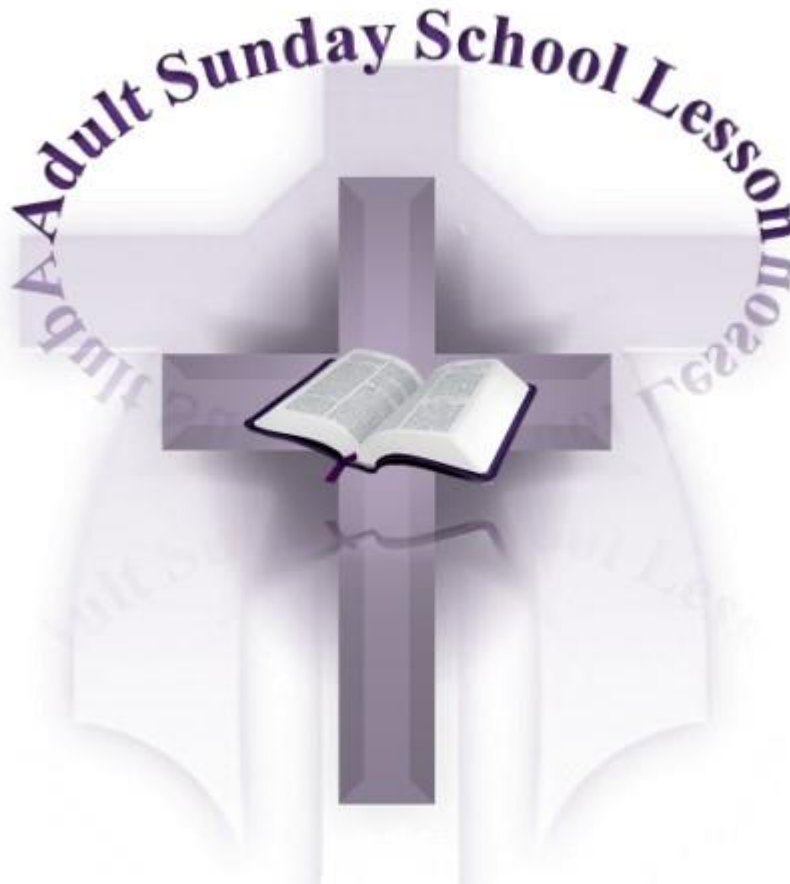




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WINTER – 2023/2024

Dec 2023 – Feb 2024

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“Diligent study of these lessons will not only bless you spiritually, but also aid you in discovering God's plan for your own life.”

-John Alva Owston



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SUNDAY SCHOOL

CLASS



ADULT

WINTER 2023-2024 SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

TABLE OF CONTENT

Page	Lesson	Date	Title
5	1	Dec 3 rd	“The Foreshadowing of Messiah's Birth” (Part I)
13	2	Dec 10 th	“The Foreshadowing of Messiah's Birth” (Part II)
21	3	Dec 17 th	“Good News for the World” (Part I)
28	4	Dec 24 th	“Good News for the World” (Part II)
34	5	Dec 31 st	“Pray for Everyone”
26	6	Jan 7 th	“I Will Be with You (Part I)
30	7	Jan 14 th	“I Will Be with You” (Part II)
34	8	Jan 21 st	“Turn to Me and Be Saved” (Part I)
38	9	Jan 28 th	“Turn to Me and Be Saved” (Part II)
42	10	Feb 4 th	“Reassurance for God’s People” (Part I)
46	11	Feb 11 th	“Reassurance for God’s People” (Part II)
50	12	Feb 18 th	“The Servant’s Mission in The World” (Part I)
54	13	Feb 25 th	“The Servant’s Mission in The World” (Part I)

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<https://www.thecityoffaith.org/sundayschool>



Sunday, December 3, 2023

Lesson 1 - "The Foreshadowing of Messiah's Birth" (Part I)

Lesson Text: **Isaiah 7:13-17; Luke 1:30-38**

Background Scripture: **Isaiah 7:13-17; Luke 1:26-38**

Devotional Reading: **Micah 5:1-5a**

Isaiah 7:13-17

13 And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also? 14 Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. 15 Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good. 16 For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings. 17 The Lord shall bring upon thee, and upon thy people, and upon thy father's house, days that have not come, from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah; even the king of Assyria.

