



• The time of waiting – not all will continue in faithfulness

Isaiah 56–66 is concerned with the time of waiting that might be involved before the promised salvation will come to Israel. The people of Judah and Jerusalem must maintain justice and do righteousness, and preserve the distinctiveness of Israel¹. They must be open to people from the nations who will want to put their trust in the promises of Israel's Saviour². Yet Isaiah knows that not all will continue in faithfulness during those years. There will be 'shepherds who lack understanding' and who care about nothing except their own pleasures³.

1 56:1-2

2 56:3-8

3 56:9-12

1. There may well be difficult days for the righteous

1. There may well be difficult days for the righteous. Sometimes they will even die for their loyalty – but their death will in fact be a rescue.

*¹The righteous person perishes,
and no one ponders it in his heart.
God's loved ones are taken away,
and no one understands
that it is from calamity to come
that the righteous person is taken away.*

• Some may die for their loyalty

• The righteous are promised peace

In one way or another the righteous are promised peace.

*²He enters into peace;
they find rest as they rest in their beds,
each one who walks uprightly.*

2. There will be plenty of spiritual decay in these years that are ahead

2. There will be plenty of spiritual decay in these years that are ahead. We who live centuries ahead of Isaiah's time remember the spiritual condition of Israel when Jesus came. Isaiah predicted it.

*³'But you – come here, you sons of a sorceress,
you offspring of adulterers and prostitutes!*

*⁴Whom are you mocking?
At whom do you sneer
and stick out your tongue?
Are you not children of rebels,
the offspring of liars?*

• Immoral cults

*⁵You burn with lust among the oaks
and under every spreading tree;
you sacrifice your children in the ravines
and under the overhanging crags.'*

• Human sacrifice

• Other sins after the Babylonian exile

The description here makes use of pre-exilic sins more than the sins that were common after the return from Babylonian exile. This is simply because eighth-century Isaiah is the author and so his picture of backsliding Israel makes use of the events of his own day. Immoral cults and human sacrifice were commonplace in Isaiah's time. After the exile there would be sins that were different but equivalent.

*⁶'Among the smooth stones of the ravines are your portion;
take your chance with them!*

*Yes, to them you have poured out drink-offerings
and offered grain-offerings.*

In the light of these things, should I relent?

*⁷You have made your bed on a high and lofty hill;
there you went up to offer your sacrifices.*

*⁸Behind your doors and your doorposts
you have put your reminders.*

Forsaking me, you uncovered your bed,

• King and ambassadors – Judah's attempts to get help from Assyria and Egypt

*you climbed into it and made it wide;
you made a covenant for yourself with those
whose beds you love,
whose power you were considering.
⁹You went down to the king with olive oil
and increased your perfumes.
You sent your ambassadors far away;
you descended to Sheol itself!*

Mention of 'the king . . . ambassadors' alludes to Judah's attempts to get help from Assyria and Egypt.

• Cults were spiritual immorality – unfaithfulness to Yahweh

The cults of the ancient world were regarded as spiritual immorality – unfaithfulness to Yahweh who is a husband to his people.

*¹⁰You were wearied by the abundance of your journeys,
but you would not say, "It is hopeless."
You found the energy to do what you wanted to do,
and so you did not faint.
¹¹Whom have you so dreaded and feared
that you have been false to me,
and have neither remembered me
nor gave me a thought?
Is it not because I have long been inactive
that you do not fear me?
¹²I will expose your righteousness and your works,
and they will not benefit you.'*

• Stupidity of sin

Isaiah points to the stupidity of sin: its wearisomeness¹⁰¹, its insult to God¹⁰², its betrayal of a faithful God¹⁰³, its exploitation of a time when God seemed inactive¹⁰⁴.

101 57:10
102 57:11a
103 57:11b
104 57:11c

3. There is a way home

3. There is a way home. The impenitent will eventually regret his sin.

• The way of safety is:

*¹³When you shriek for help,
let your collection of idols save you!
The wind will carry all of them off,
a mere breath will blow them away.'*

(i) Turning to God as the only refuge

But the way of safety is (i) turning to God as the only refuge.

*'But the man who makes me his refuge
will inherit the land
and possess my holy mountain.'
¹⁴And it will be said:
'Build up, build up, prepare the road!
Remove the obstacles out of the way of my people.'*

(ii) Lowliness of spirit^L

The way of safety involves (ii) lowliness of spirit.

*¹⁵For this is what the high and exalted One says,
he who lives for ever, whose name is holy:
'I live in a high and holy place,
but also with him who is crushed and lowly in spirit,
to give life to the spirit of the lowly
and to give life to the heart of the crushed people.'*

(iii) Hope in God's mercy

The way of safety is (iii) hope in God's mercy despite long backsliding.

*¹⁶For I will not accuse for ever,
nor will I always be angry,
for then the spirit of man would grow faint before me,
the breath that I have myself made.*

*¹⁷I was enraged by the iniquity of his wrongful gain;
I smote him, and hid my face in anger,
yet he went on backsliding in the way of his heart.
¹⁸I have seen his ways, but I will heal him;
I will guide him and make comfort complete for him,
and for his mourners,
¹⁹creating the fruit of his lips.
Peace, peace, to those far and near,'
says Yahweh. 'And I will heal him.'*

• The alternative
is terrible restless
sin

The alternative is terrible restlessness in sin.

*²⁰But the wicked are like the tossing sea,
which cannot rest,
whose waves cast up mire and mud.
²¹'There is no peace,' says my God, 'for the wicked.'*