

## **“DELIGHTING IN THE LORD” VERSUS “DOING YOUR PLEASURE”: AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF ISAIAH 58:13-14**

MELAK A. TSEGAU, PHD  
(Adventist University of Africa, Kenya)

### **Abstract**

Isaiah 58:13-14 seems to give a paradoxical guideline pertaining the manner of observing the Sabbath. While the passage prohibits a person from doing his or her pleasure, it also prescribes calling the day a delight. Hence, the following question arises. What exactly is prohibited and prescribed on the Sabbath according to this passage? This paper seeks to answer this question by clarifying some ambiguous words and expressions found in the text as well as analyzing its literary structure. Also, some theological and practical implications are drawn based on the findings of the research.

**Keywords:** *שָׁמֵחַ, אֲשֶׁר*, Isa 58:13, 14, Sabbath, holiness

### **1. Introduction**

One of the hotly debated issues about the Sabbath is the manner of its observance. Different rules and regulations have been stipulated in an attempt to answer the question of what is lawful and what is unlawful to do on Sabbath. In this regard, Isa 58:13-14 seems to give a paradoxical guideline. While the passage prohibits a person from doing his or her pleasure, it also prescribes calling the day a delight. Hence, the following questions arise. What exactly is prohibited on the Sabbath according to Isa 58:13-14? What does the passage prescribe as well? What does it mean not to do one's pleasure but delight in the Lord?

This article aims to exegetically examine Isa 58:13-14 and understand the light it sheds on what scripture teaches about the observance of the Sabbath. Hence, a correct understanding of this passage is very helpful to experience the blessings promised to those who observe the day as is prescribed here. Also, this study seeks to clarify some of the ambiguous words and expressions found in the text. To achieve this, the text, in its

original form, is presented with a literal translation. Some keywords and expressions are analyzed. Then a structural analysis of the passage is presented. Lastly, some theological and practical implications are drawn based on the findings of the research.

## 2. Linguistic Study

The text is cited below with a literal translation. Some textual, grammatical, and syntactical remarks are given in the footnotes. A study of keywords and expressions is also presented under this section.

### 2.1 Translation

Working Translation	The Hebrew Text
If you <sup>33</sup> turn your foot from the Sabbath	אם־תָּשִׁיב מִשְׁבַּת רַגְלְךָ
from <sup>34</sup> doing your pleasure on my holy day	עֲשׂוֹת חֲפָצֶיךָ בְּיוֹם קִדְשִׁי
And if you call the Sabbath an exquisite delight	וְקָרָאתָ לְשַׁבָּת עֲנֵג
To YHWH's holy to be honored (honorable)	לְקַדְוֹשׁ יְהוָה מְכֻבָּד
And if you honor it by not making <sup>35</sup> your way	וְכַבַּדְתָּ מַעֲשֵׂוֹת דְרָכֶיךָ
By not finding your pleasure	מִמְצֹא חֲפָצְךָ
And speaking a word	וְדַבֵּר דָּבָר:
Then you may delight in YHWH	אָז תִּחְעַנֵּג עַל־יְהוָה <sup>14</sup>
I will cause you to ride on the heights of earth	וְהִרְכַבְתִּיךָ עַל־(בְּמוֹתַי) [בְּמֹתַי] אֲרָץ
I will make you eat from the heritage of Jacob, your father	וְהִאֲכַלְתִּיךָ נַחֲלַת יַעֲקֹב אָבִיךָ

<sup>33</sup>It is noteworthy that the second person singular pronoun “you” is used in this passage consistently. Thus, though the message is for the public at large, it is tailored in such a way that it addresses everyone individually.

<sup>34</sup>The word “from” is inserted here as the Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah and the LXX add that.

<sup>35</sup>The word עָשָׂה can also mean “do”. But “make” is preferred here as it makes more sense with the next word, i.e., way.

Indeed the mouth of YHWH has  
spoken.

