

## Isaiah 58

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In Isaiah 58 of the Old Testament, we find a beautiful description of the law of the fast, written by Isaiah the prophet. In addition to being filled with prophetic promise, Isaiah 58 showcases Isaiah's skill as a poet through his use of a literary device called a chiasm—a method of repeating significant themes or points in a reverse sequence, with the meat of the subject being at the middle. This chiastic structure in Isaiah 58 occurs generally through the entire chapter and, on a smaller scale, in some of the individual verses.

An example of a chiasm is contained in verses 8–10, where spiritual blessings are listed for those who obey the law of the fast.

The chiasm begins in verse 8 with a description of light: “Then shall thy light break forth as the morning” and then ends in verse 10 by promising: “...then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday.”

But it is at the middle of the chiastic structure that we find the greatest blessing: “Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am” (Isaiah 58:9).

Those who observe a proper fast shall have their prayers answered.

## **Isaiah 58 and the True Law of the Fast**

Isaiah's commission from the Lord was to “cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins” (Isaiah 58:1). This verse has reference to the Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur, when a trumpet would be sounded and all Israel would fast and pray, evaluating their lives and repenting of their sins.

But the Lord was not pleased that the children of Israel were seeking God through the rituals pertaining to the Law of Moses and the law of the fast in an “afflicted manner”. In other words, they were going through the motions, but their hearts were not in it. It was all for show, and they were not observing the fast with the right intentions. (see verses 2–5)

Isaiah points out where the people were falling short in a series of questions:

*Is not this the fast that I have chosen?  
... to loose the bands of wickedness,  
... to undo the heavy burdens,  
... and to let the oppressed go free,  
... and that ye break every yoke?  
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?  
(Isaiah 58:6-7, emphasis added)*

As we can see, the true law of the fast is not to put on the “sackcloth and ashes”, and “bow down (the) head”, and “afflict (the) soul”, but to care for the poor and the needy—to share of our substance, to clothe the naked, to lift the downtrodden. (see verses 2-7)

## Repairer of the Breach

Great blessings are promised to those who observe the law of the fast. Isaiah 58 lists blessings of light, health, righteousness, glory as a protection, answers to prayer, a watered soul in drought, and a building up of waste places. (see verses 8-12)

But these are not the greatest blessings to be obtained, nor the greatest services to be rendered. Although the law of the fast was instituted to address both the temporal needs of the poor and to provide for our own spiritual development, we have a far greater responsibility: We must spiritually build up, or edify, our brothers and sisters.

Consider the following verse, which focuses on the spiritual needs of our fellowman instead of just his or her temporal needs: “And 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, emphasis added).

How do we draw out our own soul to feed the spiritually hungry? How do we satisfy the souls who are spiritually afflicted? We do that by sharing our light. We are commanded to allow our light to rise in the midst of obscurity; to let the darkest part of our own souls to be as the noonday so that others may see it and be strengthened thereby.

And if we lift one another in such a manner, these are the blessings we will obtain:

*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. And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places . . . (Isaiah 58:11-12).*

We are not the only ones who shall build up the old waste places, but those who are *of us*, or lifted by us, who shall help us build once they have been spiritually healed.

The greatest promise of this chapter comes at the end of verse 12: “. . . thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; *and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in*” (Isaiah 58:12, emphasis added).

That was the mission of Jesus Christ. He is our perfect example of how one can repair the walls breached by Satan, and restore the paths so we might once again walk toward Him.

## More about “Isaiah 58”

“Isaiah 58” was written by [Daron D. Fraley](#). The subject, “Isaiah 58,” is of vital importance to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. If you would like to know more about Mormons with no obligation, please click on the following links: