

Lesson 3





Where We're Going

Today, we will: identify relationships in which individuals or congregations have experienced God's restoration; find comfort in the plans God has for the lives of believers; and proclaim God's justice and mercy for God's people.



God's Restored People Shall Prosper

“Ma, look! Big Momma's house is back on the market!” Shekima jumped up from the couch to show her mom the listing on her phone.

“Really?! Oh, Momma has missed that place. It still hurts that we couldn't hold on to it.”

Shekima was 14 when Big Momma had to sell the house. The entire family was devastated. Everyone lived there—all her uncles, aunts, and cousins all packed into Big Momma's. On the weekends, family from all over the city would come by to visit, to eat, to laugh, and just spend time. But everyone scattered after the sale. They spread out all over the city and some moved to different parts of the country. Big Momma could only afford a one-bedroom apartment after that. Her place was too small for large gatherings, so people came by less and less. Shekima promised herself that one day, she would buy that house back. Now an adult, when she saw the house was for sale, she was elated that the time had finally come!

Shekima bought the house and planned a grand family reunion there. She called her folks all over the city and the country, telling everyone to bring their whole families if they could. Meanwhile, she and her mom moved into the house. They were up day and night painting, decorating, and making everything beautiful.

Finally, the day came! Shekima led Big Momma in with her hands over her eyes. “Big Momma, are you ready?!” Shekima asked excitedly.

“WELCOME HOME,” everyone yelled.

“Oh, *my!*” Big Momma whispered as she put her hand over her mouth in disbelief. “Is this *my* home?”

“Yes, Big Momma,” Shekima answered, “remember I promised you I would get your home back to you? I bought it back for you, Big Momma. And I told everyone to come. Me and mom, and my husband, and my babies, we're all gonna live here with you. And I told everyone to make sure they come by every weekend, Big Momma.”

“Oh, look at all y'all's beautiful faces! It's so *many* of y'all! I didn't realize the family had grown so! 'Kima, I don't know how to say thank you, baby. I felt so *ashamed* that I couldn't hold on to it.”

“Big Momma, we all love you. And look, we are *all* here now—all in the house, and outside, and all around! Big Momma, your love is our home, don't ever feel shame about anything life has tossed your way.”



Real Talk

1. When faced with places and moments of emptiness and loss, what was Shekima's response?
2. What role does memory play in restoration?
3. We talk a lot about desolation and loss, and we celebrate restoration and happy endings to painful journeys, but what role does shame play in our lives, and how can we heal from it?



The Players

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.



Make It Stick

“Kings and queens will serve you and care for all your needs. They will bow to the earth before you and lick the dust from your feet. Then you will know that I am the LORD. Those who trust in me will never be put to shame” (Isaiah 49:23, NLT).



The Word (NLT)

Isaiah 49:18 “Look around you and see, for all your children will come back to you. As surely as I live,” says the LORD, “they will be like jewels or bridal ornaments for you to display.

19 Even the most desolate parts of your abandoned land will soon be crowded with your people. Your enemies who enslaved you will be far away.

20 The generations born in exile will return and say, ‘We need more room! It’s crowded here!’

21 Then you will think to yourself, ‘Who has given me all these descendants? For most of my children were killed, and the rest were carried away into exile. I was left here all alone. Where did all these people come from? Who bore these children? Who raised them for me?’”

22 This is what the Sovereign LORD says: “See, I will give a signal to the godless nations. They will carry your little sons back to you in their arms; they will bring your daughters on their shoulders.

23 Kings and queens will serve you and care for all your needs. They will bow to the earth before you and lick the dust from your feet. Then you will know that I am the LORD. Those who trust in me will never be put to shame.”



Backstage

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, “I alone am God, the First and the Last” (Isaiah 48:12).

God declares to His people they should flee from the Chaldeans (Isaiah 48:20). This was similar to the charge given to 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 the 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).



Combing Through

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 Judea was lying in waste during the Babylonian captivity. “Your abandoned land” (from v. 19, NLT) 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 surely as I live,” says the LORD” was a solemn promise between God and His people (from v. 18). 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 by more children than she lost. She is home and blessed by her happy family. Then the mother asks, “Who bore these children?” (NLT). 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 whom God has adopted as His own and those who 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?



Diving Deeper Quiz

1. Throughout the passage, God uses the imagery of a mother and child to describe what God's restoration will look like (Isaiah 49:18–23). How does that imagery help you understand the impact of God's restoration?
2. God says that those who trust in God will "never be put to shame" (v. 23). What is the connection between desolation, restoration, and shame?
3. In the text, the recipient of restoration seems to be caught off guard and amazed at the overflow that is God's restoration (vv. 19–21). What does it mean to you to see that God's definition of restoration is not only to restore what was lacking, but to create an overflow of that which is being brought back?
4. In the passage, God says that after God restores, the people will "know that I am the LORD" (v. 23). What does it mean to "know that God is the LORD"? How is knowing that "God is the LORD" connected to restoration?



Next Steps

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?



Say Word?

Nebuchadnezzar. neh-buh-kad-NEZZ-zer.

Zedekiah. zeh-deh-KIE-uh.

