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The Shabbat Covenant – Part 2

By Jim Myers

Very little is said about the Shabbat in the *Prophets* until **Isaiah**, who proclaims a new revelation concerning the **Covenant of Shabbat**. This is found in chapter 56:

1 Thus says Yahweh, "**Preserve justice**, and **do righteousness**, for My salvation is about to come and My righteousness to be revealed. 2 "Blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who takes hold of it; **who keeps from profaning the Shabbat**, and keeps his hand from doing any evil."

3 Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to Yahweh say, "Yahweh will surely separate me from His people." Neither let the eunuch say, "Behold, I am a dry tree."

4 For thus says Yahweh, "To **the eunuchs who keep My Shabbats**, And choose what pleases Me, and hold fast My covenant, 5 to them I will give in My house and within My walls a memorial, and a name better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off.

6 "Also **the foreigners who join themselves to Yahweh**, to minister to Him, and to love the name of Yahweh, to be His servants, every one **who keeps from profaning the Shabbat, and holds fast My covenant**; 7 Even those I will bring to

My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; for My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples." 8 Adonay Yahweh, who gathers the dispersed of Israel, declares, "Yet *others* I will gather to them, to those *already* gathered."

The first two verses contain a word that we encountered in Exodus 31:13 – "**observe**" (**TISheMORU**). The form of the word in Isaiah is **ShIMeRU**. The root of both words is **ShMR**, which means "**to guard and protect**." Therefore Yahweh's opening words of this section would be – "**Guard and protect justice. . .**"

The author uses a very common Hebrew writing style to explain how to guard and protect justice – a **parallelism**. A parallelism generally refers to some similarity in the content and/or form of two components of a construction. The most simple and purest form of Hebrew parallelism is when the terms or members of one statement correspond directly to those of the other.

Component 1	Guard and protect justice.
Component 2	Do righteousness.

How do we "guard and protect justice"? The answer is – "by doing **righteousness**" -- which is defined as "*the fulfillment of all legal and moral obligations; by doing what is just and right in all relationships.*"

This is followed by another parallelism.

Component 1	My salvation is about to come.
Component 2	My righteousness to be revealed.

Yahweh's act of salvation will be an act of righteousness, just as guarding and protecting justice is man's act of righteousness.

Now the author further defines the act of righteousness by using two parallelisms. They will also define who will be blessed:

Parallelism #1

1	the man who does this
2	the son of man who takes hold of it

Parallelism #2

1	who keeps from profaning the Shabbat
2	who keeps his hand from doing any evil

The person who will be blessed is the one who does "this;" the person "who takes hold of it." The obvious question is – What does the author mean by "this" or "it"? He then goes on to answer this question in parallelism #2:

- (1) Keeps from profaning the Shabbat.
- (2) Not doing evil (on Shabbat).

What would "doing evil" mean in this context? The answer was given back in Exodus 31:14 with another parallelism:

1	who profanes it (the Shabbat)
2	whoever does any work on it (the Shabbat)

Isaiah has now linked the coming of Yahweh's salvation with Israel keeping the Shabbat by not doing work on that day. This probably got the attention of many of the people; however, the prophet's next words may have stopped them in their tracks.

He now includes eunuchs and foreigners in Yahweh's salvation message! He declares that Yahweh wants them to "keep the Shabbat" too. I bet this really upset more than a few Israelites.

The author joins two classes of people who have no "standing" in the community of Israel. Notice the parallelism concerning the eunuchs:

1	who keep My Shabbats
2	(who) choose what pleases Me
3	(who) hold fast My covenant (of Shabbat)

Next let's examine the parallelism concerning foreigners:

1	who join themselves to Yahweh
2	(who) minister to Him
3	(who) love the name of Yahweh
4	who keeps from profaning the Shabbat
5	(who) holds fast My covenant (of Shabbat)

The eunuchs and foreigners who keep the Shabbat Covenant will have a place in the community of Israel and be part of Yahweh's salvation. Isaiah uses a series of parallelisms to further explain their new standing:

Parallelism #1

1	I will bring to them My holy mountain
2	I will make them joyful in My house of prayer

Parallelism #2

1	Their burnt offerings will be acceptable on My altar
2	Their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar
3	My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples

Parallelism #3

1	Yahweh gathers the dispersed of Israel
2	Yahweh will gather <i>others</i> to them

The words found in this portion of Isaiah were written immediately before the Northern Tribes were captured by Babylon or within a few centuries after. Either way, the message reflects a major shift in the Israelite religion from exclusive tribalism. No longer would birth be the only way to be included in "Yahweh's salvation." **BHR**

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