

Teaching Tips

June 19
Bible Study Guide 3

Words You Should Know

A. Standard (Isaiah 49:22) *nasas* (Heb.)—Sort, kind

B. Nursing (v. 23) *yanaq* (Heb.)—Tending, nourishing at the breast, education, maintaining

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—All Things Put Right.

When freedom from oppression is realized, it is hard to believe. From where do freedom and blessings come? Creator God will restore relationship between God's people, nations, the land, and the next generation in ways that confirm God's Lordship.

A. Read the Bible Background and Devotional Reading.

B. Pray for your students and lesson clarity.

C. Read the lesson Scripture in multiple translations.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Begin the class with prayer.

B. Play a trailer for a popular dystopian movie (1984, *Fahrenheit 451*, *Minority Report*, *Metropolis*, etc.). Discuss why we fear that the world will get worse and worse. The Bible tells us the only way the world will become better.

C. Have the students read the Aim for Change and the In Focus story.

D. Ask students how events like those in the story weigh on their hearts and how they can view these events from a faith perspective.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Read the Focal Verses and discuss the Background and The People, Places, and Times sections.

B. Have the class share what Scriptures stand out for them and why, with particular emphasis on today's themes.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Use In Depth or More Light on the Text to facilitate a deeper discussion of the lesson text.

B. Pose the questions in Search the Scriptures and Discuss the Meaning.

C. Discuss the Liberating Lesson and Application for Activation sections.

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Summarize the value of strengthening a transparent and intimate relationship with God.

B. End class with a commitment to pray to trust that God works in their best interest, even when they fail God.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: God's Restored People

Shall Prosper

Song: "There Shall be Showers of Blessing"

God's Restored People Shall Prosper

Bible Background • ISAIAH 49:18–26

Printed Text • ISAIAH 49:18–23 | Devotional Reading • PROVERBS 25:21–26

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will IDENTIFY relationships in which individuals or congregations have experienced God's restoration, FIND comfort in the plans God has for their lives, and PROCLAIM God's justice and mercy for His people.

In Focus

Jakiesha, an accountant, was going through a difficult time in her life. She was angry with God and the church. No one was doing things the way they should, so she thought. She became so angry she refused to pray anymore. She even made the decision to no longer attend church. Lastly, she gave Pastor Fred a piece of her mind.

Concerned, Jakiesha's Gran-gran, persuaded her to come over for dinner one evening. They talked about all God had provided in Jakiesha's life: her safe home, her scholarship to an HBCU, her first job. "What are you even mad about, baby?" Gran-gran asked.

Jakiesha felt ashamed now even mentioning it to her grandmother. "There's just a certain way I know things can be done. The church doesn't want to take the shortcuts I show them, even though—trust me—EVERYONE else saves themselves money that way."

"Baby," Gran-gran said, "I love you, but that sounds like some shady dealings in my book."

Jakiesha couldn't keep up her excuses to her grandmother. God changed her heart. She and her grandmother prayed for forgiveness.

After prayer, Jakiesha told her grandmother, "God has forgiven me and restored me in right relationship with Him. He is a God of justice and mercy and I am a recipient. I'm going to apologize to Pastor Fred and to the entire congregation."

After speaking with Pastor Fred, he told her, "We thank God for answering our prayers. Now that we know you have repented, Jakiesha, we do need an accountant again."

After experiencing difficult challenges, being restored back to God, are you a witness to God's indescribable faithfulness?

Keep in Mind

"And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me."

(Isaiah 49:23, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV **Isaiah 49:18** Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to thee. As I live, saith the LORD, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee, as a bride doeth.

19 For thy waste and thy desolate places, and the land of thy destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants, and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away.

20 The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell.

21 Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost

my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been?

22 Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders.

23 And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.

The People, Places, and Times

The Progeny Blessing. Having children as heirs to continue the covenant people of God has always been a major theme of God's story with humanity. Scholars call this aspect of God's promise to His people the "progeny blessing." When Abram first arrived in Canaan, God promised to give the land to his descendants, even though at the time, he was 75 years old and had no heir. Later, God again promises Abram an heir of his own flesh and blood, and as many descendants as stars in the sky (Genesis 15:4–5). By the time Abram is 99 years old, he has fathered a son who will indeed become a great nation, but God makes a further promise. Abram will be the father of many nations, and is renamed Abraham. Sarai is renamed Sarah, and named as the one who will mother the child of God's covenant with Abraham. Isaac fulfills this promise. Isaac and Rebekah struggle for many years to have children before God blesses them with twins. The elder son, Esau, fathers his own nation, and the younger son, Jacob, ends

up with four wives. For a time, the favored wife Rachel is concerned that she will not bear, and though she does give birth to two sons, she dies in bearing the second. This gives Jacob a total of 12 sons, who each have multiple children themselves. The nation of Israel blossoms from this point.

