

ISAIAH

Chapter 57

Israel's Futile Idolatry

The 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; 2 he enters into peace; they rest in their beds who walk in their uprightness. 3 But you, draw near, sons of the sorceress, offspring of the adulterer and the loose woman. 4 Whom 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, 5 you who burn with lust among the oaks, under every green tree, who slaughter your children in the valleys, under the clefts of the rocks? 6 Among 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? 7 On a high and lofty mountain you have set your bed, and there you went up to offer sacrifice. 8 Behind 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. 9 You journeyed to the king with oil and multiplied your perfumes; you sent your envoys far off, and sent down even to Sheol. 10 You 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. 11 Whom 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? 12 I will declare your righteousness and your deeds, but they will not profit you. 13 When 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.

Ch 57 As the raucous drinking song (56:12) fades into the distance, the somber sounds of a dirge fill the air. Wicked leaders are summoned to draw near to hear their indictment. (TLSB)

57:1 *righteous man perishes* – Devastating practices (56:10-11) cause the righteous to perish. The absence of popular protest against a reign of unprincipled politicians shows that the people were just as bad as their leaders. (TLSB)

no one lays it to heart. Huldah explained that righteous King Josiah would die before disaster struck (2Ki 22:19–20). (CSB)

The prophet laments that the good go unrecognized though the unrighteous live lives of contentment, able to sleep in the night (cf. Ps 73) (TLSB)

57:2 *peace.* Contrast v. 21. (CSB)

The perfect peace in God's presence awaiting those who walk in their uprightness in "a contrite and lowly spirit" (v 15). (TLSB)

This is an excellent text. "May he rest in peace!" It is as if he were speaking in contrast to the "not peace." It is as if he were saying: "The souls of the saints are in the hand of God, since they are taken out of the world and brought to peace." (Luther)

rest. Cf. Paul's words in Php 1:21, 23. (CSB)

This is what they enjoy, and they are unconcerned about the world. Meanwhile they rest in the Lord. (Luther)

57:3 *sorceress*. One who practices soothsaying or magic (see 3:2; 47:12; Dt 18:10). (CSB)

Sorcery, the practice of magical arts, was strictly forbidden because spells and incantations presume to coerce God and conflict with His lordship over human life. (TLSB)

adulterers and loose woman. Spiritual adultery (idolatry) is in view (see vv. 5–8). (CSB)

Adultery and harlotry, despicable crimes when committed physically, describe the spiritual degeneracy of Israel's union with idols (Jer 3:1-3; Ez 16:1-52; Hos 1-3). The people, guilty of these crimes, have a depraved nature (cf Is 1:4; 47:4). (TLSB)

57:4–5 Fertility cults were a perpetual problem (e.g., 2Ki 17:10; Jer 2:20; 3:13; Ezk 6:13; Hos 4:12–13). Child sacrifice was a part of the worship of Molech and Baal. (TLSB)

57:4 *mocking*. The people mocked Isaiah in 28:9, 14. (CSB)

The Lord calls into question the grounds on which the wicked mock the righteous. The popular Egyptian god was depicted with his tongue sticking out. (TLSB)

children of transgressions. They are wicked children. These are pure thunderbolts, which are unbearable, because the hypocrites do not want to be *sons of the adulterer*, and *children of transgression*. Rather, they are extremely holy in their outward appearance. (Luther)

57:5 *burn with lust* – Israel's spiritual adultery expressed itself in the lascivious rites of the Canaanite fertility cult. During the reign of King Manasseh, which ended less than 40 years before the fall of Jerusalem, these rites were practiced with unchecked abandon (2 Kg 16:3; 21:1-17). (TLSB)

under every green tree. Associated with high places of pagan worship in 1Ki 14:23. Cf. Jer 2:20; 3:13. (CSB)

That is, “wherever there was a tree,” such as an oak or a pear tree, etc. They forsook the first commandment of trust and fell into reliance on works. All these places were forbidden. It is a very great sin to forsake the place ordained by God, the temple, and to choose one's own places. (Luther)

slaughter your children. Often associated with the worship of Molech “Topheth”) or Baal (Jer 19:5). Ps 106:37–38 says that children were sacrificed to idols and demons. (CSB)

