

A House of Prayer for All Peoples

Isaiah 56-60 • Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

DISCOVERY AIM

Participants watch the doors open: foreigners and eunuchs, the old law's excluded, are welcomed by name into a temple renamed "*a house of prayer for all peoples*," and they discover Jesus quoting that verse as he cleanses the temple (the whip of cords belongs to John's account, 2:15), and the study paying its debt to the Ethiopian of Session 11. They learn the fast God chooses (58): bread shared, the homeless housed, the naked covered, and hear the Catechism call these the works of mercy. They meet the armor of God at its original address (59:17). And the light thread, planted at 2:5 thirteen sessions ago, resolves in the sunrise of chapter 60, complete with camels, gold, and frankincense that the Magi will one day carry up the same road (Matthew names three gifts; tradition counts three travelers from them).

CATHOLIC TOUCHSTONE

The catholicity of the Church, *catholic* meaning according-to-the-whole, for all peoples, and the corporal works of mercy (CCC 2447), which quote tonight's chapter 58. Epiphany also lives here: the Magi of Matthew 2 are chapter 60 arriving on schedule (CCC 528).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Chapters 56-66 turn to the community rebuilding after the return, with all its compromises and hopes. Chapter 56 opens with two case rulings that would have astonished the old assembly. The *foreigner* who joins himself to the LORD must not say, "*The LORD will surely separate me from his people*"; and the *eunuch* must not say, "*Behold, I am a dry tree*," for to eunuchs who keep the covenant God promises "*a monument and a name better than sons and daughters... an everlasting name which shall not be cut off*" (56:3-5). This matters doubly. First, Deuteronomy 23:1-8 barred emasculated men and specific neighboring nations from the assembly; tonight's steelman lives in that tension, and the answer is fulfillment, not contradiction. Second, this study owes a debt: the man in the chariot in Acts 8 was a *eunuch*, riding home from worship at Jerusalem, and his baptism reads like Isaiah 56:5 kept in person. The section crowns with the verse Jesus made famous: "*my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples*" (56:7), which he quoted while cleansing the temple (Mark 11:17); by the common reconstruction of the temple courts, the commerce filled the Court of the Gentiles, the one space the nations had.

Chapter 57 passes quickly in the session but leave one jewel on the table: "*For thus says the high and lofty One 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 humble spirit*" (57:15). The God of the Isaiah 6 throne room keeps a second address, and it is not a palace. Chapter 58 is the session's moral engine: the people complain that their fasting goes unnoticed; God replies that fasting while oppressing workers and quarreling is theater. Then the fast he chooses: "*to loose the bonds of wickedness... to share your bread with the hungry, and*

bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him" (58:6-7). This is Session 1's lawsuit resolved into a program: worship and justice, finally one fabric, and the promise attached is the light thread itself: *"Then shall your light break forth like the dawn"* (58:8, 10). The Catechism cites these verses when it defines the works of mercy (CCC 2447).

Chapter 59 diagnoses the wall between the people and God, *"your iniquities have made a separation"* (59:2), and then, when no man can be found to intervene, gives the study's resolved thread a magnificent postscript: *"He saw that there was no man... then his own arm brought him victory"* (59:16). The group now knows how the Church reads the arm; let the sentence land. God then dresses for the rescue: *"He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head"* (59:17), armor Paul later issues to the whole Church (Ephesians 6:14-17): the armor of God is, first, the armor God wears. Chapter 60 is the sunrise: *"Arise, shine; for your light has come"* (60:1-3), nations and kings streaming to the brightness of Zion's rising, camel caravans from Midian and Sheba bringing *"gold and frankincense"* and proclaiming the praise of the LORD (60:6). Matthew 2 is this page with names attached, which is why the Roman Lectionary appoints Isaiah 60:1-6 as the first reading for Epiphany; CCC 528 gives the feast its meaning. The chapter ends beyond the sun itself: *"The sun shall be no more your light by day... but the LORD will be your everlasting light"* (60:19-20), a promise Revelation 21:23 keeps in the new Jerusalem.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Roots. Deuteronomy 23:1-8 (the old exclusions, tonight's steelman); Solomon's dedication prayer already asked God to hear *the foreigner* who prays toward the house (1 Kings 8:41-43); 56:7 answers Solomon. The fast of chapter 58 stands on Session 1's Isaiah 1:11-17 and the Torah's constant triad: the sojourner, the orphan, the widow. The mountain the nations stream to (2:2-4) has been waiting thirteen sessions for chapter 60's caravans.

