

Warning against Idolatry

Today we continue to study the last 11 chapters of the prophecy of Isaiah, chapters 56 through 66. Although these chapters were written by the prophet Isaiah in the 8th century BC, the Lord had inspired Isaiah to pen these messages to the Jewish people who had returned to their land from the Babylonian Exile. God had earlier caused this people to be judged for their sins, for having transgressed the covenant on which their relationship with God was maintained. Through the centuries of repeated defection and departure from God and His laws, even as they gave themselves over to the beliefs and practices of the pagan peoples of Canaan, the wrath of God had been poured out upon them. We can read of Israel's (i.e. Judah's) failure and of God's sentence of judgment upon the people in **2 Chronicles 36:15-21**:

¹⁵And the LORD God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. ¹⁶But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, till there was no remedy.

¹⁷Therefore He brought against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, on the aged or the weak; He gave them all into his hand. ¹⁸And all the articles from the house of God, great and small, the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his leaders, all these he took to Babylon. ¹⁹Then they burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious possessions. ²⁰And those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, ²¹to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.

But God had determined that He would be merciful to a remnant of His people. He promised that He would cause His people to be released by its captors and lead them in a return to Himself and to their land. There they would wait for the coming of the promised Messiah, the Servant of Jehovah, who was also the Son of David. He would restore them fully to God, by securing their forgiveness of sins, by cleansing them of their sin, by leading them and enabling them by the Holy Spirit that He would pour out upon them in the promised Kingdom of God over which He would reign. They would experience God's peace, His blessing in life, and enjoy their security in the Messiah's kingdom. Isaiah's Book of Consolation, chapters 40 through 55, foretold of the people's deliverance from Babylon and of the coming Messiah and the salvation that He would bring to His people. The chapters that we are now studying, Isaiah 56 through 66, address the people of Israel and their spiritual and physical conditions in the land after their return from Babylon, as they waited for the coming Messiah.

The condition of the people was not pleasant. The sins that had characterized the people, which had resulted in God's judgment, their exclusion from the land and their exile to Babylon, continued to be committed by them. As we considered last Lord's Day, the passage that began in chapter 56 and continues through chapter 57, reveals that the people were still committing their former sins. The people were still guilty of the sins of idolatry, hypocrisy, and indifference. In these chapters the Lord through Isaiah confronts them of their sin, and sets before them their responsibility with view toward the coming promised Kingdom, the Kingdom that God had promised to the descendant of King David.

At the end of Isaiah 56 the Lord had denounced the corrupt and negligent leaders of His people who had failed to warn His people of the danger of God's judgment that was upon them. The leaders of Israel were as "watchmen" on the walls, who should warn the city of approaching invaders. But they failed their duty. They are as blind watchmen; they were ignorant, mute, and sleeping. They were as shepherds who did not concern themselves with their flock. They were only concerned for their own well-being.

With the beginning of the next chapter of Isaiah's prophecy, chapter 57, the people who are characterized by egregious sin is set forth, even as they are contrasted with some who were righteous in the manner in which they lived before God. And so, wherein chapter 56:8-12 the leaders of Israel were denounced for their sin, before us in chapter 57 the general populace is addressed. Let us first read the chapter before us.

¹The righteous man perishes,
and no one lays it to heart;
devout men are taken away,
while no one understands.
For the righteous man is taken away from calamity;
²he enters into peace;
they rest in their beds
who walk in their uprightness.
³But you, draw near,
sons of the sorceress,
offspring of the adulterer and the loose woman.
⁴Whom are you mocking?
Against whom do you open your mouth wide
and stick out your tongue?
Are you not children of transgression,
the offspring of deceit,
⁵you who burn with lust among the oaks,
under every green tree,
who slaughter your children in the valleys,
under the clefts of the rocks?
⁶Among the smooth stones of the valley is your portion;
they, they, are your lot;
to them you have poured out a drink offering,
you have brought a grain offering.
Shall I relent for these things?
⁷On a high and lofty mountain
you have set your bed,
and there you went up to offer sacrifice.
⁸Behind the door and the doorpost
you have set up your memorial;
for, deserting me, you have uncovered your bed,
you have gone up to it,
you have made it wide;
and you have made a covenant for yourself with them,
you have loved their bed,
you have looked on nakedness.
⁹You journeyed to the king with oil
and multiplied your perfumes;
you sent your envoys far off,
and sent down even to Sheol.
¹⁰You were wearied with the length of your way,
but you did not say, "It is hopeless";
you found new life for your strength,
and so you were not faint.