Ahaz introduced child sacrifice to the royal house in Jerusalem (2 Kg 16:1-4). (TLSB)

57:6–13 Describes the inability of idols to save the faithless, in contrast to the security of those who trust in the Lord. (TLSB)

57:6 *among the smooth stones* – קִלְקִילִים means to flatter, to make smooth. “In the smooth stones, there is your portion, your god; that is, your heart, your treasure, your life is there.” (Luther)

Idolaters foolishly gave up the living Lord for an inanimate rock as their portion and lot. (Is 61:7; Ps 16:5–6; 73:26; 119:57; 142:5) (TLSB)

valley. Possibly the Hinnom Valley, southwest of Jerusalem, where Molech was worshiped. (CSB)

drink offerings. These pagan libations were especially popular. (CSB)

He is astonished at this act of sacrifice and libation. *Drink offering*, which was offered in the form of wine. (Luther)

grain offering – a cereal offering for appeasement, prescribed in the law of Moses. They should have made these sacrifices in the temple, not in places of their own choice. (Luther)

shall I relent – They did all things in order to placate God. Here God replies to them, “Do you think you can reconcile Me with these offerings?” Choice works, no matter how imposing, not only do not please God, but they make Him angry. (Luther)

57:7 Likely a reference to the adulterous Canaanite fertility cult activities. (TLSB)

high and lofty mountain. “High places” or “mountain shrines” (see Jer 3:6; Eze 16:16; 22:9). (CSB)

He persists in this metaphor, adulterers and adulteresses. An adulterer is one who lies with one who is not his wife. Therefore they are adulterers who adopt other places and teaching, because they forsook the established temple and set up their whorehouse on high mountains. Their *beds* he calls altars and temples. (Luther)

57:8 *door and the doorpost* – Instead of putting the prescribed words of allegiance to the Lord on the doorposts (Dt 6:9), they placed an inscription or a figure within their homes that dedicated them and their occupants to an idol. (TLSB)

uncovered your bed – You harlot, you must have a broad bed to roll around in, your altars and places.” He wants to indicate the insatiable zeal of superstition, in which there is nothing except security, peace, wealth, and glory. It is a broad bed. But here there is narrowness, the cross. (Luther)

you have loved. Pagan deities or idols. (CSB)

covenant for yourself. Lifeless idols cannot agree to a covenant. (TLSB)

on nakedness – “You have the desire, wherever you are seen, to choose the place for your adultery. You are ready to take on all idols.” For when Word and faith are lost, we soon slide into endless monstrosities. Therefore learn the First Commandment, according to which you are to trust in God alone, and then undertake these works by which you know that you are obeying God, but do not put your trust in that, and flee from self-chosen ones. Therefore it is adultery, a sacrilege against God, to choose your own works and to forsake the commandments. (Luther)

Lit, “gazed at a hand.” In the context of lewd acts, “hand” may be a euphemistic term for the male organ (cf Ezk 23:20). (TLSB)

57:9 Dependency on foreign kings causes idolatry (cf Ps 20:7). (tlSB)

to the king with oil. The main god of the Ammonites. (CSB)

“You seek treaties with the king of Egypt, that is, you have confidence in the flesh.” Paul says to the Galatians (Gal. 6:13): “That they may glory in your flesh,” and that all the ungodly fall away from the faith. (Luther)

oil. Used as an ointment for perfume. (CSB)

Ointments, drugs, balsam, myrrh, frankincense, and gold, a royal gift (cf. Matt. 2:11). To send those tributes is not a sin, but to forsake God and rely on the arm of the flesh is a sin. Therefore these are two evils, to depart from God and to put confidence in one’s own righteousness’s and in the arm of flesh. (Luther)

to the grave. Cf. 8:19. (CSB)

57:10 *It is hopeless.* Ironically, the people said that turning away from their own plans or from foreign gods was hopeless. (CSB)

Despite the unfruitful pursuit of other gods, Israel never tired of her idolatry or turned back to the Lord. (TLSB))

new life for your strength. Contrast 40:30–31. (CSB)