Fulfillment. Mark 11:17: Jesus quotes 56:7 at the temple cleansing, defending the nations' courtyard. Acts 8: the eunuch baptized, 56:4-5 kept. Matthew 25:31-46 sets chapter 58's fast at the center of the Last Judgment scene: I was hungry, naked, a stranger. Ephesians 6:14-17 issues God's own armor from 59:17 to the Church. Matthew 2:1-11: the Magi with the gold and frankincense, the firstfruits of Isaiah's kings-to-the-brightness image (CCC 528). Revelation 21:23-26: the city needing no sun, the nations walking by its light, the kings bringing their glory in: Isaiah 60, kept forever.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom • *Homilies on Matthew*

Preaching to a congregation that adorned its altar while beggars shivered at the church door, St. John Chrysostom refused to let worship and mercy divorce: honor Christ in the sacrament, he thundered, but do not despise him when he is naked outside; the same Lord who said *this is my body* also said *I was hungry and you gave me no food*. Adorn the table within, and do not neglect the brother without, for the temple of the afflicted brother is more precious than the ornaments of any church.

St. Peter Chrysologus • *Sermons for Epiphany*

The golden-worded Doctor preached the Magi as chapter 60 in motion: in the wise men (tradition counts them three from their gifts), the whole Gentile world bent its knee early, bringing the

prophet's own inventory, gold for the King, frankincense for God. What Isaiah saw as caravans on the horizon, Bethlehem received as a few tired travelers; and in them the nations were already arriving at the light of their rising.

St. Teresa of Calcutta • *The Witness of Her Life*

St. Teresa of Calcutta built a religious family on the syllogism of Isaiah 58 and Matthew 25: the Christ she received in the Host each morning she served all day in what she called his distressing disguise, the hungry, the naked, the dying stranger. A saying long associated with her runs: the fruit of silence is prayer, of prayer faith, of faith love, of love service: the fast God chooses, run (as this study may put it) as a supply chain from the altar to the gutter and back.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 2447.** The works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities: feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked. The Catechism's own citations here include Isaiah 58:6-7. Tonight's chapter is where the list comes from.
- **CCC 528.** The Epiphany: the Magi's coming means that pagans can discover Jesus and worship him as Son of God and Savior of the world; in them the full number of the nations begins its journey. Isaiah 60's caravans; the Lectionary sets that chapter at the head of the feast.
- **CCC 1961-1964.** The Old Law is holy, a preparation for the Gospel: it prophesies and presages the work of liberation, and its ceremonial prescriptions awaited fulfillment. The frame for tonight's steelman on Deuteronomy 23 and Isaiah 56.

THREAD WATCH

THREADS TONIGHT

Light: resolved. 2:5 (walk in the light), 9:2 (Galilee's dawn), 42:6 and 49:6 (the Servant as light), 58:8-10 (your light breaks forth), and 60:1-3 (arise, shine: the sunrise). Walk the whole trail aloud; it is the study's longest thread and it ends in a sunrise. 60:19's beyond-the-sun clause hands the baton to Revelation 21.

The mountain / house of prayer: resolved. 2:2-4's streaming nations arrive at 56:7's renamed house and 60's caravans. The Zion-as-mother finale still waits for Session 14; do not touch 66 tonight.