SWAG

(Spiritual Wisdom and Guidance)

"This is the true wine of
astonishment:
We are not
Over

When we think
We Are."
—Alice Walker



Lesson 4





Where We're Going

By the end of the lesson, participants will: examine Isaiah's example of God's rich faithfulness in Israel's spiritual history; feel encouraged through personal trust in God, even when others speak critically about their faith; and express the goodness and deliverance of God with others.



God Offers Deliverance

Every Juneteenth, the Jenkins family gathers at Grandma Ethel's home on the family farm in Texas. The Jenkins family has four living generations that have migrated throughout the United States and emigrated to Liberia. Juneteenth is a special holiday for this close-knit family because their story directly ties to the enslaved African Americans who learned they were free on this day in 1865. They choose to commemorate this day by returning to the land their ancestors purchased after being made free.

On this particular occasion, Jonathan was not in the best of spirits. The last three months of his life were filled with challenges. He was unhappy with his corporate job at Western Airlines, his long-term girlfriend ended their relationship to date someone else, and his landlord decided to sell the downtown Dallas loft he had lived in for the last five years. Jonathan felt like every day was a rainy day with no rainbow in sight. Although he was not feeling like his normal jovial self, he still went to Grandma Ethel's to commune with his family. After eating his favorite uncle Joe's barbecue, Jonathan ventured into the main room of the family home to hear what everyone was talking about.

"We have been landowners and homeowners for 125 years. Josephus and Bonita Jenkins established a legacy for our family when they purchased this land and opened the first Black-owned convenience store in this area. The financial seed they planted has blossomed over and over again through the entrepreneurship efforts of each of you," exalted Grandma Ethel.

Uncle James chimed in, saying, "Times were hard coming up, but our parents made sure we could get a college education if we wanted it. College was not the route for all eight of us children. Mama and Daddy were okay with that."

"You see here? This is a picture of Daddy Joe and Little Joe in front of our store serving meals to the families who needed it in our community. We did not care if they were Black, White, or Native Americans," spoke Grandma Ethel as she turned pages in one of the family photo albums. Jonathan sat down next to his mother to hear more of the family history.

"Our family has survived the Depression, Jim Crow, the Civil Rights era, and the displacement of people of color in this area, and we are yet holding on! We are survivors! Every generation has inherited the strength, knowledge, joy, and work ethic of our ancestors," exclaimed Uncle James. Jonathan's mom leaned over to him, placed her hand on his and said, "Son, I know you have been going through a lot, but everything is going to work out for you. Our ancestors are on your side. God is on your side. Life will get better!"



Real Talk

1. Why is it important to know our family history?
2. What are some life application lessons Jonathan could have learned by listening to his elders?
3. How do you think Jonathan felt after being reminded of his family legacy?



The Players

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 there were 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.



Make It Stick

“Listen to me, all who hope for deliverance—all who seek the LORD! Consider the rock from which you were cut, the quarry from which you were mined” (Isaiah 51:1, NLT).



The Word (NLT)

Isaiah 51:1 “Listen to me, all who hope for deliverance—all who seek the LORD! Consider the rock from which you were cut, the quarry from which you were mined.

2 Yes, think about Abraham, your ancestor, and Sarah, who gave birth to your nation. Abraham was only one man when I called him. But when I blessed him, he became a great nation.”

3 The LORD will comfort Israel again and have pity on her ruins. Her desert will blossom like Eden, her barren wilderness like the garden of the LORD. Joy and gladness will be found there. Songs of thanksgiving will fill the air.

4 “Listen to me, my people. Hear me, Israel, for my law will be proclaimed, and my justice will become a light to the nations.

5 My mercy and justice are coming soon. My salvation is on the way. My strong arm will bring justice to the nations. All distant lands will look to me and wait in hope for my powerful arm.

6 Look up to the skies above, and gaze down on the earth below. For the skies will disappear like smoke, and the earth will wear out like a piece of clothing. The people of the earth will die like flies, but my salvation lasts forever. My righteous rule will never end!

7 Listen to me, you who know right from wrong, you who cherish my law in your hearts. Do not be afraid of people’s scorn, nor fear their insults.

8 For the moth will devour them as it devours clothing. The worm will eat at them as it eats wool. But my righteousness will last forever. My salvation will continue from generation to generation.”



Backstage

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, 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 humankind 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).



Combing Through

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. They are Sarah’s daughters if they strive for righteousness. To encourage the captives in Babylon, God calls them to remember when He called Abraham and how 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 to whom He has made promises 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 in Isaiah 51:6 is the heavens will disappear like a vapor, or smoke. 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 not to fear others’ rebuke and criticism. 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 righteousness of God will always remain. 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?



Diving Deeper Quiz

1. Why is it important for Israel to remember the spiritual history of their ancestors?
2. Does your family have a spiritual history? If so, how has the faith of your elders and ancestors had an impact on your faith?
3. In Isaiah 51:7, what advice is given to Israel?
4. How does this passage inform your trust in God?



Next Steps

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 who 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 by people.



Say Word?

Hearken. HAR-ken.

SWAG

(Spiritual Wisdom and Guidance)

“Our ancestors are an ever widening circle of hope.”—Toni Morrison