That is, “Your works.” “You found toil and other methods, and your zeal did not flag. Because you were mad with sensual desire, you could not grow weary.” (Luther)

57:11 *so dreaded and feared.* They feared men (see 51:12). (CSB)

Israel forgot the name and the graciousness of God, which should have been close to the hearts of all. (TLSB)

This is the vice of hypocrites. They do not fear the true God, but they are afraid where there is nothing to fear. We would have to be afraid in this matter, that we do not sin against faith and God’s commandments. There we transgress with the utmost smugness, but meanwhile we have been most fearful in our religion and in our chosen works. So we saw it in the papacy. There were those who only feared their own statutes and were not afraid where they should have been afraid. In offering their sacrifices by the riverside and in slaughtering their children, etc., here the people of Israel were not afraid. Therefore the prophet says, “Why is it that you are so afraid to forsake the things that you have done, but you are not afraid to forsake the temple?” (Luther)

did not remembered me. See 51:13. (CSB)

“What shall I say about remembering Me? You never thought of Me, and moreover you care nothing for Me, because your heart is filled up with other thoughts.” (Luther)

long time. God had not acted in judgment. (CSB)

“Do you think I will forever keep silent like this? Do you think I will keep silent forever because you do not fear Me?” Threat follows rebuke, as if, “You will find out in a time of calamity why I was silent. You fear your lies, and you neglect My commandments. Do you think I will overlook this in your case? What am I going to do?” (Luther)

57:12 *righteousness.* See 58:2–3; 64:6. (CSB)

Israel's supposed righteousness will not be enough to save them from God's coming judgment. (TLSB)

Here you see a discussion of the matter that is being treated. Here the prophet censures their own righteousness as a result of which they despised the righteousness of God. "And I will do it in such a way that you may see that your righteousness is doubly worse than sin, since it is a sin in itself and it also defends itself under the guise of godliness." (Luther)

your deeds – that is, "your righteousness and sacrifices, these will be of no benefit to you." The statement about one's own righteousness is dreadful. It says that our righteousness finds no grace in the presence of God. (Luther)

57:13 *idols deliver you.* The worthlessness of idols means that one is not enough and many still cannot save. (TLSB)

wind will carry ... breath will blow. Idols are no stronger than men. (CSB)

Idols of wood and stone will be swept away as though chaff. (TLSB)

takes refuge. See 25:4. (CSB)

possess the land. See 49:8 and note. (CSB)

The remnant will be in the Lord's presence, climatically made known in the new temple, Jesus Christ (cf Mt 12:6; Jn 2:19-21). (TLSB)

my holy mountain. Prominent phrase in Is (e.g., 2:2-4; 66:20). The Lord dwells there *:18), which means it is Mt Zion. (TLSB)

57:1–13 As Israel practices idolatry through a number of degenerate acts, they are openly mocking the Lord. We, too, have our own collection of idols. Whenever we give those idols the fear, love, and trust deserved by God alone, we are guilty of deserting and mocking the Lord. As a perfectly righteous man, Jesus died in our place. Because He was taken away to bear our sins, the Lord does indeed relent from punishing us as our sins deserve. • Lord God, teach us to turn away from every idolatrous act and to call upon Your name alone in every time of trouble. Amen. (TLSB)

Comfort for the Contrite

14 And it shall be said, "Build up, build up, prepare the way, remove every obstruction from my people's way." **15** For 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. **16** For 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. **17** Because 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. **18** I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will lead him and restore comfort to him and his mourners, **19** creating the fruit of the lips. Peace, peace, to the far and to the near," says the LORD, "and I will heal him. **20** But the wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up mire and dirt. **21** There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."