The arm: postscript. 59:16, his own arm brought him victory: say it and let the room enjoy knowing.

The eunuch's debt: paid. Acts 8 meets Isaiah 56:4-5. Let a participant make the connection if possible; it is the study's sweetest callback.

SESSION GOALS

1. Open the doors of 56:1-8: foreigner and eunuch welcomed, the house renamed, and the debt to Acts 8 paid.

2. Run the Deuteronomy 23 steelman, Scripture contradicting Scripture?, and answer with fulfillment, trajectory, and CCC 1961-1964.
3. Discover Mark 11:17: Jesus quoting tonight's verse at the temple cleansing.
4. Preach the fast God chooses (58:6-10) as the works of mercy (CCC 2447), with Matthew 25 as its final exam.
5. Land the arm's postscript (59:16) and issue God's own armor (59:17 with Ephesians 6).
6. Resolve the light thread in the sunrise of 60:1-6, with the Magi (CCC 528) and the city beyond the sun.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

SUGGESTED CLOCK

Gather and opening prayer, 5 min. Win, 10 min. Build, 55 min. Send, 10 min. Live It, memory verse, Take-Home, closing prayer, 10 min.

Pre-chosen cuts if running long: cut Question 6 (59:16-17, the arm and the armor) first, painful as that is; compress Question 1's second half second. Never cut the eunuch's debt, the steelman, the fast, or the chapter 60 sunrise.

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Isaiah 56-60 • Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

High and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: you dwell in the high and holy place, and also with the contrite and humble. Dwell here.

Tonight, open the doors you have opened: to the far-off, the excluded, the ones who call themselves dry trees. Teach us the fast you choose. And let our light break forth like the dawn.

Through Christ our Lord, the light of the nations. Amen.

WIN • OPENING QUESTIONS

1. Describe a time you were welcomed somewhere you expected to be turned away, or turned away somewhere you expected welcome. What did it do to you?
2. When you hear the word *fasting*, what is your honest association: diet culture, Lent, hunger, holiness, guilt? One word each around the table.

BUILD • INDUCTIVE STUDY

The Doors Open (Isaiah 56:1-8)

1. Read Isaiah 56:3-8. Two groups of people are told to stop saying something about themselves. Who are they, what are they forbidden to say, and what is promised to each, in detail? Then read verse 7's famous sentence and verse 8's last line.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The foreigner may not say, "*The LORD will surely separate me from his people*"; and the eunuch may not say, "*Behold, I am a dry tree*." To the covenant-keeping eunuch, the childless man whose name dies with him, God promises the unthinkable: "*in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters... an everlasting name which shall not be cut off*", and the Hebrew has a tender edge: the *name that shall not be cut off* is promised to the man who was. To the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD: their offerings *accepted on my altar*, full liturgical citizenship. Then the house is renamed: "*my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples*," and verse 8 leaves the door propped: the God who gathers Israel's outcasts says, "*I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered*." The guest list has a *yet others* clause, permanently.

Now pay the study's debt. Two sessions ago, a man rode home from Jerusalem reading Isaiah 53 in a chariot, and Luke's narrative keeps naming him by one word, again and again: the *eunuch*, returning from worship at a Jerusalem whose assembly the old rules excluded him from. Philip baptized him, and he went on his way rejoicing. Acts 8 reads like God keeping Isaiah 56:4-5 in person: the dry tree given, in the house of the Church, a memorial that has outlasted every family tree of his generation: we are telling his story tonight, on another continent, twenty-seven centuries later.

