

that mere forms and ceremonies will never bring happiness or secure God's blessing. Their purpose is only to present to the mind the great truths taught in God's Word. If the form or ceremony is made an end in itself, it soon becomes a snare and a delusion, rather than a means of salvation.

B. (2) God's Blessing on Those Who Seek Him in Sincerity and Truth (Isaiah 58:6-14)

In contrast with verse 5, which declares that God will not give His mercy to people simply because they go through the forms and ceremony of a fast, verse 6 points out that the real fast that He accepts is that which leads to righteousness, justice, and kindness. True religion inevitably leads to kindness and helpfulness. If this result does not come it is plain that the forms and ceremonies involved are mere empty vanity. The one who is truly fasting before God will break every yoke by which he is oppressing someone else, and will loose every band that brings harm to a neighbor. If true trust in God results in truly righteous living, then the result described in verse 8 and following will inevitably come. God will no longer seem far away, but will be near and will guide His people continually; He will allow them to build up what has been torn down and destroyed as a result of sin.

Modern critics point to v.12 as evidence that this passage is part of a so-called "third Isaiah," written by an unknown author about a century after the return from exile, when the people, already back from Babylon and dwelling in their own land, had made little headway in rebuilding, but there is little else in these chapters to suggest such an idea. The verse does not require such an interpretation. While it could give great comfort to people in difficult days after the exile, it could apply equally well to people in Isaiah's day or at any other time who see about them waste and destruction which has come as a result of sin and wickedness.

In verses 13 and 14 the promised blessing reaches a wonderful climax, as God declares to His people that if they will cease from using His ordinances simply as a means to bring pleasure to themselves, and will endeavor instead to seek to do His will in connection with them, He will cause them "to ride upon the high places of the earth."