

¹ Shout it aloud, do not hold back.

Raise your voice like a trumpet.

Declare to my people their rebellion

and to the house of Jacob their sins.

² For day after day they seek me out;

they seem eager to know my ways,

as if they were a nation that does what is right

and has not forsaken the commands of its God.

They ask me for just decisions

and seem eager for God to come near them.

³ 'Why have we fasted,' they say,

'and you have not seen it?

Why have we humbled ourselves,

and you have not noticed?'

"Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please

and exploit all your workers.

⁴ Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife,

and in striking each other with wicked fists.

You cannot fast as you do today

and expect your voice to be heard on high.

⁵ Is this the kind of fast I have chosen,

only a day for a man to humble himself?

Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed

and for lying on sackcloth and ashes?

Is that what you call a fast,

a day acceptable to the Lord ?

⁶ "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:

to loose the chains of injustice

and untie the cords of the yoke,

to set the oppressed free

and break every yoke?

⁷ Is it not to share your food with the hungry

and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter-

when you see the naked, to clothe him,

and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

⁸ Then your light will break forth like the dawn,

and your healing will quickly appear;

then your righteousness [1] will go before you,

and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.

⁹ Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;

you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.

“If you do away with the yoke of oppression,
with the pointing finger and malicious talk,
and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,
then your light will rise in the darkness,
and your night will become like the noonday.

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Commentary · Exegesis of Isaiah 58:1-10

By Elizabeth Sweet

With the opening words in Isaiah 58, the prophetic purpose is proclaimed. The prophetic mission was not to foresee future events or even to provide guidelines or a behavioral roadmap for the people to follow.

The primary role of prophets was to call God’s people to repentance, to demand their return to obedience and to remind the people what it means to live lives in keeping with the covenant. The opening command from God to Isaiah in 58:1 is, therefore, the most basic job description of a prophet: Shout out, do not hold back, raise your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins.

The “rebellion” and “sins” that Isaiah is to announce to the people of Judah — and to their Persian rulers — are surprising ones. Yahweh is not displeased here by some egregious BAD behavior. Rather it is what the Judeans obviously consider their very GOOD behavior that has gained them a spot on God’s bad list.

The re-established temple worship in Jerusalem had become a single-minded focus of the people. Public practices of piety, involving structured worship and extensive, repeated ritualized fasting, defined their religious life. The Hebrew people were caught worshipping worship. Not only are these worshipers convinced that acts of

