

FPFWC Christian Development



God's Promises

January 2023

Winter Quarter

January 21, 2023

Lesson #3 – God Promises Light

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Isaiah 58:6-10

ICE BREAKERS-

1. How is fasting used as a spiritual discipline?
2. Why is repentance so important in the life of the believer?

Key Verse: “If thou draw out thy soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday.”—Isaiah 58:10

LESSON BACKGROUND –

This is now our third lesson from the book of Isaiah, so the Lesson Contexts of the previous two lessons apply to this one as well. Our text, found in Isaiah 58, focuses on fasting, though not as the audience would have expected.

The essence of fasting is self-denial. The intent behind this practice is typically understood as being reminded of complete dependence on the Lord, as Jesus expressed during His temptation (Matthew 4:1–4; compare Luke 12:22–31). Fasting on a regular and devout basis could earn the respect of the community. For example, a heroine of the Jews who lived in the intertestamental times, Judith, was renowned for her extensive fasting practices, said to have occurred all the days of her widowhood (see the non-biblical Judith 8:6). Community fasting was a solemn event for the people of Israel (1 Samuel 7:6; Esther 4:1–3, 15–17; 9:31–32; Joel 1:14–15; contrast 1 Kings 21:9–12). Fasting could be an appropriate personal condition for a dedicated time of prayer (2 Samuel 12:16, 21–23; Nehemiah 1:4; Daniel 9:3). It was for the humbling of the soul (Psalm 35:13).

Unfortunately, fasting could easily become an empty ritual, more about recognition for Judah’s own piety than as a spiritual discipline (see Zechariah 7:5–6; Matthew 6:16–18; Luke 18:9–14). In that vein, Isaiah begins chapter 58 by loudly declaring the rebellion and hypocrisy of Israel (Isaiah 58:1–2). The people invited that critique by pointing to their fasts (58:3a) as evidence of their humility, only for God to point out what should have been the obvious error in their way: fasting gave the appearance of humility, but it actually resulted in exploitation (58:3b) and violence (58:4)! “Wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?” (58:5). What kind of fast does God *really* desire?

LESSON COMMENTARY

God did require fasting that would be accompanied by penitence and changed behavior. Those fasting would allow **the oppressed to go free** (v. 6) and care for the downtrodden (v. 7). These acts of repentance will result in messianic

blessing. The **light** (a metaphor for the Messiah, cf. Is 9:2) will come as will their **recovery** (literally, “healing” referring to spiritual and physical restoration) (v. 8). The nation will experience **righteousness** and **the glory of the LORD**. Most importantly, **the LORD will answer** their prayers and **guide** them (vv. 9, 11). At that time, the nation will **rebuild the ancient ruins** of Israel (v. 12). Although it is certain that genuine repentance will always bring God’s blessing, this passage is speaking of God’s blessings in the end, in the messianic age.

LESSON NUGGET – Have you ever been disappointed or even angry with religion? Perhaps you’ve heard someone say that the church is full of hypocrites. Maybe you’ve even said that yourself! Isaiah rebuked Israel for practicing bad religion – religion that benefited no one and offended God. The prophet specifically zeroed in on fasting, pointing out ways in which the people misused this important spiritual discipline. It’s easy to point a finger at others and criticize or ridicule their religious practices and spiritual life. But what about your own patterns of faith? How do they measure up to the Lord’s description of true religion?

Sources: Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, Wiersbe Study Bible, The Word In Life Study Bible and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary