

# Blessings and Duties of the Righteous

One of Isaiah's major themes is that God requires righteousness of his people. The prophet admonishes the people to "prepare," fast, "gather," and be clean. Parallel to these instructions are the blessings that come to those who obey: they will have "peace . . . as a river," they will "not hunger or thirst," and "the Lord shall guide" them.

## **ISAIAH 1:16**

*Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil.*

The term "wash" may refer to members of the priesthood washing their hands and feet with water before entering the temple. This was practiced in biblical times (Exodus 29:4). It also points to baptism, which is a ritual cleansing from sins and transgressions (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, 1:51). Ultimately, washing with water represents symbolic washing with the blood of Christ to become spiritually clean.

## **ISAIAH 25:2**

*For thou hast made of a city an heap; of a defenced city a ruin: a palace of strangers to be no city; it shall never be built.*

Those who survive the judgments and the destructions upon the earth, as set forth in Isaiah 24, will praise the Lord, perhaps in prayer or song. Isaiah provides the words of a hymn of praise in Isaiah 25:1–5. The hymn includes words that bring Isaiah's readers great comfort: Jehovah is Israel's "strength" and "refuge from the storm." He is the "shadow from the heat." He is always there when his children need him, whether for spiritual protection or physical safety. The hymn begins

O Lord, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth. (v. 1)

Then follow expressions that speak of God making a city into a "heap" and a "ruin."

For thou hast made of a city an heap; of a defenced city a ruin: a palace of strangers to be no city; it shall never be built. (v. 2)

"City" here refers to all cities wherein wickedness reigns. It appears in the singular form, perhaps recalling the ancient city of Babylon, which represents worldliness (D&C 1:16). The righteous will praise God's name and the "wonderful things" he has done, including destroying Babylon or cities that are like Babylon in their wickedness.

## **ISAIAH 33:4**

*And your spoil shall be gathered like the gathering of the caterpillar.*

Isaiah 33:2–6 is a wonderful prayer from the righteous to the Lord. Its words exemplify how Saints may praise and worship the Lord. It sets forth the attributes of God, including his graciousness, strength, salvation, exaltation, justice, and righteousness. The prayer begins with the words: “O Lord, be gracious unto us; we have waited for thee: be thou their arm every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble” (v. 2).

Verse 4 of the prayer has an interesting image of a caterpillar gathering sustenance for itself: “And your spoil shall be like the gathering of the caterpillar.” “Spoil” generally refers to goods taken from an enemy during war. In this context it may refer to spiritual benefits, including peace, joy, and love, that the righteous receive as they partake of the Lord’s salvation. The righteous, then, pray that they will receive this spiritual spoil just as the caterpillar gathers sustenance.

### **ISAIAH 40:3**

*The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*

The “voice of him that crieth in the wilderness” is that of John the Baptist, who during his mortal ministry cried repentance to the people (John 1:6–24; Mark 1:1–8; Luke 1:76–79). The “voice” also pertains to others besides John (D&C 33:10; 88:66).

The statement “prepare ye the way of the Lord” is a commission to prepare for the coming of the Lord by crying repentance and gathering a people sufficiently prepared by covenant and ordinance to receive him (Malachi 3:1; Luke 3:4–10 JST; D&C 84:28). John the Baptist prepared the way for the Lord’s first coming. John also prepared the way of the Lord when he appeared to Joseph Smith to restore the keys of the Aaronic Priesthood. This commenced the preparation for the Lord’s second coming (D&C 13).

The phrase “make straight in the desert a highway for our God” also means “prepare the way of the Lord.” The people of the last days are to prepare for the second coming by making the path back to God’s presence level or smooth. In other words, they are to remove obstacles so that others can be obedient to the laws and ordinances of the gospel.

### **ISAIAH 40:31**

*But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.*

These four beautiful promises, “renew,” “mount up,” “run,” and “walk,” are directed to those who “wait upon the Lord,” or seek righteousness. The promises certainly pertain to the physical body (D&C 89:20). They also deal with the mind and spirit, which are continually renewed as his servants seek the Lord through righteous living and obedience to his commandments. The Lord’s servants are compared to the eagle—they will be spiritually powerful and sustained.

### **ISAIAH 41:19-20**

*I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together: That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the Lord hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it.*

The seven trees Isaiah lists represent righteous people. (See Psalm 1:1-3 for another instance of trees representing people.) Seven is a symbolic number that denotes wholeness or completion. These trees “see,” “know,” “consider,” and “understand” together. Note the Lord’s interest in the trees and his active role with them. He “will plant” and “will set” the trees in the wilderness so that all will know “the hand of the Lord hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it.”

### **ISAIAH 48:18**

*O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea.*

Peace of conscience and spirit are gifts God gives to those who are obedient (Isaiah 26:3; Psalm 37:37; Romans 8:6; 14:17-19; Philippians 4:7). That kind of peace comes from the Holy Spirit and is made available through the power of Christ and his atonement (John 14:27; 16:33). God’s peace is not offered for this world alone. The peace spoken of here continues into celestial glory and will be consistent, ever flowing, like a river (Isaiah 66:12).

When people obey the Lord’s commandments their righteousness is as unstoppable as the ocean waves. Also, their righteousness is truly subject to the pull of the heavens, as the waves are subject to the moon.

### **ISAIAH 49:10**

*They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them.*

This passage refers to the Lord’s blessings for those who are returning from exile, as well as for those returning from spiritual bondage. In physical captivity, exiles suffer from hunger and thirst. The heat of the sun threatens them. Spiritual exiles thirst for gospel truth and peace. The Lord protects and nourishes them. In all circumstances, it is only through Christ that spiritual hunger can be satisfied (John 6:35; Alma 31:38; 32:42; 3 Nephi 12:6; 20:8). The expression “springs of water” symbolizes living water (Isaiah 35:6-7; 41:17-18; 43:19-20), or Jesus Christ.

### **ISAIAH 51:1-2**

*Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged. Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him.*

Isaiah 51 is a call to those who “follow after righteousness.” The call is repeated again and again: “hearken,” “look,” “hearken,” “lift up your eyes,” and again “hearken” (vv. 1–7). The call reminds the righteous that they are descendants of Abraham and Sarah and heirs to the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant. Their rock and quarry are Abraham and Sarah, from whom they descend. Even as Abraham and Sarah received promises when fulfillment seemed beyond hope, so will the Lord fulfill his promises to comfort Zion (v. 3).

Ultimately, of course, the rock from which the righteous come is God the Father, and Christ, who is called the Rock at least thirty-four times in the scriptures. For example, the Lord informed Enoch, “I am Messiah, the King of Zion, the Rock of Heaven, which is broad as eternity” (Moses 7:53).

### **ISAIAH 54:17**

***No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord.***

The Lord speaks to the righteous and promises them protection from any weapon that is formed against them. This promise was repeated to Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon. The Lord said, “Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you—there is no weapon that is formed against you shall prosper” (D&C 71:9).

And Joseph Smith prayed on behalf of those who would worship in the temple, “We ask thee, Holy Father, to establish the people that shall worship, and honorably hold a name and standing in this thy house . . . that no weapon formed against them shall prosper” (D&C 109:24–25). Weapons, of course, take many forms, including instruments of physical harm and destruction or unseen powers of darkness.

### **ISAIAH 58:5**

*Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?*

Chapter 58 of Isaiah outlines the true law of the fast. Fasting involves far more than simply abstaining from two meals. Participants in a true fast seek to help and bless others. They remove heavy burdens from the shoulders of others. They share their substance. If they do these things, they will be blessed spiritually and temporally. Their portion of light will increase. Their health will be strengthened and the Lord will be their guide in all things.

Verse 5 indicates that they are not to put on an appearance of one who is making a sacrifice. True fasting does not consist of outward signs such as hanging one’s head like a bent bulrush to give the appearance of suffering and to attract the attention of others.

## ISAIAH 58:6-7

*Is not this the fast that I have chosen? . . . Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?*

This verse details four actions of a true fast before the Lord: (1) giving bread to the hungry, where bread represents food generally; (2) assisting the poor; (3) covering the naked, meaning providing the destitute with clothing through fast offerings; and (4) helping family members in need, or in Isaiah's words, "[hiding] not thyself from thine own flesh." These four actions are the essence of pure religion (Matthew 25:31-46; James 1:27). Those who have done these things will receive God's blessings. Isaiah lists some of those blessings. For example, their fasting will be recognized and their prayers heard (Isaiah 58:8-12; see also Ezekiel 18:5-9, 16-17).

## ISAIAH 58:11

*And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.*

This verse describes four blessings to those who live the true law of the fast before the Lord: the Lord will guide them, he will satisfy their souls in drought, he will make fat their bones, and he will make them like a watered garden or spring of water. The Lord provides living water in times of spiritual drought. Bones were considered the gauge of the body's vitality—they become dry and brittle with age and illness but are moist and supple with youth, health, and vigor (Job 21:24). Bones that are made fat are renewed and made strong (Isaiah 66:14). "Make fat thy bones" may also refer to the resurrection, when dead bones will be renewed with life.

Isaiah says the righteous will be like a "watered garden" and a "spring." In a garden, water, the source of life, often comes from the outside. It is the same for the righteous, who receive sustenance from the Lord (Isaiah 51:3; Numbers 24:5-6). Jesus said, "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38). In this dispensation the Lord promised, "Unto him that keepeth my commandments I will give the mysteries of my kingdom, and the same shall be in him a well of living water, springing up unto everlasting life" (D&C 63:23).

## ISAIAH 65:8

*Thus saith the Lord, As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it: so will I do for my servants' sakes, that I may not destroy them all.*

Israel is the Lord's vineyard (Isaiah 5:1; 27:2), which has produced mostly wild grapes useless for wine. But there have always been a few who remain faithful to the Lord and his law. For the sake of these few good grapes, the Lord has refrained from altogether destroying the vineyard. In the end, though, only the good clusters will be saved, and the rest will be destroyed (Isaiah 1:9, 27-28; 4:3-4).

The expression “destroy it not; for a blessing is in it,” may have been part of a vintage song. (Isaiah 16:10 and Jeremiah 25:30 suggest that those who worked in vineyards sang and shouted.) The grape cluster should not be destroyed because of the good juice in it. This image symbolizes the Lord’s treatment of Israel—he promises not to destroy the whole of Israel because of the good people who remain.

### **ISAIAH 65:10**

*And Sharon shall be a fold of flocks, and the valley of Achor a place for the herds to lie down in, for my people that have sought me.*

Isaiah 65:8–10 is a prophecy about God’s covenant people. He refers to them as “my servants,” “Jacob,” “Judah,” “an inheritor,” “mine elect,” and “my people.” The Lord promises to provide an inheritance for his elect (v. 9) and a safe place for the righteous.

Sharon is the coastal plain from Carmel south to Joppa. The Israelites marched through the valley of Achor (perhaps Wadi Qelt), on the east, to get from Jericho to Jerusalem (Joshua 7:24; 15:7). Isaiah expresses, then, that the whole land from east to west, will become a place of safety and refuge for the Lord’s people. It will become like a gigantic sheepfold for those who seek the Lord. They will find pasture, water, and safety there, because Jesus Christ himself will be their Shepherd.