Luke 1:30-38

30 And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God. 31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. 32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: 33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. 34 Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? 35 And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. 36 And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. 37 For with God nothing shall be impossible. 38 And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her

LESSON AIMS

- **Facts:** to study how the divine sign of the virgin birth given to David's house was to be fulfilled in the humble young Mary.
- **Principle:** to recognize the incarnation of God in Jesus as the greatest of all miracles.
- **Application:** to help people see that just as Jesus was born of Mary physically, so He can be born in us spiritually. Tell someone today who Jesus is.

INTRODUCTION - Futurists vs. Prophets

Human projections about the future are no more than guesswork. Some may be highly informed and skillful, but it is still guessing. Consider that weather predictions of even a few days in the future are often wrong despite sophisticated technology and computer models. The authors of the Bible make predictions of the future, but these authors are not like modern-day futurists. The Bible authors have been given insights by the one who knows and controls the future—God. Such predictions are prophetic and can be understood only as something supernatural and miraculous. The prophets of the Bible were not merely good guessers; they were God's instruments to proclaim His plans.

Many prophecies in the Old Testament were fulfilled in the life and ministry of Jesus, God's prophesied Messiah. Isaiah, the greatest of the prophets, made beautiful predictions about Jesus over 700 years before His birth. This week's lesson will examine some of these prophecies and their fulfillment.

LESSON BACKGROUND Time: about 734 B.C.; 6 or 5 B.C. Place: Jerusalem; Nazareth

The seventh chapter of Isaiah is set in the reign of King Ahaz of Judah, the father of King Hezekiah. Ahaz came to power around 740 B.C. His reign was overshadowed by the growing threat of invasion by

the mighty Assyrian empire to the north. The Assyrian armies eventually conquered the northern kingdom of Israel (also called Ephraim; see Isaiah 7:8, 9, 17) in 722 B.C. The threat to the southern kingdom of Judah must have been terrifying.

Before this move by the Assyrians, the kings of Ephraim and Syria (also called Aram) formed an alliance to protect themselves. They brought military pressure on Ahaz to join them (2 Kings 16:5; Isaiah 7:1). To relieve the pressure, Ahaz pledged himself to Assyria and appeased the Assyrian king with gold looted from the temple (2 Kings 16:7–9). This high-stakes political intrigue meant that Judah had aligned herself with the Assyrians against Israel and Syria. This is the backdrop for Isaiah 7–12. This section of Isaiah sometimes is called the Book of Immanuel. In this section, Isaiah confronted faithless King Ahaz because he trusted in an alliance with the Assyrians rather than trusting in God.

In Isaiah 8, the prophet depicts the coming invasion of the Assyrians in terms of a catastrophic flood. The waters of this flood were to reach up to the neck of Judah (Isaiah 8:8), meaning they would be highly damaging, but not fatal. In the midst of this horror, Judah would still be able to cry, “O Immanuel” (again, 8:8), in this case a plea of “May God be with us!”

A PROPHECY THROUGH ISAIAH (Isaiah 7:13-17)

1. Why was King Ahaz not seeking God's help against Israel and Syria (Isaiah 7:10, prior to lesson text)?

The Lord spoke very firmly to Ahaz through the Prophet Isaiah. In order to completely allay Ahaz's fears, God told him (through Isaiah) to ask for a sign confirming His word (vs. 10,11). But Ahaz arrogantly refused. Was it his unbelief in God, his annoyance at being told what to do by Isaiah, or simply his overwhelming pride that he felt no need for a confirmed word from God? Whatever his reason, Ahaz couched his refusal in the excuse of not wanting to test God, which was no doubt a transparently hypocritical response!

A comparison with 2 Kings 16:7 reveals that Ahaz was seeking assistance from the king of Assyria; so he apparently had no intention of relying on God for deliverance. Ahaz was unwilling to trust God and

leave things in His hands; instead, he had thoughts of finding a political answer to his problem.