¹¹Whom did you dread and fear,
so that you lied,

and did not remember me,
did not lay it to heart?
Have I not held my peace, even for a long time,
and you do not fear me?
¹²I will declare your righteousness and your deeds,
but they will not profit you.
¹³When you cry out, let your collection of idols deliver you!
The wind will carry them all off,
a breath will take them away.
But he who takes refuge in me shall possess the land
and shall inherit my holy mountain.

¹⁴And it shall be said,
“Build up, build up, prepare the way,
remove every obstruction from my people's way.”
¹⁵For thus says the One who is high and lifted up,
who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:
“I dwell in the high and holy place,
and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit,
to revive the spirit of the lowly,
and to revive the heart of the contrite.
¹⁶For I will not contend forever,
nor will I always be angry;
for the spirit would grow faint before me,
and the breath of life that I made.
¹⁷Because of the iniquity of his unjust gain I was angry,
I struck him; I hid my face and was angry,
but he went on backsliding in the way of his own heart.
¹⁸I have seen his ways, but I will heal him;
I will lead him and restore comfort to him and his mourners,
¹⁹creating the fruit of the lips.
Peace, peace, to the far and to the near,” says the LORD,
“and I will heal him.
²⁰But the wicked are like the tossing sea;
for it cannot be quiet,
and its waters toss up mire and dirt.
²¹There is no peace,” says my God, “for the wicked.”

In the first 13 verses we have a case presented which is...

I. Against Idolatry (57:1-13)

Idolatry was rife in the ancient world. It is very popular today also. God forbids and condemns idolatry.

What is idolatry? The second commandment prohibits the sin of idolatry in worship. Idolatry had two forms in Israel. The first was *the worship of false gods*. The second was *the worship of Jehovah by means of images*. The second commandment prohibited the making of images that would inevitably result in either form of idolatry.

There are several aspects to the sin of idolatry that should be considered. At the core the issue is this: *we commit idolatry when we set up something other than God to which we devote our hearts*. Paul admonished the believers at the church at Corinth: “And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play’” (1 Cor. 10:7). Idolatry, therefore, is much more

than merely using images in the worship of god. Idolatry is a very common and broad kind of sin that we commit. Sadly, we are all too ignorant of the idols that we have set up in our hearts. **Os Guinness** wrote:

Idolatry is the most discussed problem in the Bible and one of the most powerful spiritual and intellectual concepts in the believer's arsenal. Yet for Christians today it is one of the least meaningful notions and is surrounded with ironies. Perhaps this is why many evangelicals are ignorant of the idols in their lives... Contemporary evangelicals are little better at recognizing and resisting idols than modern secular people are... There can be no believing communities without an unswerving eye to the detection and destruction of idols.

It was **John Calvin** who said, "The human heart is a factory of idols... Every one of us is, from his mother's womb, expert in inventing idols." This proneness to idolatry leads us to be less than fully devoted to our God. Could it be said of some of us, as it was of the early Samaritans, "They feared the Lord, yet served their own gods"? (2 Kings 17:33). One could say that much of the Christian life is taken up with resistance to set up idols in our hearts to which we would become more devoted to than we are to our God, and to the casting down of those idols when we discover that we have set them up. And so, the problem of idolatry is an extensive and pervasive matter. It is this sin that is present to the degree that we do not love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and our neighbor as our self.

We first read of...

A. The Condition of the Righteous (vs. 1, 2)

*¹The righteous man perishes,
and no one lays it to heart;
devout men are taken away,
while no one understands.
For the righteous man is taken away from calamity;
²he enters into peace;
they rest in their beds
who walk in their uprightness.*

Righteous people had become scarce in Israel, but it would seem that no one had taken note of this. Why was this occurring? God was removing them from the scene. Why was God doing this? God was merciful to them in that He was removing them before the great calamity of His judgment came upon the people.

They are described as "righteous." When the people are set forth in this way, it is a declaration of their right standing before God. These people had been attempting to live righteously before God, but the people among whom they lived would not have them in their midst. It would seem by the manner in which they are described that these righteous persons had met with death due to unjust treatment toward them by the wicked persons in the society in which they lived. When these righteous people died, no one seemed to grieve. They had been a nuisance to all those who desired to live in ways according to their own desires, their own lusts. The righteous people were an ever-present rebuke of them and their behavior, so they were relieved at their passing.

The removal of these righteous people in their death and the reason that God was permitting their death were not understood by those who survived and who were living in sin. Where they were quite unconcerned and maybe even relieved that they were no longer present, they did not know that this actually portended their own ruin. God was being merciful by removing these righteous people from among the wicked, so that they would not suffer under the calamitous events that God would bring upon the wicked ones. We read the reason for the death of the righteous,

For the righteous man is taken away from calamity;
²he enters into peace;
they rest in their beds

who walk in their uprightness.

This is a common way in which God works in history. We might assume that the worst possible happening is if someone loses his life. But actually God at times shows mercy in removing people from this fallen world that lies under His judgment.

Consider the account in ancient Israel when God was about to judge a wicked king and his family for their sin. In **1 Kings 14** we read of God's intention to bring His judgment upon Jeroboam and his descendants. The account reads as follows:

At that time Abijah the son of Jeroboam became sick. ²And Jeroboam said to his wife, "Please arise, and disguise yourself, that they may not recognize you as the wife of Jeroboam, and go to Shiloh. Indeed, Ahijah the prophet is there, who told me that I would be king over this people. ³Also take with you ten loaves, some cakes, and a jar of honey, and go to him; he will tell you what will become of the child." ⁴And Jeroboam's wife did so; she arose and went to Shiloh, and came to the house of Ahijah. But Ahijah could not see, for his eyes were glazed by reason of his age.

⁵Now the LORD had said to Ahijah, "Here is the wife of Jeroboam, coming to ask you something about her son, for he is sick. Thus and thus you shall say to her; for it will be, when she comes in, that she will pretend to be another woman."

⁶And so it was, when Ahijah heard the sound of her footsteps as she came through the door, he said, "Come in, wife of Jeroboam. Why do you pretend to be another person? For I have been sent to you with bad news. ⁷Go, tell Jeroboam, 'Thus says the LORD God of Israel: "Because I exalted you from among the people, and made you ruler over My people Israel, ⁸and tore the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it to you; and yet you have not been as My servant David, who kept My commandments and who followed Me with all his heart, to do only what was right in My eyes; ⁹but you have done more evil than all who were before you, for you have gone and made for yourself other gods and molded images to provoke Me to anger, and have cast Me behind your back— ¹⁰therefore behold! I will bring disaster on the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam every male in Israel, bond and free; I will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as one takes away refuse until it is all gone. ¹¹The dogs shall eat whoever belongs to Jeroboam and dies in the city, and the birds of the air shall eat whoever dies in the field; for the LORD has spoken!"' ¹²Arise therefore, go to your own house. When your feet enter the city, the child shall die. ¹³And all Israel shall mourn for him and bury him, *for he is the only one of Jeroboam who shall come to the grave, because in him there is found something good toward the LORD God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam.*

God had regard for this child "because God had found something good toward the Lord God of Israel." We would understand this as God having regard for this child due to God's grace toward him and in him. But the point is this: the time and manner of the death of this child was due to the mercy of God so that he would not experience the terrible fate that would occur to all the others of Jeroboam's family. It remains true, "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints" (Psa 116:15).

The fallen world views the Lord's people who are living righteously among them as thorns in their sides. They are troubled by the presence of righteous people with their righteous standards and their righteous ways. Their very presence is a rebuke to those unrighteous people even as they aggravate their conscience, convicting them that what they do is wicked and is deserving of God's punishment. They do not want to hear what the righteous have to say. They do not want to watch what the righteous do. They are relieved when the righteous are no longer present. And in very difficult times, the unrighteous are relieved even when the righteous die and are no longer among them.

