

• *What should God's people be doing while they wait for salvation?*

1. The nation must maintain a godly lifestyle

• *Spiritual blessing cannot be 'switched on' at will – have to wait for God's timing*

• *We have to work for it, pray for it and wait for it with eagerness*

• *Justice*

• *Righteousness*

• *Keeping the Sabbath*

2. When salvation comes it excludes no one

In **Isaiah 1–37** God said he would demonstrate his power to rescue his people from the Assyrians but (because of the unbelief of the nation) the Assyrian threat would be replaced by threat of Babylonian exile. In **Isaiah 38–55** God promised that despite Babylonian exile the people of God would survive; the Babylonians would be put down and salvation would come. In **Isaiah 56–66** the prophet takes up the question: what is to be happening among God's people while they wait for this salvation to come? There are really three answers that Isaiah gives. (i) Their expectation is to be enlarged. They must expect the Saviour more than ever. (ii) They must pray for the promises to be fulfilled. (iii) Their lifestyle must be the lifestyle of people looking for the blessing of God. Isaiah 56:1–2 begins with this last point.

1. The nation must maintain a godly lifestyle.

¹*This is what Yahweh says:
'Maintain justice
and do righteousness,
for my salvation is close at hand
and my righteousness will soon be revealed.
²Blessed is the person who keeps doing this,
the one who holds it fast,
who keeps the sabbath without desecrating it,
and keeps his hand from doing any evil.'*

Spiritual blessing cannot be 'switched on' at will. If it could we would 'switch it on' right now. Isaiah writes in the eighth century BC. He looks forward to a coming salvation. But he has to wait for God's timing. It is the same with us. We might want spiritual revival for our city or our country. But we cannot 'switch it on' as easily as some think. We have to work for it, pray for it, wait for it with eagerness. While we are waiting we show our sincerity by the way we live. Isaiah mentions justice (*mishmat*), righteousness (*tsedakah*) and the keeping of the sabbath. 'Justice' is holiness acted out in fair and right actions. 'Righteousness' is holiness getting a grip on the human heart and establishing right principles there. Sabbath-keeping in Israel involved maintaining the distinctiveness of being God's people (for sabbath-keeping was in the ten commandments and disobedience to it was punishable by the death-penalty; it made Israel highly distinctive as a nation). It involved faith (for the ordinary activities of life are suspended and Israelites had to leave other concerns to the care of God). The Christian is not 'under' the sabbath-law but he fulfils its deepest significance and learns to rest in God.

2. When salvation comes it excludes no one.

³*Let no foreigner who has bound himself to Yahweh say,
'Yahweh will surely exclude me from his people.'
And let not any eunuch complain,
'I am only a dry tree.'
⁴For this is what Yahweh says:
'To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths,
who choose what pleases me,
who hold fast to my covenant –
⁵to him I will give within my house and its walls
a memorial and a name
better than sons and daughters;
I will give him an everlasting name
that will not be cut off.'*

- Even before the coming of Christ, any who join Israel's lifestyle will share Israel's blessing

- All people are invited to join

Although Isaiah writes centuries before the coming of Christ, yet even then the gospel is open to any who will put faith in the promises of the God of Israel. If they join in Israel's lifestyle, they will share Israel's blessings. They will become part of God's 'house' (a metaphor for the people of God), and will be given a name as a reward for their faithfulness (we remember Genesis 12:2). Though gentiles were never allowed inside the inner parts of the temple, yet by faith all people everywhere will be able to come into the very heart of the people of God, the 'house of prayer'. The people of God will not be a building, but they will be **like** a building and all peoples will be invited to join it.

⁶*'And foreigners who have joined themselves
to Yahweh to serve him,
to love the name of Yahweh,
and to worship him,
all who keep the sabbath without desecrating it
and who hold fast to my covenant –
⁷these I will bring to my holy mountain
and give them joy in my house of prayer.
Their burnt-offerings and sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar;
for my house will be called
a house of prayer for all nations.'*

⁸*An oracle of Sovereign Yahweh –
he who gathers the scattered ones of Israel:
'I will gather still others to them,
to be his gathered people.'*

3. There will be danger again for the nation of Israel if they continue in spiritual blindness

3. There will be danger again for the nation of Israel if they continue in spiritual blindness. If the people are truly to prepare the way for God's blessings in the land they will need good leadership. It was a deficiency at this point that was the greatest disaster at the time Jesus came to Israel. Isaiah puts his points in picture-language. He envisages a feast where there is plenty of food and drink. All sorts of animals are gathering there.

⁹*'Come, all you beasts of the field,
come and eat, all you beasts of the forest!*

⁹Wild animals enter into any place which is not securely guarded and kept clean. Isaiah uses this as a picture of the chaos that is likely to come into the nation while they wait for God's Saviour to come.

Isaiah sees a time when Israel's leaders will also be like animals. They will be dumb dogs.

¹⁰*'Israel's watchmen are blind,
they all lack knowledge;
they are all mute dogs,
they cannot bark;
they lie around and dream,
they love to sleep.'*

Dogs have one useful task. They act as guards and bark when intruders are approaching the home. But what is the use of guard-dogs who cannot bark? Israel's leaders who are careless about justice and righteousness are like guard-dogs who are unable to give any warning to anyone.

¹¹*'They are dogs with mighty appetites;
they never have enough.
They are shepherds who lack understanding;
they have all turned to their own way,
each seeks his own gain.'*

¹²*'Come, let me get wine!
Let us drink our fill of beer!'*

- Israel needs good leadership

- A vision of a feast that wild animals will enter if not securely guarded – chaos

- Israel's leaders likened to dumb dogs – careless about justice and righteousness, so unable to give warning


• *Israel's leaders also famous for their greed*

Israel's leaders will also be famous for their greed; it is another way in which they are like dogs. They will be shepherds with no concern for the flock. They will be careless of the dangers ahead of the nation if it does not hold to justice and righteousness and distinctiveness.


'And tomorrow will be like today, or even far better.'

• *Glorious salvation promised – will the people remain faithful?*

Isaiah promises glorious salvation. Its blessings may be entered by faith even in Isaiah's time. Yet its fullness is a long way ahead. The question is: will the people remain faithful to justice and righteousness? Will they be open to foreigners who wish to share their faith? Will their leadership maintain the message of the salvation that is to come?



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