

SLOW FOOD BIBLE STUDIES

ISAIAH 56-66 (40 studies)

56-66 The final eleven chapters of Isaiah (sometimes called Third Isaiah) have no agreed date or historical context, though Motyer is convinced that 'the setting is plainly pre-exilic' (see notes on 65:1-7). The society being addressed is no longer the exiles in Babylonia as in chapters 40-55, but the Palestinian homeland and the sub-standard character of a half-believing people who have let slip their hold on the revealed truths of a holy and merciful God. The prophet is recalling his readers and hearers from a human religiosity based on a shrine (e.g. the Temple at Jerusalem) and on the outward observance of ritual (e.g. fasting), to a Divine relationship centred upon a glorious Messianic future. The 'Servant' figure of Israel has become the Redeemer for all mankind (anticipated in Isa 49:5-6). The characteristics of this new Spirit-given attitude are moral integrity and devotional intensity, marked by repentance, humility and a steady looking forward to the new Jerusalem – the new heavens and earth that God is preparing for his people. But it is always possible to lose this vision and revert to the old ways. Thus these chapters are relevant to any age in which a formerly vibrant and committed company of believers has compromised its stance and blunted its mission to the world.

Commentaries to hand include: Alec Motyer (IVP 1993); Derek Kidner in the *New Bible Commentary* 4th ed (IVP 1994); Barry Webb (BST 1996); Jo Bailey Wells (BRF 2006).

56:1-2 Is the mainspring of my Christian faith correct performance or hope in a soon-to-be-revealed Redeemer? *Mk 1:15; 1 Th 1:3; Tit 2:11-14.*

56:3-8 Does my attitude to Sunday, and its relation to the working week, need reviewing? *Isa 58:13-14; Mt 12:10-12; Jn 20:19-20; Rev 1:10.*

56:9-12 If I am in a position of responsibility, how can I fulfil it responsibly? *Ps 78:70-72; Prov 8:14-16; Hab 2:1; Mal 2:6-7; Heb 13:17.*

57:1-2 Do I regard death as an evil? Will my life have meant anything to anyone? *Ps 116:15; 1 Cor 15:58; Phil 1:20-23; Rev 14:13.*

57:3-10 Have I, either in imagination or reality, fallen for any substitute gods? *Ezek 8:7-12; Rom 1:21, 25; Col 3:1-5; Heb 11:25-27.*

57:11-13 Whose opinion do I really value? *Mt 5:3-6; 1 Cor 4:1-5; Heb 10:26-31.*

57:14-21 Does my view of God as accusing or unwelcoming stand in the way of my receiving his intimacy and healing? *Dt 30:11-20; Mt 11:28-30; Eph 2:16-17.*

58:1-5 When I practise my religion, who is it I'm trying to impress? *Isaiah 1:10-20; Mt 6:1-4; Lk 16:15.*

58:6-9a If I long for the experiences of vv8-9a, am I willing to embrace the disciplines of vv6-7? *Isa 30:18; Jn 12:24-26; Mt 6:33.*

58:9b-12 Is the Christian fellowship to which I belong concerned more for doctrinal correctness than for being a good influence in the workplace or community? *Prov 3:27; Jer 29:7; 1 Cor 15:58; Gal 6:9-10; 2 Tim 3:5.*

58:13-14 How can I make sure that Sundays aren't 'business as usual'? *Exod 31:17; Ps 63:1-5; 1 Cor 16:2; Heb 10:25.*

59:1-8 'There's nothing wrong with God; the wrong is in you' (v2, *The Message*). Do I need to face the truth about myself at any point in this passage? *Prov 16:2; Jer 17:9; 1 Jn 1:8.*

59:9-15a When I see spiritual and moral failure in the world and the church around me, is my attitude judgmental, or do I see myself as part of the problem? *Dan 9:7-11, 18; Hos 14.*

59:15b-19 Can I pray confidently for the work of Christ's kingdom in a world that has rejected him? *2 Th 3:1-3; 1 Tim 2:1-2; Rev 11:15-19.*

59:20-21 How are Isaiah's words fulfilled in Jesus Christ? *Luke 4:18-19; Acts 10:34-43.*