The rollercoaster drama of the difficulty of conceiving, bearing, and raising one (let alone many) children is a constant narrative thread from Genesis 12 through chapter 30. It continues to play a large role in later sacred stories of Samson's family, Hannah, Bathsheba, and others. Even in less drastic stories, children are always seen as a blessing from God. Throughout Scripture, Israel can judge if it is being blessed or not by how many children they are having.

In the pre-industrial age, more children meant more workers to help bring in food or trade to help the family survive. Children were their parents' only financial safety net in old age. In an economic system like this, losing

one's children was financially devastating, in addition to being heartbreaking. This is why it is a major theme in the prophecies of returning from exile that they will have many children.

Background

God's people were in captivity because they were obstinate and stubborn (Isaiah 48:4). He told Israel if they disobeyed, He would scatter them. Then He would restore them back (Deuteronomy 30:1–3). God placed His people in a place of affliction (Isaiah 48:10). Through Isaiah, God is speaking to His people with comfort and mercy (Isaiah 48:20; 49:13). He says, "All things begin and end with me" (Isaiah 48:12).

God declares to His people they should flee from the Chaldeans (Isaiah 48:20). This was similar to the charge given their ancestors who had fled from Egypt while depending on God to sustain them (Isaiah 48:21). God's people are given the promise to be released, restored, and prosperous once again. God's people are promised a temporary freedom from their earthly captivity and a permanent freedom through Jesus Christ from captivity of sin. Restoration will be given on the day of salvation. This is in reference to Christ's kingdom when God's people will be restored and prosper (Isaiah 48:8-9).

At-A-Glance

1. Promise of Restoration (Isaiah 49:18-20)
2. Questioning Restoration (v. 21)
3. Confirming Restoration and Prosperity (vv. 22-23)

In Depth

1. Promise of Restoration (Isaiah 49:18–20)

Look all around and see all the people gathering back to the Lord. They are the children of the people of captivity. Coming from many different places to meet in one place, they will make one body and join themselves to glorify God. These words spoken during the exile were intended to encourage God's people. He implies that the land of Judea was lying in waste during the Babylonian captivity. "Thy land of destruction" contrasts with what was to come.

The increase of people will be so great in number. This will come after many have been killed in wars and died in captivity in a faraway land. There will be a great increase as if these children had been given to a widowed mother.

The added people would be a blessing and strength as an ornament to God's people. The Lord wanted to assure them of His commitment to what He was saying. "As I live, saith the LORD" was a solemn promise between God and His people. The bride, wearing fancy jewelry, indicated these children will portray beauty and glorify the Lord.

Likewise, when the people of God were in a wasted, desolate, and unproductive state, there manifested the Savior of the world, the introduction of the Gospel, and the transformation of the Gentiles.

How do we see God fulfilling this kind of restoration throughout salvation history?

2. Questioning Restoration (v. 21)

This describes the great increase of the true people of God. The image given is of a mother who had been robbed of her children and made a widow. She had seen the devastation of ruin that was spread all around her. She felt alone. Then all of sudden the mother sees herself completely surrounded with more children than she lost. She is home and blessed by the happy

family that surrounds her. Then the mother asks, “Who hath begotten me these?” She wants to know where they had been. God’s restoration would be beyond what we could hope for.

Why does God choose the image of children to illustrate the overflowing blessing of restoration He has in store?

3. Confirming Restoration and Prosperity (vv. 22–23)

God will call His people to Himself, like a general calling the troops together. He will set the standard for His people. Those that God has adopted as His own and those that claim Him for their Father will be in His arms. Those He adopts will be given great care, devotion, and loving-kindness, as a nurse would care for babies. The daughters will be carried as a sick and weak person might be carried. Nonbelievers will give to the increase, protection, and maintenance of these children. Even those in high positions such as kings and queens will have a heartfelt love and caring concern toward God’s people.

How does God use non-Christians to aid His Church today?

Search the Scriptures

1. What shall cause the desolate places to become too small (Isaiah 49:19)?
2. Who can ask for another place to dwell (v. 20)?
3. When kings and queens become nursing fathers and mothers to God’s people, what shall they know (v. 23)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. God restores and prospers His people. Should His people do anything to help secure their prosperity?
2. When God grants restoration, what is our responsibility? How do we show our gratitude? How do we maintain our blessings?

Liberating Lesson

Today, there are many people who need to be restored to God because of sin. Who can restore us? Jesus will lift us up when we feel neglected, abandoned, and bereaved. God restored Israel; He will also restore us. He will give us freedom when we’re enslaved by our own choices and disobedience. Jesus is waiting to restore us so that we can have a relationship with God. We must repent, pray, and wait on the restoration of the Lord! We must depend on God’s promises to bring the Gentiles and His people together into one people of God through Jesus Christ.

Application for Activation

This week think of how you can overcome discouragement from the enemy who creeps into your peace. Ask God to restore you to Himself when you have allowed the enemy to take your joy. Remember that Jesus Christ has come to redeem you and wants you to have the right relationship with Him and others. He’s coming back!