2. How did Isaiah chide Ahaz when he refused to obey God's command for him to ask for a sign (v. 13)?

In response to Ahaz's refusal of Isaiah's command to ask, the Lord then spoke to both Ahaz and other people: "Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?" (v.13). The reluctance of the king to ask for a divine sign brought a rebuke from Isaiah.

Isaiah's response uncovers the illogic and duplicity behind Ahaz's actions. The king's secret alliance with the Assyrians has been a perversion of truth to his nation (to weary men). Does he think he can lie to God also (weary my God)? To ask the question is to provide the answer. There is no such thing as duplicity with God, for we cannot deceive Him. To attempt to hide the truth from God is delusional thinking.

3. What was the sign God gave to Ahaz and the people (v. 14)?

Ahaz refused to ask for a sign, but that did not stop God from giving a sign. The sign would be one of the greatest prophecies in all Scriptures – the birth of a son through a virgin, and he was to be named "Immanuel."

A question then naturally arises. How was this promised birth a sign to Ahaz that he could trust God's word about not needing to worry over the alliance of Rezin and Pekah? The answer is that it is common for prophetic utterances to have both near and far fulfillments (Exod. 3:12; 1 Sam. 2:34; 2 Kings 19:29). These would only have the effect of signs on those who witnessed their accomplishment.

In order for the sign to have meaning for Ahaz, this young woman had to be someone he knew; Isaiah did not include that information, perhaps because the more important message was the ultimate fulfillment in the Messiah, and that this was God's way of reminding Ahaz to trust in Him, for God is with His people and has not abandoned them.

4. Do you think there are some prophecies (such as the ones in Revelation) that will never be

understood fully until after they're fulfilled? If so, then why are they included in the Scripture?

Isaiah's prophecy about a virgin giving birth is understandable in light of the virgin birth of Christ centuries later. Yet, we wonder how many people really understood it at the time it was given! Jesus' disciples knew about the prophecy regarding Elijah in Malachi 4:5, but they didn't know it had been fulfilled until Jesus explained it to them (Matthew 17:10-13).

All this should serve as a caution. Some yet-to-be-fulfilled prophecies are so rich in symbolism that it seems impossible to come to a consensus regarding their interpretation. Some of the prophecies about Jesus were incomprehensible to many of the original hearers. The fact that we can read about prophecies that were fulfilled in every detail gives us confidence that God will fulfill all remaining prophecies. Our trust in that fact results in glorifying Him as the Lord over all of history.

5. What two things are mentioned as part of the sign to Ahaz (vs. 15,16)?

The two things that are mentioned as part of this sign to Ahaz are the time after the child would be weaned and able to eat food, and the time when he would be old enough to know right from wrong.

In the time it takes a baby to be able to eat semisolid food and learn to behave, disaster will have fallen on the two kings to the north. Parents know that this sort of development varies from child to child. But by the second birthday a child normally will be weaned and begin to respond to a parent's teaching of the basics of what is wrong and what is right (evil and good).

King Pekah of Israel/Ephraim reigns for 20 years (2 Kings 15:27). King Ahaz begins to reign in Judah in Pekah's seventeenth year (2 Kings 16:1). If the prophecy of Isaiah came to Ahaz in the second or third year of his reign, we can see how the prophecy of Pekah's demise is fulfilled quickly. Pekah is killed by a usurper, namely Hoshea (2 Kings 15:30). Although exact information about the king of Syria/Aram is harder to put together, we know that King Rezin of Damascus (the capital of Syria) is

killed by the Assyrians at about this time (see 2 Kings 16:9).

In short, Isaiah's message was that by the time these two things were true of this baby, God would have already dealt with the two kings coming against Ahaz. That should have sounded like good news to Ahaz, but there was bad news at the same time, as we shall see.

