

Isaiah 58

1. How does Isaiah picture the contrast between a people who both seek God's will and rebel against it? (Is 58:1-2)
2. *Challenge:* In God's eyes, the Israelites misunderstood the purpose of fasting. (Is 58:3-4)
 - a. How would you characterize the true purpose of fasting?
 - b. Do Christians today still often misunderstand the true purpose of fasting? Explain.
3. Isaiah talks about two dimensions of fasting: (1) prayer and abstaining from food (Is 58:5), and (2) care for others in need. (Is 58:6-7)
 - a. How would you characterize the primary difference between these two dimensions?
 - b. Which of the two dimensions does the Lord consider more important? (Is 58:6-7) Why?
 - c. Do we Christians today emphasize both dimensions of fasting enough?
 - d. Name some of the Lord's promises if we live both dimensions of true fasting. (Is 58:8-11)
4. *Reflection:* The first thing the Lord promises the Israelites if they obey his laws and keep holy, is that they will experience an inner "joy in the Lord." (Is 58:13-14) Have you ever experienced this "joy in the Lord"?

Isaiah 59 A Poem of Sin, Confession, and Redemption

5. Isaiah sets up this poem by having someone claim that the Lord has "shortened" his hand, that is, He has become too weak to save his people.
 - a. How does the Lord begin his reply? (Is 59:1)
 - b. How does He turn the people's accusations around by making accusations against them? (Is 59:2-3)
6. What would it mean to say that some people are so wicked that they *run* toward wickedness and *hurry* to do evil? (Is 59:7-8)
7. The people reply to the Lord's accusations by admitting that justice and righteousness are far from them and that they are morally blind. (Is 59:9-11) What are some of the sins the people admit to? (Is 59:12-15)
8. The Lord gets ready to defend his people and dresses in "spiritual armor." (Is 59:17)
 - a. List the various pieces of spiritual armor the Lord puts on. (Is 59:17)
 - b. Compare Isaiah's armor with the spiritual armor described by St. Paul in Eph 6:14-17.
9. God promises the permanent presence of His Spirit in the people. (Is 59:21) It is probably one of the reasons Isaiah is sometimes called the Fifth Gospel.
Research. Review John's gospel, chapters 14 through 16 where Jesus promises his followers the gift of the Holy Spirit and note the similarities in Isaiah 59:21.