

**Is. 56:1 Thus saith the LORD, Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed.**

In the Lord's economy of time, the time of rejoicing being referenced at the end of chapter 55 is *near*.

"keep" = hedge about, guard, protect, be circumspect, preserve

I just thought the words used to define *keep* in the Hebrew were very interesting in connection to *judgment*, which is a reference to a verdict reached according to law, human or divine. I think we can safely deduce that divine law is being referenced as well as divine *justice*, that which is right or of moral virtue. When the LORD comes to deliver Israel, as well as all other believers on planet earth, He will rule with *righteousness*. The word for *righteousness* in the Hebrew is the exact same word as that for *justice* in the first part of the verse. I think the implication being that if you are not keeping judgment and doing justice, you will experience His divine justice in judgment.

**Is. 56:2 Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil.**

The LORD is declaring through His prophet that the man who understands this truth and applies it to his way of life will be happy. This message is of direct significance to the Jewish people. In Isaiah's day one of the most obvious signs of a person's relationship with the Lord was his observance of the Sabbath. To pollute the Sabbath is to break it, to not use it as God intended. God intended the Sabbath for the good of His people, as a time to meditate on Him without being distracted by the cares of this world, a time of worship and spiritual fellowship with Him, and a time of physical renewal.

As the scripture states, "*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments....*" (Psalm 111:10) If we spend no time with the LORD in meditating on who He is and our need to depend upon Him, we will inevitably begin to serve the flesh and fall prey to the deceit of the enemy. When the Sabbath is utilized as God intended, His people are more likely to "do His commandments."

To *pollute* the Sabbath would include going through ritual without the heart being involved. To go through the motions without the proper heart attitude is of no spiritual benefit, therefore, defeating the purpose for which God established the day. The Sabbath day was a day of strengthening one's heart connection to the LORD and giving one's body the rest needed to tackle the demands of the coming week. God is interested in our body as the conduit through which we can enjoy spiritual blessing in service to Him.

"keepeth his hand from doing any evil" – Obviously, one cannot live according to divine judgment and justice if he is involved in evil actions. Also obvious, one cannot be an evildoer and enjoy true happiness.

**Is. 56:3** Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I *am* a dry tree.

**Is. 56:4** For thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose *the things* that please me, and take hold of my covenant;

**Is. 56:5** Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off.

This section is one that shows the great compassion and mercy of God. He takes special care to give hope to those who are most rejected and hopeless—the stranger and the eunuch. The stranger being referenced is one who has joined himself to the LORD and has left his own people to join fellowship with God’s people, but finds that there are limits to the degree in which he can participate as part of the community.

In doing some research on the word *eunuch*, I found a verse I hadn’t noticed before.

*Matthew 19:12* For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother’s womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.

Of the three types of eunuchs, the first one, those that were born that way, would be the ones to be most pitied among the Jewish people. I would assume you could also include those who had been mutilated by men, whether willingly or not, who wanted to become proselytes to the faith (whether by association with the Jews in the Old Testament or the church in the New Testament), such as the Ethiopian eunuch of Acts 8. Eunuchs were prevented from participating in the “congregation of the LORD” (Deuteronomy 23:1) and from the priesthood even if born a Levite (Leviticus 21:18-21). Eunuchs obviously could not have children, thus, the reference to “the dry tree” in verse 3.

The LORD promises that any eunuch that keeps His Sabbaths, chooses the things that please Him and takes hold of His covenant will also be able to experience the blessings available to all other people of faith. Keeping the Sabbath was discussed in the previous verse.

“choose the things that please me” – As declared often throughout the scriptures, this verse is clear that man is responsible for the choices He makes. He is not preprogrammed. People of faith will prove their faith through the choices they make. One who makes choices that are pleasing to the LORD gives proof of his faith. One who makes choices that he knows are displeasing to the LORD is demonstrating that he has not submitted to God as LORD through faith.