כִּי פִי יְהוָה דִּבֶּר: ט

## 2.2 Lexical Study

Five words occur twice in Isa 58:13, 14 and among these four are taken as keywords to understand the meaning of this passage.<sup>36</sup>

חֲפִצָּה

This word has the following range of meanings: “(1) happiness, joy, delight, pleasure; (2) wish, desire, aspiration; (3) precious, priceless, valuable, “jewel”; (4) affair, concern, business, matter.”<sup>37</sup> Commentators vary in translating this word. Joseph Blenkinsopp translated the first occurrence of this word in verse 13 as “business” and the second as “affairs.”<sup>38</sup> In the same vein, Ed Christian wrote an article to show the appropriateness of translating the word חֲפִצָּה as “business” in Isa 58: 13, 14.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, Brevard S. Childs translates the first occurrence of the word in verse 13 as “delight” and the second as “affairs or business”<sup>40</sup>. However, John N. Oswalt rightly opts for the word “pleasure,” as the right translation of חֲפִצָּה. He argues that the context is about one’s motive in carrying out religious ceremonies, which should not be pleasing oneself but to find pleasure in God. Thus, Oswalt writes: “the frequent suggestion (e.g., Whybray) that חֲפִצָּה should be translated as ‘business’ here misses the point.”<sup>41</sup> A contextual study of the passage favors the translation of the

<sup>36</sup>The fifth one is חֲפִצָּה and that is left because the whole paper discusses it.

<sup>37</sup>David Talley, “חֲפִצָּה,” *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids.: Zondervan, 1997), 2: 231.

<sup>38</sup>Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, The Anchor Bible, 19b (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 174, 175.

<sup>39</sup>“God is not speaking against pleasure here, but against working, doing business on Sabbath.” Ed Christian, “‘Sabbath is a Happy Day!’ What Does Isaiah 58: 13-14 Mean?” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*13/1 (2002): 87.

<sup>40</sup>Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, The Old Testament Library (London: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 474.

<sup>41</sup>John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, The New International Commentary of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 508.

word as “pleasure.” Besides, the word pleasure is a broader term that may even include business and all other pursuits that humans undertake to realize happiness. The following citation from *The Isaiah Targum* will further support this point. “If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and celebrate the Sabbath with delight, honor the holy day of the Lord; if you give honor before it, not going your own way, or supplying your own pleasure, or talking sayings of oppression.”<sup>42</sup>

ענג

The word can be translated as “enjoyment, pleasure, delight.”<sup>43</sup> But it is not simply a delight but an “exquisite delight.”<sup>44</sup> Kronholm defines the word as “sensual pleasure” and as perfect delight (both mental and physical).<sup>45</sup> Isho’dad of Merv elaborates on the meaning of the word: “If you call the Sabbath a delight,’ in other words, you honor it for the banquets and the drinks, finding your joy on that day as if (it) were a party.”<sup>46</sup> The root of this word is found seven times in the book of Isaiah (13:22; 47:1; 55:2; 57:4; 58:13, 14; Isa 66:11). Besides, the parallel usage of ענג and קדש in verse 13 could imply that what is prescribed is a more intensive delight (ענג) in the Lord than the prohibited pleasure of man (קדש).

קדש

<sup>42</sup>Bruce D. Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum, The Aramaic Bible: the Targums* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987), 10: 113.

<sup>43</sup>William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, based on the First, Second, and Third Editions of the Koehler-Baumgartner Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros (1988), s.v. “ענג.”

<sup>44</sup>Francis Brown, with S.R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic*, based on Gcsenius (1952), s.v. “ענג.”

<sup>45</sup>Madla T. Kronholm, “ōneg,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. J. Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), XI: 213,214.

<sup>46</sup>Isho’dad of Merv, “Commentary of Isaiah 58.13,” *Isaiah 40-66, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, ed. Mark W. Elliott (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2007), XI: 216.

This word means “apartness, holiness, sacredness”.<sup>47</sup> This is the word used to depict how God instituted the Sabbath originally in Gen. 2:3. In this text, God made it holy, or set the seventh day apart. And this divine act of sanctifying the day is the rationale for keeping it holy. McComiskey comments:

A basic element of Israelite religion was the maintenance of an inviolable distinction between the spheres of the sacred and the common or profane (Num 18:32). That which was inherently holy or designated so by divine decree or cultic rite was not to be treated as common. The sabbath was holy, and the restrictions connected with that day served to maintain its distinctive nature and to guard against its being treated as common (Exod 16:23-26; Isa 58:13, 14).<sup>48</sup>

In the Book of Isaiah, God Himself is repeatedly called holy (Isa 6:3) and in this verse, God identified the Sabbath as “my holy day,” יום קִדְּשִׁי.