Think of what you can do to restore a broken friendship with a family member or a friend who you consider to be your enemy. Ask yourself, “Am I the enemy?” What should you do to become a better Christian?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Isaiah 49:18–23

Reading the prior lesson is necessary to fully grasp the beauty of what the Lord is expressing in this week's verses. Let us begin with an overall picture for context: this lesson is ultimately about God's deliverance and grace as He liberates His people—the people who were once the ancient kingdom of Judah—who have been both held in captivity and exiled from Jerusalem by the Babylonians after Nebuchadnezzar prevailed against the King Zedekiah and the Judeans. After King Zedekiah, the last wicked king was defeated, the Babylonians destroyed Solomon's Temple. In our lesson, the Lord not only vows to liberate them, but He promises to restore what they have lost in terms of the Temple and community. Not only will God restore what they have lost, but He will give them more than they ever asked for. This restoration will also include enlisting new people into the family of God. Even Gentiles will come to know God and worship Him unashamedly.

18 Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to thee. As I live, saith the LORD, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee, as a bride doeth.

Zion (also known as Jerusalem)—personified as a woman, as the restored bride of God—is coping with her feelings of loss, desertion, and abandonment. Zion recognizes that her position of captivity was the result of her own choices but still bemoans the pain of not being in the presence of the Lord any longer. We imagine that she is filled with regret, coping with the guilt of knowing that she broke God's heart with her unfaithfulness. Picture her crying every day while reflecting about her previous life with God. Her tears are dried, however, when she learns that the Lord has not left her permanently. Through the Lord's grace and forgiveness, He plans on restoring all that was taken from her and destroyed. Zion, in shock and glee, is comforted by not only the Lord's presence but the Lord's explicit declaration of commitment to His covenant in spite of what she has done historically by breaking her vows to Him.

In verse 18, the Lord says to Zion, to the broken-hearted exiles, look around, look up, open your eyes and behold the process of your own restoration. When the text says "As I live, saith the LORD," the Lord is in many ways renewing the vows, breathing fresh air into the ancient Abrahamic covenant and declares once again that Zion is His bride—in spite of what she has done—and she will be adorned with the children who are returning to her. John alludes to this text when he describes the New Jerusalem "as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:2). In the New Testament, the church of Jesus Christ is the extension of the Lord's covenant with the kingdom of Judah. Isn't it wonderful to be bound with God in the name of Jesus? The Hebrew word for "bind" in this text is *qashar* (kaw-SHAR), which means to "league together" or "conspire." It means to politically form a group or plot together. This means the Lord and His children will conspire together and be freed from the oppressors that

God used to punish them. This is the beginning of the Lord renewing the relationship between Himself and Zion, and restoring them with more children and more blessings than they lost.

19 For thy waste and thy desolate places, and the land of thy destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants, and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away.

After stating God will regroup the people who were lost and separated because of the Babylonians, God then says through Isaiah that He will restore the land with people to the point where it will be overpopulated. In spite of the fact that Zion is at this moment wasted and desolated, it can be restored. The Hebrew word for “desolate” in this text is *shamem* (shaw-MEM), and it is used repeatedly in Jeremiah’s writings when referring to the Exile (Jeremiah 10:25; 33:10; Lamentations 1:4; 5:18). *Shamem* simply means to be either desolated or appalled. Both words carry the logic and reason for the destruction of the Temple and the subsequent captivity of the people of Judea. Because of Judea’s unfaithfulness to the Lord, because they were enamored with other gods and rituals that were not their own, the Lord allowed the destruction and enslavement of the Babylonians.

But the Lord recovers what was once lost; the Lord repairs that which was once broken; and the Lord restores whatever was once damaged. Through the Lord’s redemption, Zion will be restored and even though she lost soldiers in battle, even though she lost children in captivity, the new inhabitants who will benefit from the Lord’s redemption will grow in number exponentially, and the people will once again be free and far from the enemies who seek to destroy them and keep them captive. This highlights that even in God’s anger, He has an

irrevocable love for His people. God’s anger does not last once there is repentance. God forgives.

God forgives so much that the blessings that Israel imagines will make them happy is too narrow to God. Have you ever asked God for something and He not only provides you with it but He adds additional blessings? Have you experienced God’s love in ways that exceeded even your own expectations and desires? Isn’t it a blessing that the Lord’s goodness exceeds our own imaginations of goodness? What God wants for us as His people is better and more than anything we can imagine for ourselves. Since we are God’s bride, bound to God in the name of Jesus, God delights in giving blessings. God loves His people and wants nothing more than to maintain the relationships He has with those who seek to sustain a mutual relationship with Him.

20 The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell.

After the Lord promises to restore Zion and fill the land with people, the Lord then says that the number of people will have grown to the point that Zion declares she is out of room. What was once deserted and abandoned will eventually become overcrowded. This change will once again display God’s ability to deliver and restore.