But they do not realize that God actually withholds the most severe manifestation of His judgment until the righteous are removed from the scene. This is not always the way God works, but He does do so when it suits Him. We read of this principle in the experience of Lot and God's destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. In Genesis 19 we read this account:

¹⁵When the morning dawned, the angels urged Lot to hurry, saying, “Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city.” ¹⁶And while he lingered, the men took hold of his hand, his wife’s hand, and the hands of his two daughters, ***the LORD being merciful to him***, and they brought him out and set him outside the city. ¹⁷So it came to pass, when they had brought them outside, that he said, “Escape for your life! Do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountains, lest you be destroyed.”

¹⁸Then Lot said to them, “Please, no, my lords! ¹⁹Indeed now, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have increased your mercy which you have shown me by saving my life; but I cannot escape to the mountains, lest some evil overtake me and I die. ²⁰See now, this city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one; please let me escape there (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live.”

²¹And he said to him, ***“See, I have favored you concerning this thing also, in that I will not overthrow this city for which you have spoken. ²²“Hurry, escape there. For I cannot do anything until you arrive there.”*** (Gen. 19:15-22)

God not only withholds the manifestation of His judgment when His people might be adversely affected, but He will also bless those who are not His people due to the presence of His people among them. We read of this in the accounts of the Patriarchs in Genesis. After Jacob had lived many years among his father-in-laws goods and people, Jacob desired to return to his homeland with his family. Here is the interchange between them:

And it came to pass, when Rachel had borne Joseph, that Jacob said to Laban, “Send me away, that I may go to my own place and to my country. ²⁶Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, and let me go; for you know my service which I have done for you.”

²⁷And Laban said to him, ***“Please stay, if I have found favor in your eyes, for I have learned by experience that the LORD has blessed me for your sake.”*** ²⁸Then he said, “Name me your wages, and I will give it.”

²⁹So Jacob said to him, “You know how I have served you and how your livestock has been with me. ³⁰***For what you had before I came was little, and it has increased to a great amount; the LORD has blessed you since my coming.*** And now, when shall I also provide for my own house?” (Gen. 30:25-30)

I believe that it is this principle that lies behind the apostolic teaching that a believing spouse or parent “sanctifies” either the unconverted spouse or the unconverted children (1 Cor. 7:14). This need not mean that the unconverted spouse or child becomes more righteous in thought or behavior due to the relationship with a believer. Rather, it may simply mean that there are many in this world who escape for a time the wrath of God, or the direct consequences of their sin, because God is being merciful to the believing relation who would be adversely affected by His judicial action on that one who is close to that believer.

This principle of God blessing people because of their association with God’s people may be traced to the declaration that God gave originally to Abraham. We read of God’s promise to Abraham, “I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 12:3). Many assign this promise to those who bless the ***physical*** descendants of Abraham, or the nation of Israel. Those who bless them will be blessed, but those who curse them, or afflict them, will themselves experience the wrath of God. But the God’s blessing and cursing is manifest due to the manner in which they regard His ***spiritual*** people, those in covenant relationship with Him, those who are righteous before Him.

In the world today God regards those people and nations who deal justly with His people. Those nations or peoples that curse, or persecute His people, will receive the retribution of a holy God who cares for His people.

The apostle Paul set forth this principle in his letter to ***the church at Thessalonica***. The Christians dwelling in that city were suffering hardship from its citizens. Paul wrote these words:

²Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, ⁴so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your

patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, ⁵which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; ⁶since *it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you*, ⁷and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, ⁸in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, ¹⁰when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed. (2 Thess. 1:2-10)

When the Lord does take His people out of this fallen world, it is to a place of rest and peace which they enjoy. Again, **Isaiah 57:1b-2** read,

For the righteous man is taken away from calamity;
²he enters into peace;
they rest in their beds
who walk in their uprightness.

And so, here the passing of a righteous man is described. He is removed from having to be in the presence of evil. The ones who had lived righteously entered their rest.