STEELMAN • BUILD IT AT FULL STRENGTH

But wait. Open Deuteronomy 23:1-3 and read it, because the objection writes itself, and skeptics use exactly this pair of texts:

Scripture contradicts Scripture, and the God of the Bible changes his rules. Deuteronomy 23, the Law of Moses, God's own word, expressly bars eunuchs and certain foreigners from the assembly of the LORD. Isaiah 56, also God's word, welcomes both by name, with honors. These are not different emphases; they point opposite directions across overlapping cases. So either God changed his mind, awkward for an unchanging God, or the Bible is a human anthology of competing policies, and appeals to *what Scripture says* are naive: it says both. And if these rules could flip, the skeptic continues, every rule can flip; the Bible is a wax nose.

Sharpen it fully. Then answer from the shape of the whole story.

2. Answer it: (a) what was the old exclusion actually protecting, and what kind of law was it (CCC 1961-1964 helps); (b) what does Isaiah 56 itself say the welcomed must hold fast to, and what does that reveal; (c) what does Jesus say he came to do with the Law, and how does Acts 8 embody the resolution; (d) what is the difference between a contradiction and a trajectory?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

(a) Distinguish what the Church has always distinguished: the moral law (permanent: the Decalogue) and the ceremonial and boundary laws (temporary by design: holiness fences for a young nation surrounded by paganism, CCC 1961-1964: the Old Law is holy, a *preparation*, prophesying the work to come). Deuteronomy 23's assembly rules were boundary markers: they guarded Israel's distinctness, and the eunuch exclusion in particular is commonly read as guarding the assembly against the pagan cults whose priests were castrated, and against any hint that mutilation consecrates. The fence was protecting the field for a harvest it could not yet see.

(b) Now read what Isaiah 56 actually requires of the welcomed: keep my sabbaths, choose what pleases me, *hold fast my covenant*, three times. The welcome is not the abolition of holiness but its extension: the same covenant, now offered to the very people the fence once excluded. That is the tell that this is not a policy flip: the *center* never moved, one LORD, one covenant, one house; what moved was the perimeter, exactly as the prophets always said it would: nations streaming to the mountain (2:2-4, Session 1), a Servant as light to the nations (49:6), Solomon already praying for the foreigner's prayers to be heard (1 Kings 8:41-43). Isaiah 56 is not Deuteronomy repealed; it is Deuteronomy's own destination announced.

(c) Jesus states the hermeneutic in one sentence: "*I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them*" (Matthew 5:17). A scaffold is not contradicted by the finished cathedral; a fence is not refuted by the harvest it protected. And Acts 8 is the resolution with a face: the Ethiopian eunuch, excluded by Deuteronomy's letter, promised by Isaiah's oracle, is baptized into Christ, in whom, Paul will write, there is neither Jew nor Greek (Galatians 3:28). The old rule served its season; the promise it protected has arrived; the door opens from the inside.

(d) So name the difference for your skeptical friend: a *contradiction* is two final answers to one question; a *trajectory* is one plan unfolding in stages, each stage announced in advance by the stage before it. The exclusion was never the last word, and Scripture itself says so, in Isaiah, centuries before Christ. Far from a wax nose, this is the strongest kind of evidence that one Mind wrote the whole story: the early chapters contain the later ones in promise. And a caution for us, not just for

skeptics: every generation of God's people is tempted to mistake its fences for the field. The test, then and now, is 56:8: does your instinct sound like *yet others will I gather*, or like the dry-tree sentence God forbade a man to say about himself?

LIVE DISCOVERY

Jesus quoted tonight's renamed house, out loud, once, and he was overturning tables when he did it. Find the scene: Mark 11. What was happening in the temple, in which courtyard, and what two texts does Jesus splice together? Pairs, 3-4 minutes.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Mark 11:15-17, the cleansing of the temple. The buying, selling, and money-changing had, by the common reconstruction of the temple courts, colonized the Court of the Gentiles, the nations' one courtyard, the square of earth where a God-seeking foreigner could stand. Jesus drives out the commerce and splices Isaiah 56:7 to Jeremiah 7:11: *"Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers."* Read his anger precisely: it is Isaiah 56 enforced. The rage is not against the temple but *for* the nations: their one prayer-space had been turned into a currency exchange, the *all peoples* clause buried under livestock pens. Every parish inherits the audit: is there anything in our common life currently parked on the square footage where the outsider was supposed to be able to pray?