“Give place” is technically a rough translation of the Hebrew. The Hebrew word for “give place” is *nagash* (naw-GOSH) and means “to draw near” or “approach.” In other words, it can also mean to come close or stand near. Therefore, the children born during bereavement and grief will say that it is crowded here, but provide me with space that is near you, that is not too far from you, that is close to you at all times. Zion will be filled with people once again, but the people will not want to be out of proximity

from what they lost. They will remember what happened and cherish being in the land of their ancestors and their God.

21 Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been?

There will be so many people in Zion that the bereaved mother and bride will wonder where these people came from. How could they be her children if so many of her sons were lost in captivity? Zion will be astonished at the restoration happening in front of her eyes. This astonishment is also connected to imagery of the mothers of the Jewish people who were once incapable of conceiving children (Genesis 16:1; 30:1) and found themselves astonished at what the Lord did for them. Zion, like Sarah and Rachel, were at one point despondent about their condition until the Lord surprised them with a blessing they considered unfathomable. Isaiah invokes the mothers in Genesis to highlight what the Lord has done in the past in order to show what God is capable of doing in the present and future.

The blessings of restoration and redemption will also overwhelm Zion. Jerusalem will return and be plentiful. This blessing will overwhelm Judea to the point where she will ask questions in her heart that reveal the embarrassing abundance of God's blessings. As already stated, she has lost children in captivity, but the growth in new children arriving during bereavement will compel her to ask how this restoration is possible. While the land was emptied by the Babylonian Exile, Yahweh—through His servant—will not only restore the population but fill the land to overflowing with returning people. The fourth servant song is immediately followed with the command to a redeemed

Israel to “enlarge the site of your tent” and to “spread out to the right and to the left” to “settle the desolate towns” (Isaiah 54:2–3).

As we read this passage as New Testament believers, we also see that even as much as God fulfilled the promise to the Israelites when they returned to the Promised Land from exile, He also brought another kind of fulfillment after Christ's resurrection. He again brought in a flood of believers to join the faithful by welcoming Gentiles into the family. Then again, we look forward to seeing the ultimate fulfillment of this promise in heaven as every nation, tribe, and tongue glorify God.

The church can also understand it has a part to play in bringing about this influx of people. God commanded Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply. In a way, Jesus' Great Commission is a similar command that when we go out into the world, we are to grow the number of faithful.

22 Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders.

Not only will the Lord bless the chosen people, but the Lord will also invite Gentiles to recognize the truth of God's existence. These Gentiles will then turn from worshiping false gods and start worshiping Yahweh in spirit and in truth. When God says, “Behold, I will lift up mine hand,” it is meant to bring the imagery of a sworn oath as in the military.

What Isaiah is saying here is that God will do two things. First, God will enlist other peoples to help free the captives. Secondly, God will also invite and accept them into His care and concern. In other words, in the process of delivering the captives from their oppressors, that deliverance will function as a type of witnessing. Non-Jewish people will see the glory

of the Lord in the event of Zion's redemption. Historically, this shows that God has the power to not only use Cyrus and the Persians to free the people from captivity in Babylon, but also that God has the power to convince the world that He can do the same for them. The Gentiles across the world will be able to recognize God's grace and compassion and will ultimately want to serve Him, too.

After using military imagery, Isaiah then uses the imagery of children. The imagery of sons who are brought in arms and daughters carried on shoulders creates an imagery of God using Gentiles to carry the people of Zion back to their land. The event described by Isaiah is reminiscent of the Exodus. Just like children were carried out of Egypt, out of slavery, children will again be carried out of Babylonian bondage. The same God who freed the people once can free them again. What God has done and accomplished in the past is not frozen in history, but proof of what God can always do in a moment of His choosing.

23 And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.

When Isaiah says "kings shall be thy nursing fathers" the text uses the word *aman* (Heb. aw-MON) or guardian. God will use Gentiles to free Israel, protect them, and provide for them. For sure, it is easy to misinterpret the text here; but we must remember the socio-politics of the relationship between Zion, the bride of God,

and God in general. We must also remember the allegorical nature of the text. When the text says kings and queens will nurse them, he is saying that the Gentiles will also be a source of sustenance for them. Moreover, the Lord is also saying that the kings and queens will also bow to them, what Isaiah is saying is that they will bow to Zion as a way of bowing directly to God. Zion, as the bride of God, is the representative of God. God exists in and through Zion. Thus, when the kings and queens of other people "lick up the dust of [Zion's] feet," they are acknowledging the supreme power and grandeur of Yahweh. God's enlisting of Gentiles, and subsequent invitation into the true religion of Yahweh, will also mean that God will welcome these non-Jewish people into the family. They will not only worship the Lord, but they will do so unashamedly.

This lesson sheds light on God's ability to restore what was lost. He renews His vows with the chosen people, exhibits unfathomable grace and forgiveness and then promises to restore them to the point that will run out of room. This oncoming event will be so glorious that Gentiles will eventually make Yahweh their God and worship Him in spirit and in truth. This lesson highlights the notion that God will never abandon you, and even when it seems like it, take heart and know that God is faithful and committed. God will never leave you nor forsake you.