B. The condition and fate of the Unrighteous (vs. 3-19a)

In contrast to the righteous, we next read of the wicked ones who had lived alongside the righteous:

³*But you, draw near,
sons of the sorceress,
offspring of the adulterer and the loose woman.*

The ones who are alive and remain are addressed and called to come and hear the message of God. They are described as the children of evil parents, implying that they themselves are evil by nature. They were wicked from birth.

A challenge is leveled at them in **verse 4a**:

⁴*Whom are you mocking?
Against whom do you open your mouth wide
and stick out your tongue?*

These wicked people derided the few godly people that were among them. Opposition always comes against the righteous from the unrighteous. The unrighteous are characterized by deceit and rebellion. They are cruel and boisterous.

They are then charged with corruption in **verses 4b-5**:

*Are you not children of transgression,
the offspring of deceit,
⁵you who burn with lust among the oaks,
under every green tree,
who slaughter your children in the valleys,
under the clefts of the rocks?*

This is a denouncing of them due to their idolatry. The “oaks” and the “green tree” were places in which idols were placed and the people came out of the cities to perform their worship. They were bold and zealous in their idolatry. The idols were set up under trees and there they performed their pagan worship. In their religious practice they were cruel and violent toward one another, particularly the children. These children were offered as sacrifices to their gods. The places that this was conducted were in the ravines among the rocks. The “slaughter of your children in the valleys” alludes to the valley of Hinnom which lie on the southeast side of the city. It was here that the people had worshipped the god they called Molech. This was where they had sacrificed their children in their worship of this god of the Ammonites.

King Josiah had one time attempted to eradicate idolatrous worship in the decades before the Babylonian invasion and the exile of the Jews from Judah. We read of Josiah’s reforms in 2 Kings 23.

³Then the king stood by a pillar and made a covenant before the LORD, to follow the LORD and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people took a stand for the covenant. ⁴And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest, the priests of the second order, and the doorkeepers, to bring out of the temple of the LORD all the articles that were made for Baal, for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven; and he burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried their ashes to Bethel. ⁵Then he removed the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense on the high places in the cities of Judah and in the places all around Jerusalem, and those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun, to the moon, to the constellations, and to all the host of heaven. ⁶And he brought out the wooden image from the house of the LORD, to the Brook Kidron outside Jerusalem, burned it at the Brook Kidron and ground it to ashes, and threw its ashes on the graves of the common people. ⁷Then he tore down the ritual booths of the perverted persons that were in the house of the LORD, where the women wove hangings for the wooden image. ⁸And he brought all the priests from the cities of Judah, and defiled the high places where the priests had burned incense, from Geba to Beersheba; also he broke down the high places at the gates which were at the entrance of the Gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which were to the left of the city gate. ⁹Nevertheless the priests of the high places did not come up to the altar of the LORD in Jerusalem, but they ate unleavened bread among their brethren. ¹⁰***And he defiled Tophet, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter pass through the fire to Molech.*** (2Ki 23:1 NKJ)

God had judged them formerly for their idolatry. He would do so again. **Psalm 106** describes their crimes of idolatry before their God, after first the Israelites are said to have failed to cast out the Canaanites from the land which God had given to them.

³⁴They did not destroy the peoples,
Concerning whom the LORD had commanded them,

³⁵But they mingled with the Gentiles
And learned their works;

³⁶They served their idols,
Which became a snare to them.

³⁷***They even sacrificed their sons
And their daughters to demons,***

³⁸***And shed innocent blood,
The blood of their sons and daughters,
Whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan;***
And the land was polluted with blood.

³⁹Thus they were defiled by their own works,
And played the harlot by their own deeds.

⁴⁰Therefore the wrath of the LORD was kindled against His people,
So that He abhorred His own inheritance.