“take hold of my covenant” – Again, this implies making a choice. Since the first verse makes reference to judgment and justice and goes on to reference keeping

the Sabbath and avoiding evil actions, I think the LORD is referencing the covenant of the law at Sinai. The law establishes clear guidelines for making choices that are pleasing to God.

What is the wonderful promise to these people of faith? That they will get to live in the house of God in a position of honor and security.

“better than of sons and of daughters” - In the Jewish community children were considered a sign of God’s blessing. The reference to “the dry tree” in verse 3 makes me think that the Lord is promising them a name that includes blessing far greater than that of being known for having many progeny. This name and the blessings associated with it would be an everlasting name that could never be *cut off*. I think this is a direct reference to what has been their shame. They need never fear that they would experience shame for being incomplete because they are made complete in God through their faith.

**Is. 56:6 Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant;  
Is. 56:7 Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices *shall be* accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.**

The address now jumps back to the “sons of the stranger” referenced in verse 3—those that are not of the nation of Israel that choose to:

- Join themselves to the LORD
- Serve the LORD
- Love the name of the LORD
- Be servants of the LORD
- Keep the Sabbath and not pollute/break it
- Take hold of the covenant of the LORD

These people will be recognized as full-fledged members of the community of God’s people with all the privileges thereof. One thing that immediately jumps out in the above list is that there appears to be a duplication of serving and being a servant. The Hebrew, however, associates the word *serve* with worship and the word *servant* with bondservant. Frankly, as I look at the list, though one can make distinctions, they are all descriptive of love and obedience to YHWH, their Creator.

“joy” = The passion or emotion excited by the acquisition or expectation of good; pleasurable feelings or emotions caused by success, good fortune, and the like, or by a rational prospect of possessing what we love or desire; gladness; exhilaration of spirits; delight.

“make them joyful in my house of prayer” – The thought that stood out to me when I looked at the definition of *joy* was that of possession. God is saying that

coming to His house of prayer will bring joy because of answered prayer—receiving what you desire because your heart is so attuned to the Lord's. One proof of a right heart condition is that one's sacrifices are acceptable. No one will be trying to go the way of Cain; each will be acting in obedience to the Savior.

The LORD is emphasizing that His house has always been intended to be a place for ALL people of faith—not just the nation of Israel.

*Mark 11:17* "And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves."

**Is. 56:8** The Lord GOD which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather *others* to him, beside those that are gathered unto him.

The "outcasts of Israel" is a reference to all the peoples of Israel that have been scattered throughout the world as part of the judgment of God for their rejection of Him as LORD and of His Son as the Messiah. This verse is declaring that God will gather those of the nation of Israel that have been *outcast* and, in the process, will gather other people of faith along with them. I believe this is speaking of the time when Messiah comes to set up His kingdom, but I also believe that gathering has already begun.

**Is. 56:9** All ye beasts of the field, come to devour, *yea*, all ye beasts in the forest.

**Is. 56:10** His watchmen *are* blind: they are all ignorant, they *are* all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber.

**Is. 56:11** *Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter.*

**Is. 56:12** Come ye, *say they*, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to morrow shall be as this day, *and much more abundant.*

After a beautiful promise of blessing to those who will look to YHWH in faith and obedience, the LORD directs His message to the enemies of Israel and those in leadership in Israel who are focused on self and are in rebellion against their God. The *beasts* seem to represent the enemies of Israel. The *watchmen* are the supposed spiritual leaders of Israel. Being spiritually blind and ignorant, they don't even recognize when they are supposed to bark out a warning to the people that they are on dangerous spiritual ground. They are so focused on self that they are content to live their lives in a sleepwalking mode. They love to slumber; they are not interested in improving their spiritual condition. Instead of caring for the spiritual needs of the people, these leaders are consumed with accumulating material wealth for themselves. Why can they not understand? Because they are not true men of faith. They form a brotherhood of wicked leaders that are constantly trying to outdo each other in the wealth they can amass and the worldly pleasures they enjoy.

This sounds disturbingly similar to many who claim to be spiritual leaders in the church today doesn't it!