Sources:

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Say It Correctly

Nebuchadnezzar. neh-buh-kad-NEZZ-zer.
Zedekiah. zeh-deh-KIE-uh.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

God Puts Down and Lifts Up
(Psalm 75)

TUESDAY

God Protects a Restored, Holy People
(Leviticus 26:3–13)

WEDNESDAY

Blessings upon God's People
(Luke 6:20–26)

THURSDAY

God Has Turned Mourning into Dancing
(Psalm 30)

FRIDAY

God Gives Good Gifts
(James 1:13–18)

SATURDAY

Blessings for Obedience
(Deuteronomy 28:9–14)

SUNDAY

Wait for the Lord
(Isaiah 49:18–23)

Notes

Teaching Tips

June 26

Bible Study Guide 4

Words You Should Know

A. Hearken (Isaiah 51:1) *qashab* (Heb.)—To prick up the ears, to cause to hear, give heed

B. Hewn (v. 1) *gazith* (Heb.)—To cut or carve, to split or divide

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Back to Basics. People of integrity find it difficult to ignore criticism. Where do they find affirmation in the face of adversity? God delivers the righteous from the judgment of others when they are faithful to God’s teachings.

A. Read the Bible Background and Devotional Reading.

B. Pray for your students and lesson clarity.

C. Read the lesson Scripture in multiple translations.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Begin the class with prayer.

B. Begin class by asking volunteers to respond to some questions about their families. For example: Whose family immigrated to this country in the past three generations? Who can tell us the meaning of their family name? Who knows that they are distantly related to someone famous? Has any member of your family ever started a family business? After allowing a few volunteers to share, lead into Bible study by saying Isaiah encouraged Israel to be encouraged by looking back at their family history.

C. Have the students read the Aim for Change and the In Focus story.

D. Ask students how events like those in the story weigh on their hearts and how they can view these events from a faith perspective.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Read the Focal Verses and discuss the Background and The People, Places, and Times sections.

B. Have the class share what Scriptures stand out for them and why, with particular emphasis on today’s themes.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Use In Depth or More Light on the Text to facilitate a deeper discussion of the lesson text.

B. Pose the questions in Search the Scriptures and Discuss the Meaning.

C. Discuss the Liberating Lesson and Application for Activation sections.

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Summarize the value of rejecting charges that their hopes lay in feelings or fairy tales and pointing to historical accounts of God’s work.

B. End class with a commitment to praising God that the best days are yet to come, when He restores them for eternity.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: God Offers Deliverance

Song: “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus”

God Offers Deliverance

Bible Background • ISAIAH 51

Printed Text • ISAIAH 51:1–8 | Devotional Reading • 2 THESSALONIANS 3:1–4

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXAMINE Isaiah’s example of God’s rich faithfulness in Israel’s spiritual history, TRUST God even when others speak disparagingly about our faith, and SHARE the goodness and deliverance of God with others.

In Focus

Kaylynn had been incarcerated for a crime he did not commit. He believed the day would come when God would clear his name and he would be delivered from his bondage. He held close to the words found in Isaiah, “The Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be put to shame, He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? It is the Sovereign Lord who helps me!” (Isaiah 50:7–9).

He trusted God. He had gotten into some situations in the past, being accused falsely and misjudged, and God delivered him every time.

But, this time, the setup led to his imprisonment. His friends and associates felt sorry for him. But they didn’t believe Kaylynn would get out of this one easily and they told him to plead guilty and he would get a lesser charge. Kaylynn stood his ground and said, “How can I confess to what I have not done? God has never failed me and neither will He this time.”

Kaylynn was given the maximum sentence of 20 years without a chance of parole.

That was two years ago. Today he was preparing to leave prison. All charges had been dropped. He was exonerated. As he was singing and praising God, Paul and Silas’s jail experience came to mind. After their release they told the brethren all about it. Kaylynn could hardly wait to meet up with his former friends and associates to share with them how God delivered him out of prison.

When we are in a jam and things don’t look good, do we still keep the faith? Do we still believe and hope in God to deliver us?

Keep in Mind

“Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged.”
(Isaiah 51:1, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV **Isaiah 51:1** Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged.

2 Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him.

3 For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.

4 Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation: for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light of the people.

5 My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the

people; the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust.

6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.

7 Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings.

8 For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation.

The People, Places, and Times

Abraham and Sarah. Abraham did not always follow God's plan as God had intended. On occasion, he and Sarah both seemed to have an urge to give God a helping hand. At other times, the two acted out of cowardice, not out of faith in the God who called them.

From the time of his call, Abraham had no knowledge of where he would be going. He stepped out on the word of God. He never stopped believing in God's purpose, even when it seemed that everything was working against him.

