as a watered garden, a spring of water whose waters fail not, Isa. 58:11.
 - 9. Indeed, Israel's ancient ruins would be rebuilt and she would be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets in which people might dwell, Isaiah 58:12.
 - 10. If Israel turned back from doing her own pleasure on the Sabbath, calling God's holy day honorable and honoring it, not going her own way of seeking pleasure and talking idly with concerns only for her selfish welfare, then Israel would take delight in the Lord and He would make her ride on the heights of the earth in blessing, feeding her with the heritage of Jacob her forefather, Isaiah 58:13-14b.
 - 11. In making this promise potent, God added, "for the mouth of the Lord has spoken," Isaiah 58:14c ESV.

Lesson: *Israel missed God's blessings by focusing on performing external religious actions when God wanted heartfelt obedience and love for God and one's neighbor from His people.*

Application: *(1) May we not equate religious busyness with righteousness, for God seeks heartfelt obedience to His Word and love for Him and other people, and only when such real righteousness exists in us does He bless, guide and answer prayer, cf. 1 John 3:22. (2) If need be, then, may we repent for His blessing.*