#### קָבַד

The word has the following range of meanings: “be heavy, grievous, hard, rich, honorable, glorious.”<sup>49</sup> “This root, with its derivatives, occurs 376 times in the Hebrew Bible. It is especially prominent in Psalms (occurs sixty-four times) and Isa (occurs sixty-three times), as well as Exodus (thirty-three times), Ezekiel (twenty-five times) and Prov (twenty-four times). Of the total number of occurrences, 114 are verbal.”<sup>50</sup> In Isa 58:13 the verbal form of this word appears first in pual then in piel and their meanings are “honorable,” and “to honor” respectively. These two forms of the verb are necessary to communicate thoroughness, for it is not enough to call the Sabbath honorable, but honoring it makes the recognition complete.

<sup>47</sup>Thomas E. McComiskey, “qādash” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 1: 18.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew*, s.v. “קָבַד.”

<sup>50</sup>John Oswalt, “kābēd,” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 1: 426.

## 2.3 Idiomatic Expressions

There are four expressions that need further clarification as they communicate a non-literal meaning. The first is תָּשִׁיב רַגְלֶךָ, translated as “turning your foot” from the Sabbath. In an attempt to interpret this expression, several suggestions are proposed. To mention a few: (1) “refrain from travel,”<sup>51</sup> (2) “keep from desecrating” the Sabbath,<sup>52</sup> (3) “cease to tread the Sabbath underfoot,”<sup>53</sup> (4) failing to turn one’s feet from the Sabbath as “an act like trampling on a pretty flower-bed”<sup>54</sup>, and (5) “trampling on holy ground with filthy feet”<sup>55</sup>.

The second phrase that does not make sense with a literal reading is וְדַבֵּר דְבָר, which means “and speaking a word”. Thus, the phrase is interpreted differently, such as: “speaking of business matters”<sup>56</sup>, “talking sayings of oppression”<sup>57</sup>, and “engaging in idle talk”<sup>58</sup>.

The third and the fourth expressions are found in verse 14: “ride on the heights of the earth” and “eat Jacob’s inheritance”. The first is “a metaphorical expression for a glorious elevation of life (Deut. 32: 13; cf. also 33:29).”<sup>59</sup> Austin gives the following range of meanings for this expression: “(1) that he will reestablish them in their land, or (2) that he will place them out of reach of those who would harm them, or (3) that he

<sup>51</sup>Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-66*, 174. John D.W. Watts also gives similar interpretation in parenthesis. John D.W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, Word Bible Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 25: 269.

<sup>52</sup>Childs, *Isaiah*, 474.

<sup>53</sup>A. S. Herbert, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah Chapters 40-66* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 143.

<sup>54</sup>H.C. Leupold, *Exposition of Isaiah, Volume II. Chapters 40-66* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 292.

<sup>55</sup>John Oswalt, *The New International Commentary of the Old Testament*, 508.

<sup>56</sup>Avraham Gileadi, *The Literary Message of Isaiah* (New York: Hebraeus, 1994), 14.

<sup>57</sup>Bruce D. Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum, The Aramaic Bible: the Targums* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987), 10: 113.

<sup>58</sup>Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-66*, 175.

<sup>59</sup>J. Ridderbos, *Isaiah*, Bible Student’s Commentary, translated by John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 529.

will help them rise above the limitations of earthly perspectives.”<sup>60</sup> In fact, the imagery of riding on the heights signifies invincibility and superiority. To “eat the inheritance of your father Jacob”, as a reward to an obedient life, reminds the reader of what is found in Isa 1:20—the presentation of “obeying and feeding” in juxtaposition. Besides, the fact that chapter 58 starts by addressing the descendants of Jacob and ends by reminding the same group of people of their inheritance gives more meaning. This inheritance “is all that the Lord promised ancestrally.”<sup>61</sup>

### 3. Literary Structure

Having studied keywords and some expressions in the text, we now look into the structure of the prophetic discourse.