Eden. The name Eden is derived either from the Hebrew root word meaning "to be fruitful, plentiful" or from a Sumerian word meaning "steppe, flatland." After creating the entire universe, God consecrated the particular garden called Eden as a place of paradise and

worship. He placed His newly created human beings to care for it, and communed with them there. There was still work to do to care for Eden, but no weeds or thorns to make the work especially hard. Many prophecies of the end times pull on images of Eden to indicate that God will heal the world so completely as to restore the paradise we knew before the Fall.

Background

Even though the Israelites are worried that foreign countries will conquer them, God reassures His people He is willing, able, and capable of providing for their release from their captives. In Isaiah 50, the one who is responsible for delivering this message of hope shows he has been commissioned by God and he is ready to carry out his mission, God's message, out to the fullest (Isaiah 50:4-5).

Jesus also fulfilled this prophecy when He was commissioned by God and carried out His duties in securing salvation for mankind to the fullest. Some Jews rejected Jesus as Christ on their own accord. We make a choice to accept what God offers. In Isaiah's message, the people of God are encouraged to trust in Him, while sinners are discouraged not to trust in themselves (Isaiah 50:11).

At-A-Glance

1. The Offer of Deliverance (Isaiah 51:1-3)
2. The Way to Deliverance (vv. 4-6)
3. An Everlasting Deliverance (vv. 7-8)

In Depth

1. The Offer of Deliverance (Isaiah 51:1-3)

This conversation is to those who follow after righteousness, seriously yearning to practically obey God's law. They are told, "Listen to Me!" God is making them an offer of deliverance. God's people are seeking Him because they want His favor brought back to them.

They are told to look back to Abraham and Sarah. You are Sarah's daughters, if you strive for righteousness. To encourage the captives in Babylon, God calls them to remember when and how He called Abraham by His Word He blessed and increased him. They, too, were very small in number, but the Lord has promised to increase them also (Isaiah 49:19).

The Lord shall comfort Zion: God will restore it from despair. He will make them happy—giving them hearts that are glad. Their gladness will lead to their satisfaction making them thankful to God. They will sing from their hearts songs of joy and thanksgiving unto their God.

What role models of righteousness do you identify in your life?

2. The Way to Deliverance (vv. 4-6)

God is speaking to a specific group, His people. This isn't for everyone. This is for the people of God. The ones who have the law of God within them. In addition to knowing what is right, God's people do what is right. God wants His people to listen and be attentive. He wants His people to adhere to what He is saying and take notes on their hearts.

God's righteousness is near; He will soon come to their rescue. Those that He has made promises to will see the fulfillment of those promises. God's arms will judge the people, because He has the power to judge all. He has the ability to draw them together, and He has the ability to scatter them. They should put their trust in Him.

Heaven and earth are going to pass away (Matthew 24:35). The description here is the heavens will disappear like a vapor, or smoke, into thin air. The earth will fall off like an old piece of clothing no one wants to wear. Just as the earth and the heavens will no longer exist, this will be true of people. In contrast, the way to deliverance, salvation and righteousness will remain.

How do you remind yourself to chase after eternal things, rather than passing earthly things?

3. An Everlasting Deliverance (vv. 7-8)

Isaiah is requesting the attention of the righteous, God's people, the keepers of the Law. God's people are told to not fear the rebuke and criticism of men. We have the assurance of God's promises. Others might say anything to attempt to destroy our faith in God, but God has given His promise. He will not turn back on His Word. God is faithful.

People will become food for the insects and animals when they die. As time goes on, those same people won't be around to express disapproval. In contrast, the salvation and righteous of God will always be. Salvation

and righteousness will continue to exist, from generation to generation, forever.

What would you be able to do for God if you weren't afraid of others' scorn?

Search the Scriptures

1. Is God offering deliverance to all (Isaiah 51:1)?
2. Who shall comfort the people of Zion (v. 3)?
3. Who are they that know righteousness (v. 6)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. God shows He is willing and able to deliver us from our captivity, which is sin. But He does not force us to accept His offer. Should He or should He not? Why?

2. God tells His people, “hearken unto me” three times. When something is told to us repeatedly should we consider it? Should we pay more attention to what’s being said or should we find the person to be a nuisance trying to force us to accept what they are saying?

Liberating Lesson

In spite of what we see, we must remember God is faithful and He will deliver us, just as He did the remnant of Israel. He encourages us to listen to Him and to look back at what He did for Abraham and Sarah. Abraham believed God and became a great nation, we too must believe God and trust Him. God comforts and consoles us as we fear Him. If we are faithful, God will deliver us. We must be willing to tell others that God’s Word will last forever. We should encourage others to trust Jesus for deliverance and salvation.

Application for Activation

This week, pray and trust God daily to deliver you from any situation that will cause you not to demonstrate your faith in God. Do not let anyone discourage you from believing

that God can deliver you from those that speak negatively. You can ask God to speak to your heart so the Holy Spirit will remind you that God is faithful and He will deliver you.