6. What did Isaiah say was coming in the future for Judah (v. 17)?

Assyria would indeed destroy Syria and Israel, but she would then attack Judah. God was behind this movement because of Judah's wickedness. This particular attack was going to be the worst since the nation split. The name "Ephraim" is used here to refer to the northern nation of Israel because Ephraim had become the dominant tribe of that nation. The split had come under Rehoboam, Solomon's son. Isaiah reminded Ahaz of the devastating division of the kingdom of Solomon. What is coming will be much worse.

For all practical purposes, the northern kingdom ceases to exist in 722 BC. Ahaz dies at about age 36, in about 728 BC (2 Kings 16:2). It falls to his son, the godly Hezekiah, to live through the terror of another Assyrian invasion in 701 BC. This time, however, God delivers Judah by killing 185,000 men in the army of the Assyrian king, Sennacherib (see 2 Kings 19:35, 36; Isaiah 37:36, 37). The saving intervention offered to Ahaz is realized in the reign of Hezekiah.

To be continued...

Lesson summarized by Renee Little
Jesus is All Ministries

NOTES:



December 10, 2023

Lesson 1 - "The Foreshadowing of Messiah's Birth" (Part II)

Lesson Text: **Isaiah 7:13-17; Luke 1:30-38**

Background Scripture: **Isaiah 7:13-17; Luke 1:26-38**

Devotional Reading: **Micah 5:1-5a**

Isaiah 7:13-17

13 And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also? 14 Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. 15 Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good. 16 For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings. 17 The Lord shall bring upon thee, and upon thy people, and upon thy father's house, days that have not come, from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah; even the king of Assyria.

Luke 1:30-38

30 And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God. 31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. 32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: 33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. 34 Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? 35 And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. 36 And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. 37 For with God nothing shall be impossible. 38 And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

A PROPHECY THROUGH GABRIEL (Luke 1:30-38)

7. How did Gabriel's appearances to Zacharias and to Mary compare (Luke 1:30)?

It was a startling moment for young Mary. An angel suddenly walked into her presence and greeted her: "Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women" (v. 28).

As would anyone, Mary felt confused over such a greeting, wondering what the angel could possibly mean. His announcement was very similar to what he had said earlier to Zacharias (v. 13)—namely, that she did not need to be afraid and that she was going to have a son. As with Zacharias, Mary was to name the boy what the angel told her. Zacharias had been told he did not need to fear because his prayers had been heard by God. Mary did not need to fear because she had found favor with God. The Greek word translated "favour" in Luke 1:30 is "charts", which is usually translated "grace." The word behind "highly favoured" (v. 28) is "charitoo", which means "to be indued with special honor." Mary was indeed blessed, for God was about to bestow upon her the highest honor ever given to a woman.

8. What do you think went through the mind of Mary at the news she "would bring forth a son" (v. 31)?

One of the most exciting moments for any woman comes when she can say to her husband, "Honey, we are going to have a baby!" If we allow our imaginations to picture this scene with Mary, however, we come to realize that instead of moments of great joy, Mary first experienced moments of great uncertainty over her news. How could she possibly give Joseph this information? The news for Mary must be truly shocking. She, a young unmarried girl still living in her father's house, is to be pregnant and

give birth to a son. This is disturbing, for it has the potential of ruining her marriage prospects and any chance for a normal life in that culture.

The name for the boy helps to explain this, however. His name will be Jesus, the New Testament version of the famous Israelite name Joshua. Joshua means "Yahweh is salvation" or "Yahweh will save."

9. What were some of the significant statements given to Mary about the son she would give birth to (vs. 32,33)?

The angel made five significant statements about Mary's son. First, He would be great. The Greek word here is *megas*. Jesus would certainly be no ordinary baby, for He was superior to all. Second, Mary's son would be known as "the Son of the Highest." The word for "Highest" here is translated "most high" in other places (see Mark 5:7). "Mary could not have missed the significance of that terminology. The fact that [Jesus] was to be called the 'Son of the Most High' pointed to His equality with Yahweh. In Semitic thought a son was a 'carbon copy' of his father, and the phrase 'son of' was often used to refer to one who possessed his 'father's' qualities" (Walvoord and Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Victor).

