# Isaiah 56 begins a new section and virtually all scholars recognize this. A particular school believes that a “Third Isaiah” writes this section from chapter 56-66. This is suggested because of perceived changes in style and theme and perspective. This is not my view and I think the case can be made that there is a connection between themes that run throughout the book from chapter 1. It is to be remembered that Isaiah lived long and preached and wrote over a long period of time. He began his ministry of calling Israel to repentance in the reign of King Uzziah and is martyred at the hand of the wicked King Manasseh as he was sawn in pieces, see Heb 11:37…roughly from 740-687 BC. The changing situations over time I think account for the variations in style.

# This chapter is crucial to understanding the earthly public ministry of Jesus. Jesus was quite conscious, and taught His disciples to be conscious of God’s intent to rescue the whole world and not just Israel as a nation. This chapter makes that abundantly clear. Among the ‘signs’ of the Coming of the Kingdom’ in Jesus’ ministry and in the ministry of the early Church is the ministry of inclusion of those previously excluded both from worship and leadership. This is radical change, and feels jarring to those who witness it. This chapter among a few others in the Prophets address the identity of Israel in the Age of the Rescue and the Rescuer…and it is both surprising and can appear contradictory to the Torah itself.

# Chapter 56 divides into two distinct paragraphs, both surprising as to who is blessed and who is condemned…Verses 1-8 and verses 9-13.

# Vv.1-8 Gentiles are included in Israel’s blessing…IF

# Vv.1,2 Begins with the solemn declaration, “Thus says the Lord…” these are not Isaiah’s words and ideas but God’s…therefore they carry divine authority and are to be obeyed, as the words of the Sovereign King. Keeping justice and doing righteousness are parallels and synonyms. They are two ways of saying the same thing…remember in Hebrew, repetition is for emphasis. This is a command to God’s people to be holy, to keep God’s commands.

## This command is often misunderstood as a form of works righteousness…but that is a mistake. God, through the prophet, anticipates a day and calls for such a day in his time for God’s people to “Do Torah” not because they have to but because they get to…keeping God’s Torah or Instruction is to be seen not as a burden but a privilege and the fulfillment of God’s purpose in Rescuing Israel in the first place. God’s people living under God’s direction and Lordship which reveals the power of God to sustain and to bless his people. Recall our discussion of God’s placement in the Promised Land…in a place of precariousness and dependence. What is on the line, every day, is whether God will sustain and bless his people?

## Israel is to keep Torah, whose emblem is the Sabbath…because they have been rescued not in order to be rescued. We are to obey not to get God to love us but because we have been loved by God we render obedience, because we trust that God’s promises are true and to be trusted. Sabbath Keeping recalls two events of God’s gracious love…can you remember them? See Ex 20:8-11; Deut 5:12-15. Sabbath keeping leads to blessing because it is emblematic of maintaining the relationship with Yahweh, who created and rescued his people. We don’t obey to get something from God he is reluctant to give but to keep that which God gives immediately upon our rescue and promises to keep on giving IF…

# V.2 “Blessed is the man…” does this sound familiar from the Psalms and NT? Remember that the Prophets represent the case law flowing from the constitutional documents of Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy. These constitutional documents carry sanctions of blessings and curses based on conduct, Lev 26 and Deut 28. The emblematic nature of Sabbath Keeping is seen in the parallel line pairing Sabbath Keeping with keeping one’s hand from evil. These are two ways of saying the same thing.

# Vv.3-5 Blessing those thought to be ‘unblessable’.

## Now we see two categories of people who were not permitted in God’s presence…foreigners and eunuchs. The foreigners pictured are likely proselytes who have remained ‘uncircumcised’ and eunuchs who are seen as ‘over circumcised’ they have been ‘blemished’ and hence are not permitted in God’s presence in the Temple, see Lev 21:20. Recall the ‘Wall of Separation or Hostility” Paul mentions in regards to Gentiles in Eph 2:14…a section of which is on display in the Museum in Istanbul today and a replica in the museum in Jerusalem. Now, in these verses ‘foreigners and eunuchs are not only seen as part of God’s people Israel but full members and heirs of all of the promises made to Israel without distinction. Hence it is not random but overt that God blesses a man who is both a foreigner and a eunuch in Acts 8…and makes him the bearer of God’s salvation and rescue to the Ethiopians.

# Vv6-8 Believing Gentiles are included in God’s covenant people.

## Now Isaiah ups the ante…not only will foreigners be included among the Israelites as full members but they shall serve as priests in the way that Israel was always supposed to but never did. See Ex 19:6 and 1 Peter 2:4,9…last Sunday’s text. Belonging to Yahweh was supposed to mean that God’s people would ALL be priests…interceding for this world lost in darkness and sin and representing and bearing God’s light and glory into the darkness…and that is what is represented in each and all of our baptisms…we have all, on the basis of God’s rescue through the death and resurrection of Jesus, been forgiven and cleansed for lives of ministry…this very priestly ministry of prayer, and light bearing, truth witnessing.

## Notice that one of the distinct marks that the rescue had begun is the inclusion of the “Outcasts” of Israel and the inclusion of foreigners. See Zeph 3:19. Notice also that Jesus Himself makes direct reference to verse 7 in His controversy with the leadership of the Temple in Jerusalem and uses it as the basis for His Temple cleansing…the Temple was not fulfilling its mission to be a Light to the Nations or Gentiles…so the Lord of the Temple came to cleanse it and repurpose it to fulfill its mission…and in so doing to repurpose Israel to fulfill its original mission given all the way back in Gen 12…”Blessed to be a blessing…for all of the families of the earth”

## Can you recall some instances of “Outcasts” Jesus deliberately goes to rescue…and the reaction those rescues caused among the religious leaders?

# Vv.9-12 The Condemnation and lawsuit against Israel’s Irresponsible Leaders

## V.9 The prophet pictures the wild animals being given by God ‘free reign’ to go where they will, to eat what they want. See Deut 7:22 this is a picture of the chaos of the promised land before God clears it and makes it inhabitable for His people. Notice that after Jesus’ baptism and anointing by God as King, this was exactly the state of His kingdom in Mk 1:13…the wild beasts mentioned there are not a random observance but intending to convey the sad state of Israel’s decline, so that as the new Joshua, Jesus’ name in Hebrew…He finds the Promised Land a wasteland…again.

## Vv.10-12 How did Israel, ‘Immanuel’s Land’, see Is 8:8, become a wasteland again…poor leadership. They have ‘Security Guards’ that are blind and watch dogs that can’t bark. Nevertheless, there are some things they do like to do…prophets that like to dream their own dreams and see their own visions…and take naps while they are supposed to be watching for the approach of enemies. Similarly, these ‘watch dogs’ that can’t bark do like to eat and would gladly eat themselves to death but will never chase an enemy away.

## See Eze 33 and 34:1,2; Jer 23:1 and Zech 10:2,3 for another prophet’s indictment against the shepherds of Israel, see particularly Jn 10:1-18, the Biblical basis for our stained-glass window on the west wall of the sanctuary. The shepherds of Israel serve only themselves, if they do anything for the sheep it is that they mislead them…but they have grown to feel entitled because they believe there will be no consequence for their dereliction of duty and their abuse of their sacred charge. This is why “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Ps 111:10