Ask God to help you encourage others because Jesus loves you and wants everyone to be saved. Tell others that those who reject the Lord will be judged by God, not man.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Isaiah 51:1–8

Isaiah 51 seems to be addressed to the people of Israel who lived more than a century after the time of Isaiah—the nation suffering through the Babylonian Exile. Much of Isaiah 40–66 looks beyond the time of the prophet to the Exile and the returning exiles. The background of this passage is that the people are exiled away from Judea and are being held captive by the Babylonians. They are desperate. They are heart-broken and struggling to make sense

of their predicament. Yet they still remember Yahweh. But does Yahweh remember them?

He does. The Lord calls upon the people to trust and believe in Him once again like their ancestor Abraham. The Lord employs the Abrahamic story in Genesis—a story they never forgot about—to remind the Jews what He is capable of. The Lord tells them that He is about to move. He is about to bring salvation once again for those who are pursuing His righteousness and glory. Cyrus, the king of the Persians, defeated the Babylonians in 539 BC and subsequently freed the Israelites from bondage. This passage tells the story of God revealing His plans to them.

1 Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged.

In verse 1, the Lord bids the people exiled out of Jerusalem to listen and listen closely to what He has to say. He is preparing to share important news. Note that those who listen to the Lord are also the same people who “follow after righteousness.” A person cannot do one without the other. The Hebrew word for righteousness in this text is *tsedeq* (TSEH-dek), which means ethical fairness or governmental justice. Many people turned from God before the Babylonian captivity and many others turned from God because of Babylonian captivity. Those who turned during captivity may have felt that God was unjust. They may have felt that God was unfair. Those who still had faith in the Lord are the ones the Lord was speaking to particularly. Listening to and seeking the Lord are the preconditions for following after righteousness. One cannot follow after righteousness without listening to and seeking the Lord in spite of their predicament in life. Moreover, following after God does not necessarily mean following behind Him in the sense of committing to

religious rituals without much dedication. It means pursuing Him. It means chasing after His ways. It means actively trying to please Him according to His desires.

When those who are both exiled and still pursuing God hear God’s voice in spirit, Isaiah says to “look unto the rock whence ye are hewn.” When Isaiah says “look” the Hebrew word is *nabat* (naw-BOT) which means to look in more than just a literal fashion. It means to behold or to look in high regard. Isaiah is saying to look at the rock (Heb. *tsur*, TSOOR) from which you were hewn (Heb. *chatsab*, khaw-TSOB). In proper context, the Lord is saying to behold the tradition upon which your people have historically relied or stood. The Lord is saying to honor the tradition, hold it in high regard. It is as solid as a rock. The Lord beckons the people to remember their culture, their past, their tradition. Look backwards and remember what God has done is important because it is a sheer reminder of what God is fully capable of. In other words, that which God was capable of in the past is what God is still capable of in the present.

2 Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him.

When the people look at their tradition and remember their culture, they will remember the patriarch Abraham who is the father of their faith. The Lord directed Abraham’s path by telling him to depart from his country and people to a land that God selected (Genesis 12:1). In this history, Abraham was alone with his wife Sarah who could not conceive children, and the Lord blessed them more than they could ever have imagined. The blessing of Abraham did not cease with Abraham but extended to Isaac and Jacob and all his sons. The Lord’s covenant with Abraham did not stop with Abraham but continued regardless

of circumstance or situation through all of his descendants who continued to have faith in the Lord. This great story of Abraham in the Torah that the people knew so well says to them that if the Lord can take one man, Abraham, and separate him from his people, and still make a great nation out of his descendants, then the Lord can do it again.

These words were encouraging for those who struggled with wondering not if God was willing to deliver them but if the Lord was capable of doing it. These people had experienced military defeat at the hands of countless enemies. They knew in their heart of hearts that they were guilty of not keeping the covenant. They remembered the times that they worshiped other gods and didn't care for the God who freed them from Egypt and protected their ancestors. Some even scoffed at their tradition. Some ignored their heritage. So, they thought, why would God save us? Why would God return to us? Why would God rescue us in light of everything we have done against Him? It is a wonderful blessing to know that God is a forgiving God. And not only is He forgiving, He is able to forgive and restore when He pleases.

3 For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.

After mentioning what was done for Abraham, the Lord invokes Zion (Jerusalem), the conquered land. Although, at the moment, Jerusalem as they understand it is no more, God promises to comfort her and recreate her once again. God promises with figurative hyperbole to turn their wilderness, their deserted wasteland, into something as beautiful and plentiful as the historic Garden of Eden. All the corners of their former land

that have been ruined and desecrated will be comforted and taken care of once more. The Garden of Eden represents a paradise filled with delightful resources, splendor, food, and a host of unimaginable goods. By using the Garden in this context, Isaiah invokes the image of not just Israel returning to Canaan, but of all humanity returning to a garden modeled on the first Eden, but even more glorious. Isaiah is implying that the Lord will redeem all of humanity through His power. That is to say, God has the power to take what has been destroyed and renew it into something wonderful.