60:1-9 Am I looking forward to Christ's return as King of the whole earth? *Mk 14:61b-62; Phil 2:10-11; Rev 22:20.*

60:10-14 How could the 'kings' and 'nations' of the world contribute to Christ's coming kingdom? *Ps 138:4-5; Mic 4:1-5; Rev 21:24-25.*

60:15-18 If our present experience of the Christian church is unsatisfactory, can we hope for anything better? *Eph 1:18; 4:11-16; Heb 12:22-24.*

60:19-22 What's not to like about heaven? *Isa 51:11; Rom 8:20-22; 1 Jn 3:2; Rev 19:9.*

61:1-3 If at times I feel overwhelmed by the scale of human affliction, what part can I still play in Christ's continuing work on earth? *Jer 17:7-8; Eph 3:16-17; 2 Tim 1:6-8, 2:1-3.*

61:4-7 How can I claim these promises on behalf of the Christian community to which I belong? *Exod 19:4-6; Eph 4:11-13.*

61:8-11 What does 'righteousness' mean to me? *Lk 15:22; Rom 3:22-24; Rom 8:10; Heb 1:8.*

62:1-7 How seriously do I take my commission as 'watchman'? *1 Ki 18:42-44; Lk 18:1-8; Col 4:12-13.*

62:8-12 Have I caught God's vision for all nations to know Christ as Saviour? *Isa 49:6; Jn 10:16; Jn 17:20-21; Acts 1:8.*

63:1-6 'Notice *mighty to save* – this is the dominant interest, even in this judgment passage' (Kidner). Is my relationship to Christ, whether as Saviour or Judge, merely one of convenience and self-interest? *Jn 3:16-21, 35-36.*

63:7-10 Is there any way in which I as an individual Christian, or the group to which I belong, might be grieving God's Holy Spirit? *Acts 7:51; Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 5:19.*

63:11-14 What was distinctive about Israel's exodus experience? Can we expect a return to e.g. the days of the early Christian church after Pentecost? *Heb 10:32-36; 12:1-3; 13:7-8.*

63:15-19 How perfunctory are my prayers for God to act in power and compassion? *Exod 32:11-14; Ps 89:46-51; Dan 9:17-19.*

64:1-7 Am I aware of the effects of sin in my life? What have I done about it? *Rom 3:10-20; Acts 2:37-38; Tit 3:4-5.*

64:8-12 What do the pictures of God as 'Father' and 'potter' mean to me? *Jer 18:1-6; 1 Pet 1:13-21.*

65:1-7 Am I a spiritual elitist? *Jonah 3:10-4:1; Lk 13:22-30.*

65:8-12 How can I choose what pleases the Lord? *Mic 6:7-8; Rom 8:8; 1 Thess 2:4; 2 Tim 2:4; 1 Jn 3:22.*

65:13-16 Is the gospel I believe and proclaim faithful to the teaching of Christ? *Mt 7:13-14; 13:47-50; Jn 5:24-30.*

65:17-20 Am I allowed to look forward to heaven? *Phil 3:20-21; Heb 11:16; Rev 21:1-4.*

65:21-25 What are the benefits of belonging to Christ's kingdom? *Isa 9:6; Rom 6:21-23; 1 Cor 15:58.*

66:1-4 'Is there something you feel you *must* have to be happy, something that is more important to your heart than God himself?' (Timothy Keller *Counterfeit Gods*). Am I in any sense committing idolatry? *Isa 57:15; Lk 16:13-15; Lk 18:14; Tit 1:16.*

66:5-11 If I experience rejection from a church on account of faithfulness to God's word, should I abandon my membership of it? *Jn 16:2; Acts 18:6; 2 Tim 4:1-5; 1 Jn 2:19, 24-25.*

66:12-16 How can I ensure that I experience God's tenderness and favour rather than his fury and judgment? *1 Pet 2:1-10.*

66:17-21 Have I caught Isaiah's vision for the gathering-in of all nations in the kingdom of Christ? *Isa 49:6; Jn 10:16, 12:32, 17:26.*

66:22-24 What can I be grateful for? *Lk 10:18-21; Jude 20-25; Rev 1:5-6.*