

Isaiah 56:1-8

Thus says LIVING GOD: Safeguard¹ justice, and do what is right – for nearby indeed is my coming deliverance, and my righteousness is about to be revealed.

Blessed is the man who does this, the child of humanity² who holds fast to it: who safeguards Sabbath from defilement,³ and safeguards their hand from doing any evil thing.

Let not the foreigner⁴ who has grafted⁵ himself to LIVING GOD say, “LIVING GOD will sever, will utterly exclude⁶ me from Their people.” Nor let the eunuch say, “Look, I am a dried-up tree!”⁷

¹ שָׁמַר throughout these verses; I chose “safeguard” rather than “keep” in order to emphasize that this is a cherishing and protecting, holding dear, of God’s commandments -- rather than obeying them simply because it’s commanded or because it yields rewards. In the dictionary, the main translations for *shamar* are “keep, watch, preserve.”

² or Adam, or mortals

³ piel infinitive of חָלַל, to bore or pierce, but also to dilute or defile...not sure how those two meanings are connected...

⁴ גֵּר rather than *ger* — a broader term for any outsider, regardless of where they reside or for how long. [It seems you](#) can think of it as the larger umbrella term, with *ger* as the more specific, permanent-resident type of *ben nekhar*. This makes sense for a text speaking not only to immigrants residing in Judah and Israel, but also the non-Jews the Judean exiles would have encountered in Babylon — coexisting with, befriending, and even marrying.

⁵ לָוָה to join, be joined. I just like the grafting metaphor. It’s in the niphal so it can be either passive or reflexive; I prefer the agency of the reflexive — this person made a choice to join the people. Can also mean lend, cleave. Apparently this is where Leah got the name Levi from -- “Again she conceived, and when she gave birth to a son she said, ‘Now at last my husband will *become attached to* me, because I have borne him three sons.’ So he was named *Levi*” - Genesis 29:34

⁶ יִבְדֵּילֵנִי הַבְּדֵל the hifil inf absolute and then the hifil imperfect of בָּדַל, “to be divided, to separate.” Used in Genesis 1 for God separating light and dark, water

and land, skies and earth. Sometimes used with the idea of holiness being separation/distinction, esp. in Leviticus.

⁷ pretty sure one of my disability theology books says this might be a reference to an extrabiblical text that called eunuchs a dry tree....

For thus says LIVING GOD: To the eunuchs who safeguard my Sabbaths, and choose what delights me, and hold fast to my covenant – I will give to them in my house and within my walls a monument⁸ and a name better than sons and daughters. A name everlasting will I give to them, that shall not be cut off.⁹

And the foreigners who graft themselves to LIVING ONE, ministering to¹⁰ Them and loving the name of LIVING ONE, becoming Their servants – each one who safeguards Sabbath from defiling, and holds fast my covenant —

I will bring them to my holy mountain, and make them glad in my house of prayer. Their offerings and their sacrifices will be welcome¹¹ on my altar, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”

A declaration of the Lord, LIVING GOD, who is gathering the exiles [or outcasts]¹² of Israel: “Still more will I gather to them, beyond those already gathered.”¹³

⁸ literally *yad*, “hand”; can mean a place, a sign, a memorial, a share in something. I like “place” for how general it is — is this an assigned “place” for them to sit? A “place” set up to honor them (as with a monument)? Both?

On the other hand (heh), I’m almost tempted to translate directly to “hand” to call the English reader’s mind to two idioms: “give a hand” and “have a hand in” — in God’s house, God is giving faithful eunuchs a hand as in supporting them; and God wants them to have a hand in the worship that takes place in God’s house. They are to participate fully, not merely sit in an assigned place.

[A holocaust memorial in Israel](#) is called *Yad Vashem* in reference to this verse, conveying “the idea of establishing a national depository for the names of Jewish victims who have no one to carry their name after death.”

⁹ , from כָּרַת, same word used in Deuteronomy 23:1 ""No man whose testicles have been crushed or whose penis has been cut off may participate in the assembly of the LORD." Also used idiomatically "to cut a covenant." Also used about cutting the foreskin in circumcision. Also used in Exodus and elsewhere about cutting a person off from the people.

¹⁰ From שָׁרַת "to minister, serve, wait on, attend" — can be used to describe a high-up personal servant, as Joseph was to Potiphar (Gen 39) and Joshua was to Moses (Exodus 24:13); but often is specifically about services in a temple context, hence why "minister" seems apt. Also used to talk about eunuchs' role ministering to their monarchs (Esther 1:10) — now, they shall minister to God.

¹¹ from רָצוֹן, a noun meaning favor, acceptance, will; with the preposition /ע/ before it. So a very literal translation might be "Their offerings and sacrifices for favor on my altar"

¹² from דָּחָה "to push, thrust" -- the dispersed ones, pushed-out ones, outcasts.

¹³ from Lumina on verse 8's quotation: תַּנּ The meaning of the statement is unclear. The text reads literally, "Still I will gather upon him to his gathered ones." Perhaps the preposition ל (lamed) before "gathered ones" introduces the object of the verb, as in [Jer 49:5](#). The third masculine singular suffix on both עָלָיו (‘alayv) and נִקְבָּצָיו (niqbatsayv) probably refers to "Israel." In this case one can translate literally, "Still I will gather to him his gathered ones."