The chiasmic structures noted by David A. Dorsey are insightful to see the larger as well as the immediate context of Isa 58: 13-14. While structuring the whole book in a chiasmic form, Dorsey places Isaiah 55-66 as a concluding message of condemnation, pleading, and future restoration and points out how it is positioned in parallel with chapter 1-12.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, Dorsey entitled Isaiah 55-66 as a “final invitation to return to YHWH” and noted that Isaiah 58 and 59, in parallel with Isa 61:1-62:9, have the theme of a “call for restoration and true righteousness.”<sup>63</sup> Thus, Isaiah 58:13-14 could be better understood when taken as part of this call. God is calling for a restoration of an intimate relationship with His people, which will bear the fruit of true righteousness. Hence, the Sabbath is presented here as a means to this end.

At a microstructure level, another literary structures can be observed in Isa 58:13-14. The first one is a protasis-apodosis presentation. Three conditions are placed in the protasis. These are: (1) If you turn your feet from the Sabbath..., (2) if you call the Sabbath a delight..., and (3) if you honor it.... Likewise, three promises are also given in the apodosis, viz., (1)

<sup>60</sup>John T. Willis, *Isaiah*, The Living Word Commentary on the Old Testament (Austin, TX: Sweet, 1980), 448-449.

<sup>61</sup>J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 483.

<sup>62</sup>David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 1999), 234.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, 228. Gary Smith also notes the themes of restoration and true righteousness in this section of the book of Isaiah. Gary Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 516-517.

“you may delight in YHWH,” (2) “I will make you ride on the heights of the earth,” and (3) “I shall make you eat the inheritance of Jacob”. The promises can also be seen as parallels –one building on the other. Delighting in the Lord leads to the other two –riding on the heights and eating the inheritance. Also, while riding on the heights refers to the spiritual blessings, eating of the possession of Jacob depicts material blessings.

I noted the following chiastic structure in verse 13, which could be of help to better comprehend the message of the passage:

**A** turn your foot from the Sabbath  
     **B** not doing your pleasure (פֶּנֶן) on my holy day  
         **C** call Sabbath an exquisite delight and holy to YHWH  
             **CENTER:** Sabbath is honorable and you shall honor it  
         **C'** not making your way  
     **B'** not finding your pleasure (פֶּנֶן)  
**A'** not speaking a word

Sabbath is honorable. It must be esteemed. This thought is the center of verse 13, as is shown in the above chiastic structure. However, the question is how should it be honored? What should and should not be done? *A* and *A'* answer these questions by pointing to two actions: turning the foot and not censoring the speech. Notably, a similar command is found in Eccl 5:1 and 2, where it says one has to “guard his foot” and “not to rush with the mouth” in order to give due honor to the house of God. Similarly, here, Isaiah is admonishing his readers to honor Sabbath, which is God’s sanctuary in time. Hence, these expressions entail reverence.

*B* and *B'* has the word “pleasure” in common and in both cases, the word is with a second person singular possessive suffix (your). This shows that it is not pleasure in general that is banned, but specifically “your” pleasure. Also, while *B* refers to doing one’s pleasure *B'* depicts a perusal of it. Both attempts are prohibited as a means of promoting self-denial. Putting *A* and *B* together, it is plausible to note how a true reverential attitude bears the fruit of self-denial.

*C* and *C'* bring honoring the Sabbath to its climax by combining a positive, as well as a negative command. *C* commands the reader to call the Sabbath an exquisite delight and holy to YHWH. However, this cannot be attained without a total surrender of one’s will to His. Hence, *C'* admonishes the reader not to make his or her own way or will. Ultimately,

genuine self-denial does not lead to self-pity but to a greater delight in the Lord.

To summarize, v. 13 calls readers to honor the honorable and the holy of the Lord, i.e., the Sabbath. Reverence, self-denial, and delight are the three important elements of the honor due the Sabbath. While reverence leads to self-denial, delighting in the Lord flourishes from the latter.