⁴¹And He gave them into the hand of the Gentiles,
And those who hated them ruled over them.
⁴²Their enemies also oppressed them,
And they were brought into subjection under their hand.
⁴³Many times He delivered them;
But they rebelled in their counsel,
And were brought low for their iniquity. (Psalm 106:34-43)

They had desired their idols above all things. God would give them their desires, but with them they would also have with all the consequences. Their longing after idols would come back to haunt them. God indicated that He will hold them responsible and accountable for their action. They would reap what they had sown. We read in **verses 6** and **following**:

*⁶Among the smooth stones of the valley is your portion;
they, they, are your lot;
to them you have poured out a drink offering,
you have brought a grain offering.
Shall I relent for these things?
⁷On a high and lofty mountain
you have set your bed,
and there you went up to offer sacrifice.
⁸Behind the door and the doorpost
you have set up your memorial;
for, deserting me, you have uncovered your bed,
you have gone up to it,
you have made it wide;
and you have made a covenant for yourself with them,
you have loved their bed,
you have looked on nakedness.*

The Israelites were commanded to write the words of God and place them on their doorposts so that they would always be before them whenever and wherever they went. But these people had placed these “signs” behind the door so that attention was no longer called to them. In departing from His laws, they departed from Him. They went to commit their idolatry having bound themselves to their idols. There was immorality linked with their paganism. False worship and immorality tend to go together. There was no longer shame in their nakedness. They were openly sinning without shame or remorse.

In **verse 9** we read that they even went so far as to travel to other lands and peoples to learn about their gods, bringing them gifts in order to endear themselves to these gods. They were making a contract with death in doing so. God would judge them.

*⁹You journeyed to the king with oil
and multiplied your perfumes;
you sent your envoys far off,
and sent down even to Sheol.*

Here, “king” may be a reference to the god, Molech, for the words sound similar. The Hebrew word for “king” is **Melech**. The word for the god of the Ammonites is “**Molech**.”

The reference to “Sheol” is made. Sheol was the abode of the dead spirits of all who died. Their bodies went to the grave; their souls or spirits went to Sheol. Sheol may be a literary way to express the extent to which they went to sin against Him; or, it may refer to the practice of necromancy, attempting to communicate with the dead in order to obtaining guidance for life.

We next read **verse 10**:

***¹⁰You were wearied with the length of your way,
but you did not say, "It is hopeless";
you found new life for your strength,
and so you were not faint.***

Even though travel to and in these lands was difficult, they found strength in themselves to continue in their pursuit of worshipping their idols. They were resolved to accomplish their designs.

This describes the nature of human depravity. Man will forsake the right way and the true God and go to great lengths to embrace error, because he is a sinner. This is true of all people apart from the grace of God. How careful we should be to be humble before the Lord and seek His grace, asking Him to keep us and not allow us to defect from Him. For, if He ever let us go our way, we would run headlong into error.

We then read **verse 11**:

***¹¹Whom did you dread and fear,
so that you lied,
and did not remember me,
did not lay it to heart?
Have I not held my peace, even for a long time,
and you do not fear me?***

How did all this begin? They did not fear the Lord, but rather they apparently feared the consequences of not worshipping these deities. This is what generally causes people to embrace idolatry--superstitious fear. But they feared the wrong things. When they sinned they were not concerned about God bringing His judgment upon them. He was forgotten. And yet He was patient in that He did not immediately speak to them, but He gave them space to repent. But in His silence they became hardened and committed to their evil, thereby securing His wrath upon them.

Verse 12 speaks of the Lord's judicial dealings with them. Their self-righteousness would not save them. He will speak and declare what their deeds have been, and it will not go well for them. The second clause seems to be an understatement to emphasize the great judgment they would face.

***¹²I will declare your righteousness and your deeds,
but they will not profit you.***

When they cry out, they will not be heard. Mercy will not be shown them . . .

***¹³When you cry out, let your collection of idols deliver you!
The wind will carry them all off,
a breath will take them away.***

When His judgment comes then let them resort to their idols for deliverance. But they will be found as lacking substance as the wind. They would be blown into oblivion. We next read the second portion of verse 13:

***But he who takes refuge in me shall possess the land
and shall inherit my holy mountain.***

Some would at that point repent of their sin and flee to God for safety from His wrath. He would receive them and then bring them into the place of His blessing.

