

-Save This Page as a PDF-

Isra'el's Watchmen Are Blind, They All Lack Knowledge 56:9 to 57:2

Isra'el's watchman are blind, they all lack knowledge **DIG: What three figures of speech does Isaiah use to describe the leaders of Isra'el? What time period was Isaiah describing? How do we know? To whom was this prophecy addressed? In what ways are the leaders as useless as gluttons or sleeping watchdogs that can't even bark? What are the primary concerns in these verses?**

REFLECT: How can we check ourselves against spiritual blindness? How can you be taken away to be spared from an evil situation? How do you think you would react in a situation like this? Why? What is the most important life lesson you can take away from this study? How can you use it to help others?

Throughout most of this third major section in the second half of the book: **II - That Her Sin Had Been Pardoned** from **49:1** to **57:21**, the emphasis has been on **the far eschatological prophecy** of the righteous of the TaNaKh in the Messianic Kingdom. Now in **56:9** to **57:21**, **Isaiah** prophesied about the spiritual condition of the nation about a hundred years in the future. We can be confident of our interpretation because **the nation** was not broken apart during the days of **Isaiah**, although undoubtedly corrupt. It was, however, during the ministry of **Jeremiah**, that **the beasts** came and Jerusalem fell (**Jeremiah 52**). It was then that **the Israelites** were taken into captivity and the book of **Lamentations** was written. In view of the wonderful future that **Isaiah** had already prophesied, one would expect **the Israelites** would want to obey **ADONAI** in anticipation of that glorious Kingdom. But, sadly, that was not the case. And if we look around us, we have the same problems today.



In this near historical prophecy Isaiah condemns the religious rulers of Jerusalem of about one hundred years later, during the ministry of Jeremiah. The leaders of Isra'el were not **the LORD's servants, they** were working for **themselves. They** had failed **the people** and **they** had failed **God**. Therefore, **they** were to be condemned and removed by Babylon. **In irony and bitterness the heart of the prophet invites the wild beasts of the field** and the **beasts of the forest to come and devour the defenseless sheep, because they were left unprotected by their shepherds. This is a scathing accusation against the slothful leaders of the people** and is a standard motif elsewhere in the Bible (**Jeremiah 12:9; Ezeke'el 34:8**). **Come, all you beasts of the field, come and devour, all you beasts of the forest (56:9)!** The **beasts** in the plural refer to the Gentile nations. Just because **ADONAI** had selected her as **His** vineyard did not mean **He** would not **break down its walls** and call in the wild animals if **they** did not keep **their** covenant promises (**to see link click Ba - The Song of the Vineyard**). Grace is not to somehow condone overt, continuous sin and make it acceptable, but rather, to make it possible, after chastisement, to start over with a clean slate and the power to obey (**Rom 6:1-23**).

But here **the LORD** was permitting the Gentile nations to **break down the walls** of the vineyard, and like wild **beasts, devour His** people. Assyria had already broken in and Babylon was coming. Later, others would come and **devour** her. If you have ever seen pictures of the walls of Jerusalem and the Wailing Wall, you can see that **they** are built of stones from different time periods and civilizations. History tells us that Jerusalem has been destroyed at least twenty-seven times, and today is built upon its own debris. To reach the place where **Yeshua** walked, you

would have to dig down thirty to fifty feet. Why did **ADONAI** allow the Gentile nations to **devour the apple of His eye (Deuteronomy 32:10b)**?

In his first figure of speech, **Isaiah** uses a **watchman**. **The watchmen of Isra’el** were the prophets, who were designated to see what was coming and prepare the people to meet the challenge (**Isaiah 21:6, 52:8; Jeremiah 6:17; Ezeki’el 3:17; Habakkuk 2:1**). If these “seers” were **blind**, however, the likelihood that the people would choose the right way and avoid sin was virtually non-existent. Unfortunately, that was the case during the ministry of **Jeremiah**. **Isra’el’s watchmen were blind. They all lacked knowledge, they were all mute dogs** who could not even **bark; they lay around and dreamt, loving to sleep (56:10)**. From **Isaiah** we learn that **Isra’el’s watchmen** were guilty of a whole list of wrongdoings. It would almost be laughable if it were not so tragic.

First, they were **blind (56:10a); they could not see the difference between good and evil**. Unfortunately, it was the **blind** leading the **blind**, and not surprisingly, it ended terribly. The Psalmist wrote: **I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against You (Psalm 119:11)**. The only way we can tell if we have a spiritual myopia is check ourselves against the **Word of God. For all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the person of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (Second Timothy 3:16-17)**.

Secondly, **they all lacked knowledge (56:10b)**. **They** lacked the necessary foresight and **knowledge** to lead, even though the well-being of the nation rested on their narrow shoulders. **The LORD** said through **His** prophet **Hosea**, “**My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge**” (**Hosea 4:6a**). The priests in particular had ignored **their** duty to communicate the Torah to the nation (**Deut 31:9-13, 33:8-10; Malachi 2:7**).

Thirdly, in his second figure of speech, **Isaiah** likened those counterfeit leaders to **dogs**. Rather than being barking **dogs** for protection, **they are all mute dogs**, because **they** would not **bark (56:10c)**. In **Isaiah’s** day every shepherd had a dog to help him watch the sheep. The dog would lie down at night and keep one eye open. The second a dangerous animal or human being came to harm or to steal the sheep – the dog would **bark**. But the **watchmen**, the religious leaders who should have been warning **ADONAI’s** people, were ignoring it. Like **mute dogs, they** did not **bark** when danger was near. A silent watchdog is worthless.