The Lord will take their desert *arabah* (aw-raw-BAW), a steep or desert plain of uninhabited land, and make it like the garden of the Lord. The Lord also says that this garden will be filled with joy and music. There will be thanksgiving, gratitude as opposed to shame and defeat. There will be melody as opposed to wails.

4 Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation: for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light of the people.

Again, the Lord bids His people to listen to Him closely. His people, either Gentiles from other parts of the land or the Jews who have known him since Abraham, heed His words carefully and recognize Him as their God. Here the Lord is saying that He will make His judgment—His law—a light for the people who recognize Him as their Lord and seek to follow Him in the ways of righteousness. When God delivers them, it will include non-Jewish people who see His works in their redemption and can recognize His power and awesomeness. The Lord will make judgment to rest (Heb. *raga*, RAW-GAH), or to dwell in peace and quiet. In this latter portion of Isaiah, the prophet repeatedly states the promise that Yahweh's covenant and teaching that Israel itself

will illuminate the entire world (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6; 51:4; 60:3). The apostle John sees these promises reach their ultimate fulfillment in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:24).

5 My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the people; the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust.

The Lord means a few things when He says His righteousness is near. On one hand, the Lord is saying that His righteousness is close in the sense that it is not far from people who once assumed it was distant and too far for them to grasp, because they were not members of the chosen people. Here the Lord is explicit as to the proximity to His glory, even for those living as far-flung as “the isles.” His salvation has gone forth, and it is there for any who desire to pursue it. The Lord is the Lord of all peoples. And He welcomes all peoples. What was once limited is now open; a covenant that was once particular is now open for anyone who is willing to accept and embrace.

On the other hand, however, when the Lord says His righteousness is near, He is also saying that Cyrus, king of the Persians, is on his way to battle the Babylonians. When the Persians and the Babylonians engage in war, the Lord has set it up for Cyrus and the Persians to emerge victorious. After Cyrus defeats the Babylonians, he will then free the people of Judea who were held in Babylonian bondage. This defeat and subsequent liberation will be in the name of the Lord for the world to see. Those who will be delivered will rest in God’s arms in whom they trust because they will know that only the Lord could have kept such a promise of commitment.

6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth

shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be forever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.

God, through the words of Isaiah, says to look: look up and see heaven, look around and see the soil beneath our feet and know that the cosmos that all living creatures inhabit is impermanent. The world, the universe, all that is visible to our sight—from the vast, innumerable star, to the deep stones supporting our homes—are, in fact, temporary. One day it will all be gone. The Lord also says that the earth ages, it is an object that exists within the space-time continuum, which means it is not eternal. It will not last forever. It will grow (KJV: “wax”) old as clothing does, fraying and thinning until it is of no further use.

Yet what does last forever is God and His salvation. God’s Word, salvation, and righteousness are eternal. They exist outside of the temporal motion of time. They last because they have always existed and will continue to exist even after everything else vanishes away.

7 Harken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings.

Again, the Lord calls to the people to listen to Him. And those people are people that know and recognize God’s righteousness and not the righteousness of humanity. The Lord is speaking to the people who not only know the Torah and remember the covenant, but to the people who have inscribed God’s righteousness in their hearts. He says to them to not fear men or *enosh* (EN-NOASH) which means “mere men” or “mere mortals.” Do not fear people in power. Do not fear the Babylonians. Do not fear the Persians. Do not be afraid of what they have the power to do to you. You belong to the Lord.

8 For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation.

One should not be concerned about mere mortals or the power of human beings because evil will always lose in the end. Evil will eventually devour itself and destroy the world it infests. God's righteousness, that lasts for all time, will do away with it in the end. Isaiah is saying that no matter who emerges as an enemy of God and God's people, they will eventually fall. Connected to the Lord's salvation is the Lord's consistent and promised deliverance from His enemies. The Jewish idea of salvation is centered on physical protection and deliverance from one's enemies. Jesus, a Jew himself, reimagines this understanding and expands the definition to include God's eternal protection and deliverance from Hell and evil. Remember that God restores, no matter what was lost, destroyed, or taken. The Lord has the power to redeem and deliver like He has done in the past. Always look to God's faithfulness in the past as assurance that God will continue to work on your behalf. God reminds His people that just as He did the unimaginable with Abraham, He can continue to do so with His people through the ages.

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Say It Correctly

Hearken. HAR-ken.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

God Will Vindicate His Servant
(Isaiah 50:4-9)

TUESDAY

Remember God's Mighty Deeds
(Isaiah 51:9-16)

WEDNESDAY

God Defends Israel's Cause
(Isaiah 51:17-23)

THURSDAY

God Rescues Us from Peril
(2 Corinthians 1:7-14)

FRIDAY

Jesus Rescues Us from Wrath
(1 Thessalonians 1:6-10)

SATURDAY

Deliverance Belongs to the Lord
(Psalm 3)

SUNDAY

God's Deliverance Is Coming
(Isaiah 51:1-8)