

Two Year Bible Trek  
Week 76  
Isaiah 56-66; Joel

**Key Concepts:** God calls people to faithfulness, judgment and restoration.

**Stories:** Third Isaiah (the name given to this section of Isaiah) opens with several post-return proclamations then continues with complaints against corrupt leaders and idolatry, God's denunciation of Judah's unfaithfulness, God's desire for justice and kindness, a call to national repentance, a proclamation of God's restoration of Jerusalem, a pseudo-servant song, a proclamation of Zion's restoration, a declaration of God's judgment, a prayer of intercession, God's response to the prayer and a set of concluding comments. Joel contains a description of a terrible locust plague, a statement about the coming Day of the Lord, a call to repentance and a second look at the Day of the Lord.

**Brief Summary:** Third Isaiah is called that because it is the third and last portion of Isaiah. Scholars believe that it was written during the period of return and restoration. The issue at hand with which Third Isaiah deals is that of the lack of fulfillment of the wonderful promises of Second Isaiah (chapters 40-55). Second Isaiah offered a glorious vision of God's blessings flowing to the people of Judah complete with servant songs describing the leader who would insure Israel's complete restoration. These were high hopes. What we discover from Third Isaiah is that these hopes were not being fulfilled. Here is some of the evidence.

First there are corrupt and incompetent leaders. The writer describes them as blind watchmen, dumb dogs and shepherds who have no understanding. These leaders have looked after only themselves and their desires. Second, there is still a lack of faithfulness among the people. Third Isaiah speaks to some of the people as "*sons of the sorceress, offspring of adulterers and harlots.*" The people are also accused of child sacrifice and worship of other gods. Third, the people do not live out their faith. While they might offer the appropriate sacrifices and carry out fasts in the prescribed manner they do not "*loose the bonds of wickedness, undo the thong of the yoke, let the oppressed go free... share their bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into their homes.*" In other words this new nation looks very much like the old nation. The nation is therefore once again, called to repentance. Nonetheless God will not forsake God's people and will even invite into that community eunuchs and foreigners who will bind themselves to God.

Joel's prophecies, like those of Isaiah were probably offered following the rebuilding of the Temple. We see this in his references not only to the Temple but to the rituals that were performed there. The initiating event for Joel's work was a severe famine that has gripped the nation. Joel declares that the people need to fast before God. "*Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly... and cry to the Lord.*" Joel also sees a larger catastrophe coming with the Day of the Lord, the day of judgment. "*For the Day of the Lord is coming... a day of darkness and gloom; a day of thick clouds and blackness.*" All is not lost however for God is "*gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.*" This is followed by God's promise that something new is happening. "*And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, and your young men shall have visions...*" In the end, the nations will be judged and Judah will inhabit the land forever. As with Third Isaiah, it is acknowledged that even though the returned people have not lived up to God's call, God will still save them.

1. How do you deal with unanswered prayers?
2. Where do you see justice breaking forth in our world?
3. What do you make of the prophecy that God's Spirit would be poured out on the world?