The Fast God Chooses (Isaiah 58:1-10)

3. Read Isaiah 58:3-7. The people file a complaint in verse 3: what is it? What does God's answer expose, and then list, item by item, the fast he actually chooses in verses 6-7.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The complaint: *"Why have we fasted, and thou seest it not?"* Religious performance with no receipt. The exposure: *"in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers... you fast only to quarrel and to fight."* Hungry and mean is not holy; a fast that leaves the fists closed has only rearranged appetite. Session 1's lawsuit, iniquity *and* solemn assembly, one more time, in case fourteen weeks dulled it.

The fast God chooses, itemized: loose the bonds of wickedness; undo the thongs of the yoke; let the oppressed go free; *share your bread with the hungry; bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, cover him;* and do not hide from your own flesh and blood. Your group has met this list before, in church: these are the corporal works of mercy, and the Catechism cites tonight's verses when it defines them (CCC 2447). And Jesus set the list at the center of the Last Judgment's announced exam: I was hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked (Matthew 25:31-46). St. John Chrysostom fused the altar and the door forever: honor Christ in the sacrament, and do not despise him naked outside it; St. Teresa of Calcutta ran the same syllogism as a supply chain, the Christ received in the morning Host served all afternoon in his distressing disguise. And the promise stapled to the fast is our oldest thread: *"Then shall your light break forth like the dawn... then shall your light rise in the darkness"* (58:8, 10). Mercy is how the light gets out of the building.

4. (Optional, first cut for time.) Read Isaiah 59:15b-17. God surveys the field before the rescue: what does he find missing, what does the study's most famous phrase do in verse 16, and what does God put on in verse 17? Where has your Bible seen that outfit reissued?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

He finds no justice, and, verse 16, “*he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intervene; then his own arm brought him victory.*” The room may smile together: they know Whom the Church names here. When no intercessor could be found, God supplied one from his own life; 53:12’s Intercessor is this verse kept. Then the wardrobe: “*He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head.*” Paul reissues the same equipment to every baptized Christian: the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation (Ephesians 6:14-17). Read the label: the armor of God is not armor about God; it is armor *belonging to* God, his own battle dress, lent to the Church. You are wearing his kit into his fight.

Arise, Shine (Isaiah 60:1-6, 19-20)

5. Read Isaiah 60:1-3 aloud, and then walk the whole light thread from your margins: 2:5, 9:2, 42:6, 49:6, 58:8-10, and now this. What has the thread been doing for thirteen sessions, and what happens in verse 3? Then read verse 6 and name what is on the camels.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

“*Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.*” The trail: an invitation (*walk in the light*, 2:5), a dawn over Galilee (9:2), a person (*a light to the nations*, 42:6; 49:6), a promise stapled to mercy (58:8-10), and now a sunrise over Zion while “*darkness shall cover the earth.*” And verse 3: “*nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising*”: the streaming nations of Session 1’s mountain (2:2-4) arrive at last, uphill, toward the glow. The thread’s logic, complete: the light is the LORD’s; it dawned in a person; it breaks out of his people through mercy; and it ends as the gravity of the nations.

Verse 6: camel caravans from Midian and Sheba, “*they shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.*” If that inventory sounds familiar, it should: Magi from the East, a rising light followed, gold and frankincense unpacked at Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1-11). The Magi are Isaiah 60 arriving on schedule, the nations’ firstfruits, as St. Peter Chrysologus preached them, which is why the Lectionary appoints this chapter for Epiphany; CCC 528 gives its meaning. And verses 19-20 promise a city beyond the sunrise itself: “*The sun shall be no more your light by day... the LORD will be your everlasting light,*” a promise the Bible’s last page keeps: the city has no need of sun, “*for the glory of God is its light... and the nations shall walk by its light, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it*” (Revelation 21:23-26). Isaiah 60, kept forever.