Fourthly, rather than keeping a sharp eye on the flock, **they** laid **around** dreaming because **they** loved **to sleep (56:10d)**. Instead of staying alert watching for the approaching enemy, those **dogs** were fast **asleep**, **their** legs twitching in **their** dreams, only waking up long enough to yawn and change positions. They didn't **love** the people, or even **their** task. The real affection of **their** lives was for **sleep**. Because those religious leaders had allowed their sense of calling to become fuzzy, laziness had overtaken them and destroyed **their** ability to perform their calling.

Fifthly, not only were **they** lazy, but **they** were also greedy. That is a bad combination. **They** were **dogs with mighty appetites; they never had enough (56:11a)**. The problem with them was not merely idleness and sloth; the problem was much more active than that. **They** were concerned with **their** own self-interests rather than the welfare of their flock. Ironically, **they** had forsaken the real purpose of **their** lives for self-gratification that **they** could never satisfy. Like a dog chasing its tail, **they** could never find the reward that **they** were so desperately looking for. It always seemed just out of their reach.

Sixth, in a third figure of speech **they are** compared to **shepherds who lack understanding (56:11b)**. Solomon wrote: **Folly delights a man who lacks judgment, but a man of understanding keeps a straight course (Proverbs 15:21)**. Good **shepherds** know the best grazing ground for **their** flocks. But these pseudo-leaders were self-absorbed and ignorant. **They** just didn't get it.

Seventh, **they all** turned **to their own way, each** seeking **his own gain (56:11c)**. **They sought their own interests without caring for the welfare of the people**. The cardinal sin of leadership is insatiable self-concern. The threefold imagery of the **watchman, dogs** and **shepherds** suggests that **Isaiah's** prophecy was addressed not only to the prophets but, as other places in the book, to the heart of the Jewish leadership: the priests and the royalty. Each group, without exception, had chosen to put themselves before the interests of **their God, their** country and **their** people. If **they** only could have seen king **Zedekiah** taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar, forced to watch the execution of his own sons, then blinded, bound with shackles and taken to Babylon to die (**Jeremiah 52:9-11**), then maybe **they** would have chosen differently. But **they** were **blind**.

Eighth, then **Isaiah** offers a concrete illustration. Without an introduction of a speaker we simply hear **the watchman** speak. Then everything **Isaiah** had been saying became tangibly real. **"Come," each one cries, "let me get wine! Let us drink our fill of beer" (56:12a)**. They drowned their sad plight and condition

in excessive drinking. The Bible doesn't object to drinking **wine (First Timothy 5:23)**, but it does condemn drunkenness. **Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise (Proverbs 20:1).**

Ninth, **they** were characterized by a false sense of security, saying **tomorrow will be like today, or even far better (56:12b)**. If a little pleasure is good, then more is **better**, and much more is **better** still. **They** faced the future as drunkards and **blind** optimists, unable to see beyond the glass of alcohol in front of them. There are many people who are facing life like that today. What desire never tells us is that she can never be satisfied, and in the end, she ends up enslaving us. Sin always takes you further than you want to go, and costs you more than you wanted to pay.

*In **Matthew 23 Jesus** accuses the Jewish leadership of not fulfilling **their God** given duties and pronounces seven woes against them. **Jewish critics like to use that chapter to try to show that there is anti-Semitism in the New Covenant.** If anyone ever does that to you, turn to **Isaiah 56:10-12** and ask them if **Isaiah** was anti-Semitic also?*

The disappearance of **the righteous and godly was** a result of **the apathy of the nations' supposed leaders. The righteous perish and no one takes it to heart (57:1a)**. As the wicked leaders continued **their** pursuit of pleasure, their flock was being devoured. They didn't care; in fact, they didn't even notice. **Evil** became so rampant in Jerusalem that during the ministry of **Jeremiah** there was a time when he was virtually unable **to find one person who dealt honestly and sought the truth (Jeremiah 5:1-2)**. There were a few, but basically **Jeremiah** found a city full of **evil**. **They** were like Lot in Sodom and Gomorrah; in effect **they** basically made no difference. **ADONAI** had disciplined **Isra'el** in the past, but **He** had only been met with resistance. If anything, **God's** discipline only made their hearts harder and they refused to repent (**Jeremiah 5:3**). Zion was rushing headlong toward both spiritual and physical disaster.

Therefore, **the LORD**, in **His** mercy, began to take **the righteous** out of their society. **Devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil (57:1b)**. **He** was preparing the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem and knew the suffering that would result. So one by one, **devout men** and women were **taken away**, not to be replaced. Slowly, like a body bleeding to death, the spiritual life was drained from the City. The Bible doesn't tell us how this was accomplished; only that **God** did it. The



disappearance of **the righteous** should have been a signal to all that drastic corrective measures were at hand. But **no one** understood **that the righteous** were **taken away to be spared from the evil**.

Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death, literally *they lie upon their beds (57:2)*. **Those who** walked **uprightly** had the **peace of death (Second Kings 22:20)**, and their souls are in heaven because of their righteousness. In contrast to this peaceful state of **the righteous**, the wicked, however, were idol worshippers; as we will see in the next section.