57:14–21 For those who are contrite and lowly, the Lord will bring rejuvenation (Mt 5:3). (TLSB)

57:14 *prepare the way*. The word “roadblocks” is not in the Hebrew but is added to make grammatical sense. “Remove the rocks from the road.” (Luther)

57:15 *contrite*. Or “crushed” (see 53:5). (CSB)

Though God lives in timeless heaven, He also dwells with the lowest person. He is present everywhere (Jer 23:24. (TLSB)

inhabits eternity. God’s existence is not bound by time. (TLSB)

I dwell ... holy place. God’s heaven is far beyond the mere high places of Israel’s idolatrous worship (Is 57:7). (TLSB)

revive the heart – God’s love of His creation not only gave life to Adam and Eve in Eden but also revives the weak with a renewed spirit. (TLSB)

57:16 Indicates that the Lord does relent (cf v 6); He restores and grants peace (cf 2:4; 9:6; Jn 14:27; Php 4:7). (TLSB)

not contend forever. He had taken Israel to court repeatedly (see 3:13–14). (CSB)

The Lord promises that His anger is brief and His mercy is endless. Cf Is 54:7–9. (TLSB)

nor ... be angry. He grants that He is angry. His anger will last for a while, but not forever. Just hang on. It will comfort your heart and uphold the Lord. (Luther)

People continue to depend on the initial breath of God placed within Adam. (TLSB)

57:17 *hid my face and was angry*. Israel depends on God’s life-giving breath (v 16); the Lord warns that He will turn away His face, causing Israel to expire. (TLSB)

57:18 *heal him*. See v. 19; 6:10; 30:26; Jer 3:22. God will forgive and restore his people. (CSB)

God’s forgiveness is not blindness to sin but a true forgiveness of the sins that are perfectly known. (TLSB)

lead him. Cf. 40:11; 42:16; 49:10. (CSB)

That is, “I drove them and brought them home again.” Here you see the cause of mercy, for He says, “They have no leader, no healer, etc., but they do have troubles. These move Me to mercy.” So we see in the Gospel how Christ was moved with compassion when He saw the people as sheep without a shepherd (Matt. 9:36). If only we could see our need as God can. He sits on high and has regard for lowly things. The beginning of salvation is for us to recognize our calamity. For that reason God humbles us so that we may know our trouble, and then He heals us and leads us. (Luther)

57:19 *mourners*. Those mourning the judgment on Jerusalem (see 66:10). (CSB)

Peace, peace. Contrast Jer 6:13–14; 8:10–11. (CSB)

fruit of the lips. Israel will praise God for His redemption. (TLSB)

to the far. † Paul probably had this verse in mind in Eph 2:17. (CSB)

God will cause the lips of His faithful to speak the gospel. They will speak of peace, the peace that surpasses human understanding. Such peace exists between this high and holy God, who is rightly angry at sin and all those who sin. Because of Christ, God's peace rests in His forgiveness. (PBC)

57:20 *like the tossing sea.* See Jer 49:23. (CSB)

Its waves overflow and turn up mire and foam. It is the nature of the sea that it cannot put up with what is unclean, since it is always boiling up. So also the ungodly man rages and does not hear the Word of peace but seeks security in his own endeavors. And in his supreme and endless works he throws up nothing but mud and uncleanness (cf. Phil. 3:19). However, the works of the godly are gold and silver and precious stones. These are the things they cast up. The ungodly, however, boil and foam up mud, that is, evil works, blasphemies, and varieties of ungodliness. The more they toil, the less they accomplish, and the less they accomplish, the more they rage. (Luther)

cannot be quiet. Contrast v. 2. (CSB)

The sea cannot rest even if the winds die down. (Luther)

The sea both hides its dirt beneath the depths and also unashamedly tosses its refuse on the beach. So also the wicked both hide their sins and then cast them into the full view of others. (TLSB)

Cf 66:24. (TLSB)

“I cannot provide peace for them, because they do not believe the Word.” Therefore they have not come to know the way of peace, either in good times or in trouble. The ungodly are without peace both actively and passively. Summary of this chapter: He attacked the idolaters and then consoled the godly. He preaches calamity to the ungodly and consoles the godly. And, now, having dealt with inner godliness, he will also offer instruction on outward works. (Luther)

57:14–21 The Lord heals and comforts all who are of a contrite and lowly spirit. But God's comfort and peace are withheld from the wicked, including those intent on backsliding in the ways of their own hearts. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the obstacle of our sin has been removed. There is now healing, comfort, and peace for every contrite heart. • Holy God, high and lifted up, create in us new and contrite hearts that we, repenting of our sins, may obtain from You perfect peace and forgiveness. Amen. (TLSB)