DIG DEEPER • The Missing Myrrh

Isaiah 60:6 inventories the caravans: gold and frankincense. Matthew’s Magi carry three gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The Fathers noticed the arithmetic. Gold for the King and frankincense for God are the tribute of the nations arriving at the light, exactly what Isaiah foresaw. Myrrh, the burial spice, belongs to a page of the story Isaiah 60’s sunrise does not show, though Isaiah 53 already had: the light of the nations would first be a man of sorrows. The Magi’s third gift is the fourth Servant Song, wrapped. Take it as the Church’s meditation, not a proof: even the gift registry of Epiphany confesses the whole Gospel.

SEND • TAKING IT OUT

1. Run 56:8 on yourself gently: where in your instincts, your parish, or your group is there a fence being mistaken for the field, a person or kind of person quietly filed under *dry tree*? What is one concrete act of *yet others will I gather* you could perform this month?
2. Choose your fast from God's own list, and schedule it: bread shared with a specific hungry person, one homeless or displaced person concretely helped, clothing actually taken from your closet to someone cold. Not charity in general: one item, one name, one date. Whose light breaks forth like the dawn? Yours does (58:8). Mercy is also how God heals the one who gives it.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Do one corporal work of mercy from Isaiah 58:6-7 this week, personally, not by proxy, and tell no one except God.
- Pray Isaiah 60:1-3 on one dark morning this week, at an actual window, at actual dawn. Let the sunrise preach it.
- Find the outsider's square footage in your world, the place where the seeker is supposed to be able to pray, ask, or belong, and clear one table from it: one invitation, one introduction, one welcome that costs you something.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you."

Isaiah 60:1 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

High and holy One, you dwell in eternity and with the contrite: dwell with us.

Make your house in us a house of prayer for all peoples: doors open, tables cleared, dry trees given names. Teach us the fast you choose until our light breaks forth like the dawn.

And on the dark mornings, remind us of the caravans: the nations are already on the road, and the gold and frankincense are already packed. Arise, shine. Amen.

Before next session, the last: read Isaiah 61:1-3 and 65:17-19. Bring your Take-Home 1 memory verse, and bring whoever you have been meaning to bring. We finish where a certain carpenter began.

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used tonight, in order

Primary Text

- Isaiah 56:3-8 (foreigner and eunuch; the everlasting name; house of prayer for all peoples; yet others)
- Isaiah 57:15 (the high and holy One's second address; quoted in prayers)
- Isaiah 58:3-10 (the complaint; the fast God chooses; light like the dawn)
- Isaiah 59:2, 15b-17 (sin the separator; his own arm; the armor of God; optional)
- Isaiah 60:1-6, 19-20 (arise, shine; nations and kings; gold and frankincense; beyond the sun)

Live Discovery Target

- Mark 11:15-17 (the temple cleansing; 56:7 quoted, spliced with Jeremiah 7:11)

Supporting Passages

- Deuteronomy 23:1-8 (the old exclusions; steelman text)
- 1 Kings 8:41-43 (Solomon prays for the foreigner)
- Acts 8:26-39 (the eunuch baptized; the debt paid)
- Matthew 5:17 (fulfil, not abolish); Galatians 3:28 (neither Jew nor Greek)
- Matthew 25:31-46 (the works of mercy as the final exam)
- Ephesians 6:14-17 (the armor reissued)
- Matthew 2:1-11 (the Magi; CCC 528); Revelation 21:23-26 (the city beyond the sun)

Catechism

- CCC 2447 (the works of mercy; cites Isaiah 58:6-7)
- CCC 528 (Epiphany: the nations begin their journey)
- CCC 1961-1964 (the Old Law as holy preparation)

Memory Verse

- Isaiah 60:1 (RSV2CE)