When one is in danger of God's wrath, it is foolish to try and run from Him, for there is no escape; rather, we run to Him and seek His mercy. To them He is merciful and gracious. They will be restored to His favor and be allowed to have a place in His kingdom. Here God declared that they would "possess the land." In the next clause, which is parallel to the first, it is said that they would inherit a place in the kingdom of God. The word is similar to that of our Lord Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. The Lord Jesus promised that the meek would inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5).

II. Comfort for the Contrite (57:14-21)

For the people who repented of their sin, God would make effort to reclaim and restore them unto Himself. **Verse 14** reads:

*¹⁴And it shall be said,
"Build up, build up, prepare the way,
remove every obstruction from my people's way."*

His people who are the recipients of His salvation, are being brought to His kingdom. The "way" or "road", which leads them there, is to be prepared so as to secure their successful journey, God issues the decree that it be so. Nothing will prohibit His people from experiencing His blessing.

*¹⁵For thus says the One who is high and lifted up,
who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:
"I dwell in the high and holy place,
and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit,
to revive the spirit of the lowly,
and to revive the heart of the contrite.*

In order to encourage the ones who would not expect or perhaps doubt due to their own past, God encourages them as a great God Who can bring these things to pass. He is the "high and exalted One", the One who has all authority and power at His disposal. He "lives forever" so that He may make His promises certain and lasting. "Whose name is Holy"-- He is dedicated to His task and may be counted on to bring His Word to pass.

God remains holy Himself even in His dealings with sinful people. He will bring humble, contrite people to dwell with Him there. These are people who are remorseful for their past ways. They are now so aware of their past defections and failures that they would be discouraged apart from the strong encouraging words that are given to them by their God. But with these they are encouraged and revived.

"Contrite and lowly" people are they which acknowledge their sin, turn from it, and submit to God's laws--His rule over their lives (cf. Ps. 34:17f; 51:17; 1 Pet. 5:6).

Then **verse 16** records God's assurance that He would be appeased with respect to His wrath toward those who repent of their sins.

*¹⁶For I will not contend forever,
nor will I always be angry;
for the spirit would grow faint before me,
and the breath of life that I made.*

Thankfully, He His wrath may be appeased; He may be propitiated, otherwise there would be no hope for any. Of course His being propitiated is only possible through the satisfaction of His justice in His wrath being poured out on a substitute, Jesus Christ the Lamb of God.

***¹⁷Because of the iniquity of his unjust gain I was angry,
I struck him; I hid my face and was angry,
but he went on backsliding in the way of his own heart.
¹⁸I have seen his ways, but I will heal him;
I will lead him and restore comfort to him and his mourners,
¹⁹creating the fruit of the lips.***

The one who receives salvation was himself a sinner who had lived in an unjust manner and had become successful through his dishonesty. His unjust gain angered God and He judged him for it. “His face” was hidden from him. This should have brought him to repentance, but it did not do so. He “went on turning away.” His heart was focused on “gain” rather than the Lord; he was covetous.

However, in spite of the fact that he had sinned in this fashion and God had witnessed it, the Lord would “heal” him, that is, bring him salvation, restoring him to favor with Himself. The one on whom God’s favor rests will experience His comfort, even all that “mourn” for their past dealings.

The result will be praise to God for His mercy and grace. Salvation will be experienced and enjoyed by many, because God had determined to show favor on the humble penitent. He would create praise to come forth from the lips of His people.

We next read of the two destinies of man (vs. 19b-21).

***Peace, peace, to the far and to the near,” says the LORD,
“and I will heal him.
²⁰But the wicked are like the tossing sea;
for it cannot be quiet,
and its waters toss up mire and dirt.
²¹There is no peace,” says my God, “for the wicked.”***

The result of God’s work of salvation would be praise to God for His mercy and grace. Salvation will be experienced and enjoyed by many, because God had determined to show favor on the humble penitent.

But in contrast to the righteous, the wicked who are not humble and contrite will never experience peace. They will be as “unquiet” as the tossing sea, which is constantly turning. For God has determined to wage war against the wicked, for them there will be no peace with Him. For God has determined to wage war against the wicked, for them there will be no peace with Him.