#### **4. Intertextuality**

Isaiah 58: 13-14 is not quoted elsewhere in the Bible. However, it is connected with two other passages that deal with the Sabbath in Isa 55-66. The first one is Isa 56:1-8. The parallel between Isa 58:13-14 and 56:1-8 can be seen in the employment of similar words. While Isa 56:4 talks about keeping the Sabbath honorable (here the antonym of honorable is used as in v. 2 “keep from profaning it”) by choosing what pleases God, Isa 58:13 states that the worshiper should not do or find his pleasure.<sup>64</sup> Another segment of parallelism between the two texts lies on the promises of reward to the faithful ones in observing the Sabbath according to God’s way. One of the promises given in chapter 56 has to do with elevating the people to a mountain and giving them joy (v. 7). A similar promise is found in Isa 58:14, where God promised to cause the faithful to ride on the heights of the earth and delight in him.

The second text that can be studied in connection with Isa 58:13, 14 is found in Isa 66:23. Here, the word Sabbath is mentioned, but unlike the other two in Isa 55-66, it does not mention how it should be observed. It simply depicts the scene of the climax of God’s restorative act. It is stated that when God creates “new heavens and new earth” all mankind will come to worship God from Sabbath to Sabbath. Again, though not explicitly mentioned, the concept of delighting in God as the essence of Sabbath observance can be seen here. For it is by coming to the Lord in worship that all mankind will experience the ultimate joy in the new heavens and earth.

A brief comment is also needful at this juncture regarding the existence of the concept of Isa 58: 13, 14 in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. The four Gospels narrate how Jesus, both by his example and teaching, purposed to restore the right observance of the Sabbath. And if there is one thing that stands out among many regarding what Jesus

<sup>64</sup>The Hebrew root word for pleasure is the same in both passages.

taught about the Sabbath, it is His depiction of the day as a day of delight. “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2: 27, NJKV). His healing episodes on Sabbath translated these words into reality and brought great joy to the victims. Indeed, for Jesus, the Sabbath is a day on which God’s creation can find delight in its Creator and Redeemer.

Thus far, the question “what exactly does ‘not doing or finding one’s pleasure’ on the Sabbath day mean?” has not been addressed yet. The next section that deals with the theological implications of the text will address that question, based on the exegetical study carried out so far.

## 5. Theological and Practical Implications

One of the issues the Book of Isaiah address is the tension between true religiosity and hypocritical piety.<sup>65</sup> Isaiah 58 picks two religious practices, which seem opposite in nature: fasting and feasting on the Sabbath. Thus he shows how the day should be observed before the Lord. There exists also one common problem undergirding the people’s wrong observance of the day, which is pursuing one’s own pleasure (vv. 3, and 13). But what does doing or finding one’s pleasure mean?

John N. Oswalt interprets the “doing one’s pleasure” in the context of Isa 58 as engaging “in religious ceremony to further one’s own purposes as opposed to God’s.”<sup>66</sup>In so doing, Oswalt connects pleasure to the motive of the person in carrying out the religious activity. Not only does God look at the sacrifice but also the heart that presents it, for He desires to receive a genuine worship from a holy worshiper. Therefore, practicing rituals with ulterior selfish motives or the desire to gain the favor of God is unacceptable in His sight.

It is also possible to understand the idea of doing one’s pleasure in a broader sense, as pursuing one’s own way to get happiness. It is important to note here that what is prohibited is not “pleasure” but “your pleasure” and not making the way but “your way.” Notably, the command does not stop there, but while abandoning one’s own pleasure and way, the person is admonished to call the day of the Lord delight (v. 13) by delighting in the

<sup>65</sup>In the opening chapter of the Book of Isaiah one finds God saying “Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them. (Isa 1:14 NKJ)”

<sup>66</sup>Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 508.

