

PRELIMS. This chapter is about God's people Israel, now the Church. They are being **rebuked** for their misunderstanding of what **true service** to God really is. God is doing it under the **theme** of **fasting!** (Fasting in this context just means the **form** of their commitment to God). Israel **thinks**, by their fasting, they are truly pleasing God, but they are not. God says their fast is not a fast at all!

God is speaking to His **own people** "*declare to My people*" And He is asking Isaiah to "*declare...their transgressions...their sins*"[1]! **APP** Now Israel did **not think** they had any 'real' sins! They thought they had a very **good relationship** with God. So do most church-goers! Church-goers usually think that because they are God's covenant people everything is fine! Not so! Israel made the **big mistake** of thinking that because they were **children of Abraham** (genetically) and circumcised they were all right with God!

Actually God **agrees** that Israel do acknowledge Him "*...they seek Me daily and delight to know My ways...they delight to draw near to God*"[2] It is excellent to daily seek to worship God! **Do you?**

But Israel **did complain** to God about the fact that He did **not acknowledge** their fasting "*Why have we fasted and You see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and You take no knowledge of it?*"[3]! Israel are **offended**. They **expected** more from God **because** they were **so diligent** and obedient **by attending** God's sanctuary.

Yet their service was not pleasing to God! God had **serious complaints** to make against them. His complaint was this: Your service (fasting), is **self-centred** - they were not doing it **to the Lord!** "*Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure*"[3b] In other words it was **not true** worship, because they were doing it **formally** and **hypocritically**, for **themselves** and not to God! They were not seeking to please God but to clear their **consciences**, to make them **feel better** and 'holy'! **APP** Friends, we can be going to church and never miss a service or meeting, we can keep all the commandments - and yet God can be angry with us! There must be

spiritual fellowship with the **Lord**, in our service to God!

Israel's sin was **formality** and **hypocrisy!** They would formally '**bow the head** like a bullrush/reed'[5] They wore the right clothes "*sackcloth and ashes*"[5b] They went through all the **rituals expected** of worshippers! But God Himself, the Lord Jehovah did not mean very much to them. They did **not 'know'** the Lord **personally** - it was all form and ritual. **No spiritual fellowship!**

God said to Israel "*Fasting like yours...will **not** make your voice to be **heard on high***"[4]! God is not going to listen to your prayers! This is not the way to impress God! **APP** We may **feel** we are doing everything right, but it is not the way God sees things!

*"Is **such** the fast that I choose?...Will you call **this** a fast and a day acceptable to the **Lord**?"*[5c] This is **not** what God requires. *You see, the OT was **spiritual**. The OT was not only **law**, but **faith** in God, **love** to His Name was necessary. The NT only reveals who the Messiah and the real Sacrificial Lamb was to be - the Son of God. It is the same theology, the same grace/mercy in OT and NT!

Israel's **dependence** on fasting showed they **misunderstood** what God really wanted from them, and thus their response was **not** appreciated by God! **APP** It is possible that you/I may **think** we are pleasing God - but we are not! Well God asked Isaiah to **spell out** to them in **detail** the specific areas of their service which was grieving God! Well, we know what Isaiah had to say to Israel in the following verses - the rest of the chapter. But what do you think God would say to us **at Dens Road!** In what way are **we today** formal/hypocritical in our service to God? We need to think seriously about that!

I believe our sin was the same **complaint** as many of the OT prophets had **often** to tell Israel! It was this: that although they were worshipping God they did not **know God** as they should have known Him! That was a **common** and **big** complaint that God had often against His people Israel/Judah. And it is the same today. God complained: "*they **refuse to know me, declares the LORD***"[Jer 9:6] How **solemn!** It implies that Israel did **not** know God, but **could**

have known Him but they **consciously refused** to know Him! They did not **want** to get **more 'involved'**! They wanted God - but at a **distance!** Not **too** close! **APP** Know what I mean? Happy to come to church; happy to be **loosely** identified, but not **fully committed!**

This complaint came often, right up to Jesus day: "*You **know** neither Me **nor** My Father. If you **knew** Me, you would **know** My Father also*" [John 8:19] The important thing is to **know** God, not just to know **about** Him! Jeremiah proclaimed this: "*No longer shall each one teach his neighbour and each his brother saying '**Know** the Lord', for they shall all **know** Me...for I will **forgive** their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more*" [Jer 31:34]! Knowing God **personally** was identified as having your sin forgiven!

Having a personal **relationship** with God/Christ is **vital** for heaven! You are not going to enjoy heaven if you do not know God - for heaven is **full** of 'Godness'! You cannot be in heaven without having **eternal life!** Jesus said in His prayer to His Father "*...this is **life eternal**, that they **know** You the only true God and Jesus Christ whom You have sent*"[J17:3] The Psalmist asked us to be quiet and **still!** Why? *Be **still** and **know** that I am God*"[Psa 46:10]!

Hosea the prophet proclaimed: "*There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and **no knowledge** of God in the land*"[Hos 4:1], he therefore said a few verses later "*My people are **destroyed** for lack of **knowledge***" [Hos 4:6] How often did the NT apostles say "*I would **not** have you **ignorant***"? What must Israel do then? **Return** to the **Lord!** Hosea further says to Israel "*let us **press on** to **know** the Lord*"[6:3]

A **relationship** with God is what Jeremiah called for! "*Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and **knows** Me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth*"[Jer 9:23,24] **APP** Do **you** know God? Rather do you have **fellowship** with Him each day? Did you speak to Him this morning? Do you **consult** Him about the future?

This relationship with Christ is so vital/precious that Paul said: *“I count **everything** as **loss** because of the surpassing **worth** of **knowing** Christ Jesus my Lord...I **have suffered** the **loss** of **all** things and count them as **rubbish** in order that I may **gain** Christ.....that I may **know** Him and the power of His resurrection”*[Phil 3:8-10]

If the above is true, which of course it is, then I think you/I are **missing out** on a lot of things! Life could be a lot better for you/I, if a person like Paul could suffer so much and then say ‘it was nothing compared to what he gained by **knowing** Jesus in reality!

You see Paul’s ‘**fasting**’ was not like Israel’s here. There was no mock humility and bowing heads and wearing the right clothes! It **wasn’t religion**, it was **relationship**! It was knowing God!

God has expressed this clearly in Hosea *“I **desire** **steadfast love** and **not sacrifice**”* and what is that? *“the **knowledge** of God **rather than burnt offerings**”* [Hos 6:6] It is so wrong to think that salvation in the OT was by keeping the law and making sacrifices. Yes, God **asked** that of Israel in order to demonstrate that they **acknowledged** Him as the God who delivered their fathers from Egypt but **that** was not how **salvation** was found. No. Salvation was found by having **faith** in God and His Word. Israel had to **respond in faith** to God’s revelation of Himself to them, just as NT people must respond to God’s revelation of Himself in creation, providence Scripture!

So what are **you** putting your hope in? Have you **doubts** about being saved? Are you **trying** to be saved but cannot find it? Then **listen** - here is **hope**. Jeremiah was called by God to say to Israel **when they were far away from God!** *“I will give them a **heart to know** that I am the Lord”*[Jer 24:7]! Friend - you can **only** get a new heart from God. No one else can give you a new heart, only God can.

Ask Him to give you that new **heart** Jeremiah spoke about!

*“God...**desires** all people to be saved and to come to a **knowledge** of the truth”*[1T2:4] *“I will **give** you a **new heart** and a **new spirit** I will **put** within you...and **cause** you to walk in My statutes...**This** also I will let the house of Israel **ask Me to do it for them**”*[Ezek 36:26-37]