Lord of the day (v. 14). In fact, forgoing one's pleasure and choosing what pleases God (Isa 56: 4) does not lead to misery. On the contrary, the person will find greater and exquisite delight in the Lord (as the meaning of the word *אֲשׁוּר* implies). Edward Young aptly makes the following comment:

*Thy pleasure* is that which pleases man instead of God. It is a gross misunderstanding to interpret as though the words meant "that which is pleasant" and to conclude from this that the prophet's only concern is that the sabbath be a day not of pleasure but of gloom. Rather, it is the pleasure of man in contrast to that of God that is brought to the fore.<sup>67</sup>

Richard Davidson also writes, emphasizing the command to call Sabbath an exquisite delight in Isa 58: 13. In his article he depicts the traditional Jewish family's Sabbath customs as practiced in Israel today and calls Christians to adopt them "to make our Sabbaths more of an 'exquisite delight.'"<sup>68</sup> What seems so captivating to Davidson are: the "festive family candle-lighting ceremony," "a festively decorated table," "Sabbath unfermented 'wine,'" and "Sabbath bread," which he also recommended to be adopted. While calling the Sabbath day a delight is prescribed in Isa 58: 13, it should also be noted that the source of that exquisite delight is not material things, but God himself. What if a person does not have any of these luxurious items? Can the person still call God's holy day "an exquisite delight"? This question receives an affirmative answer, because it is possible to delight in the Lord of the day. As the prophet declares, "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior" (Hab 3: 17, 18, NIV).

Thus, the Sabbath serves to experience true self-denial by allowing the person to rest and know God deeply (Ps 46:10). This intimate knowledge leads to a life of trust and delight in God (Ps 33:21). Ultimately, delighting in the Lord will make the person receive what his or her heart desires. "Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart." (Ps 37:4, NKJ) Hence, self-denial is the divine-appointed path

<sup>67</sup>Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 427.

<sup>68</sup>Richard Davidson, "The Delight of an Exquisite Day," *Adventist Review*, 2 January 1986, 18

to true self-actualization. Jesus proclaimed this paradox in the following words: "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. (Matt 16:25, NKJ). Oswald expounds this thought:

Of all the ceremonies, the Sabbath is the one perhaps best suited to the purpose just outlined. Here we cease our work and remind ourselves that it is God who supplies our needs, not us. Here we reorient the compasses of our spirits to the true north of God's gracious character, remembering as we give one-seventh of our time to him and his concerns that all our time is his. For those who approach the Sabbath in this way, the day is a precious gift (the sense of *'ōneg*, delight, v. 13). It is a special day, a holy one, to be guarded jealously, not because God will destroy us if we lift a pencil or throw a ball, but because here we have another chance to remind ourselves about what matters and what does not, about what passes away and what survives, about the fact that all we are and have is his, a gift freely given and freely to be returned to the Giver.<sup>69</sup>

Finally, denying oneself in order to delight in the Lord may not be simple. Yet, it is encouraging to remember that this command and its accompanying promises proceed from the mouth of the Lord. He never errs and is worthy of our trust.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, three things must be noted in Isa 58:13 and 14. First, in honoring the honorable day of the Lord, one has to present an attitude of reverence, for this attitude is the foundation for the next two. Secondly, self-denial must be exercised. The "turning of the foot" and the "silence of the mouth" should halt any attempt of finding and doing one's own pleasure. Accordingly, a reverential approach to YHWH on "the day of YHWH" will give forth this fruit. Thirdly, honoring the honorable day requires calling it an exquisite delight. Indeed, genuine self-denial, which is attained as a result of obeying the command "be still and know that I am the Lord," will lead to a unique experience of having an exquisite delight in the Lord.

Thus, in this passage, what is prohibited and what is prescribed should be seen as a unit. Hence, obeying one must lead to the other. Consequently,

<sup>69</sup>Oswald, *Isaiah 40-46*, 508, 509.

erroneous understandings and practices, such as turning the day into a dirge or into a mere festive day, or even using the religious practice to manipulate God, can be avoided. Rather, in honoring the honorable day of God through reverence, self-denial and experiencing an exquisite delight in the Lord, one will be honored to “walk on the heights” and “eat the inheritance of Jacob.” This promise proceeds from the mouth of YHWH.

#### **About the Author**

**Dr. Melak A. Tsegaw** is currently serving as a faculty of Adventist University of Africa, Kenya, where he received his master’s degree. He also holds a PhD in Old Testament Studies from the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Philippines.