Third, Mary was told that God was going to put her son on the throne of David. Being the godly young woman she was, Mary probably recognized that the angel spoke of the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant, which had been given nearly a thousand years earlier: "And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever" (2 Sam. 7:16). Fourth, He would reign over the house of Jacob forever. This will begin in the millennium and continue right into eternity.

Fifth, adding certainty to the previous statement, Gabriel said her son's kingdom would never end. This will include far more than the house of Jacob. Just as God promised Abraham that he and his descendants were to be a blessing to the whole world, so Mary's son will reign over the entire universe. From this she certainly would have understood that she was going to bear the Messiah.

10. What explanation did the angel Gabriel give Mary to help her (vs. 34,35)?

Mary is very young, perhaps only 15 or 16. Yet she understands the facts of life. Pregnancy is not self-induced (v. 34). She can say without pretense that there has been no sexual contact in her life. We should not understand this to be a lack of faith on Mary's part (as if she were saying "No way!"), but a desire to understand better ("How?").

While Gabriel had rebuked Zacharias for expressing unbelief (Luke 1:20), there was no rebuke to Mary. This is evidence that her question came not because of unbelief, but merely from the fact that what was being described to her did not seem humanly possible.

Gabriel makes it clear that this is not some sordid, embarrassing affair. This is a holy undertaking, a provision of God himself. God was going to accomplish this through a miraculous conception. She would conceive through the power of the Holy Spirit and give birth while she was still a virgin. This creative act of the Spirit was necessary because of Jesus' pre-existence and deity. He already was and would continue to be the holy Son of God. Here was the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14, 9:6-7. Galatians 4:4,5 assures us that this birth was for the purpose of our redemption so that we can be children of God.

11. What example did Gabriel give Mary to help her (vs. 36,37)?

In order to strengthen Mary's faith even further, Gabriel told her about her relative Elisabeth. Zacharias and Elisabeth were childless, and "both were now well stricken in years" (Luke 1:7). Gabriel had announced to Zacharias the coming birth of their son John, and as soon as the period of his temple service was completed, he returned home. Shortly after that his wife Elisabeth conceived (vs. 23,24). Mary's pregnancy was not God's only miracle going on at that time.

Gabriel emphasized that Elisabeth had conceived in her old age even though she had been childless her entire life. He also informed Mary that Elisabeth was now in her sixth month of pregnancy (v. 36); so she was well on her way to giving birth. If there were any doubts lingering in Mary's mind, this should answer them. However, to put a final conclusive thought in Mary's mind about the greatness and the possibility of this miracle, Gabriel reminded her that nothing is

impossible with God. This is a core statement of faith, yet one that we often neglect. If there are things that are impossible for God, then is He really God?

This issue comes up later in Luke concerning salvation, for Jesus teaches that salvation is not the result of human effort. Salvation is possible for the God for whom nothing is impossible (see Luke 18:25–27; compare Genesis 18:14).

12. How did Mary respond to Gabriel's words (v. 38)?

At this point, we cannot help but marvel at the faith of Mary, a mere teenager. Without a doubt, she does not understand all that is happening to her. Yet she freely submits to the will of God. She makes no demand for some kind of equal partnership with God, but offers herself as His handmaid, meaning His “servant” or “slave.” Her acceptance is a sign of great faith.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. It is dangerous enough to try the patience of people; how much more deadly is it to try the patience of Almighty God? (Isaiah 7:13)
2. Jesus is God come as man – God on our side. Once we are His, He is ours forever. (v. 14)
3. Jesus’ perfect knowledge of good and evil makes Him the perfect judge of all. (vs. 15-17)
4. God favored Mary as He does us, not for our own righteousness, but sovereignly, out of His mercy and grace. (Luke 1:30-35)
5. “Impossible” is God’s specialty; never count Him out. (vs. 36,37)
6. Mary’s humility is not false; it is the only response to God for a favored sinner. (v. 38).

CONCLUSION

One of the ongoing promises of the Old Testament is found when God proclaims, “I will be with thee.” God gave this promise to Jacob as he returned to his homeland (Genesis 31:3). A similar promise was given to Moses when he was called to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 3:12). Joshua and the people received the assurance as they entered the

promised land (Joshua 1:5). Today this promise is reflected in one of the traditional blessings of the church: “The Lord be with you.” A great part of the coming of God’s Messiah was the prophecy of Isaiah that the promised one would be Immanuel. God is with us and will be with us eternally.

When we combine the prophecy of Isaiah with the story of Mary, we should realize that God is always “with” His people. This “with-ness” is more than an aspect of God’s ever-presence, however. It means that God is behind His people, working with them and using them to accomplish His plans and fulfill His will. Ahaz, a king of Israel, did not understand this. Mary, a teenage peasant girl, did.

The church today, as God’s people, retains this promise. God is with us. He will never abandon us. He will use us if we have the heart of submission to His will that we see in Mary. We may not be visited by angels, but we too, need not be afraid. God is with us.

PRAYER

Holy God, as You chose and used Mary, may You choose and use us according to Your will. Make us sensitive to Your leading so that our response will not be that of King Ahaz, but will be that of humble Mary. We pray this in the name of Jesus the Christ. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

God is still with us.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Read Isaiah 61:1-3 and Luke 2:8-20 as you prepare to study the events surrounding the birth of Jesus Christ.

Lesson summarized by Renee Little
Jesus is All Ministries

NOTES:



Sunday, December 17, 2023

Lesson 3 - "Good News for the World" (Part I)

Lesson Text: **Isaiah 61:1, 2; Luke 2:8-20**

Devotional Reading: **Isaiah 52:7-12**

Background Scripture: **Isaiah 61:1-3; Luke 2:8-20**

ISAIAH 61: 1-2

1 The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; 2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn.

LUKE 2:8-20

8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. 10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. 12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, 14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. 15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Beth' le-hem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. 16 And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. 17 And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. 18 And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

LESSON AIMS

- Review passages foretelling and proclaiming the birth of Jesus Christ.
- Affirm the literal birth of Jesus, Savior of the world.
- Help Christians celebrate the good news that the Savior has come.

INTRODUCTION

Isaiah 61 was certainly a passage of Scripture that was meaningful to Jesus. He stood in the synagogue and read from it (cf. Luke 4:16-19). The promise of Isaiah 61, that good tidings would be proclaimed to the meek, began to be fulfilled in the life of Jesus even before His birth.

Isaiah was the prophet God used to make the most remarkable and detailed prophecies about Christ. We should not be surprised that God revealed, hundreds of years in advance, intricate details about the coming Saviour.

It is possible that Luke, the only non-Jewish Gospel writer, may have been the one who went to the most trouble to include Jewish details in his telling of Jesus' story. Perhaps Luke had Isaiah 61 in mind as he wrote the story of the angels bringing good tidings to lowly shepherds in a field.

Isaiah and Luke together give us not only a beautiful story, but indeed a revelation of the greatest truths of all. The Scriptures selected have included Old Testament passages that set forth God's plan to demonstrate His love for the world by sending a special servant.

LESSON BACKGROUND Time: About 700-695 B.C.; 6 or 5 B.C. Place: Jerusalem; Bethlehem
Isaiah sometimes has been designated as "the gospel prophet" or "the fifth evangelist" (adding Isaiah to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). Much of Jesus' life is given in predictive prophecy by Isaiah, from Jesus' being born of a virgin to His ministry and death. The first few verses of Isaiah 61, the passage for today, will confirm the mission of Jesus.

The event from Luke in today's text is that which takes place immediately after Jesus' birth. It is the announcement to shepherds that the Savior, the Christ, is in nearby Bethlehem as a baby in a manger. This part of God's plan for the ages had come to pass, just as it had been predicted through Isaiah and other prophets for centuries. The Commission of the Servant-Messiah.

1. How can we tell that Isaiah is not the speaker in Isaiah 61:1-2?

During prophecy, Isaiah usually did not speak in the first person as he was doing in this passage. He also was not speaking of himself, but the Messiah. When Isaiah spoke the words, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me", earlier in Ch. 11:2, Isaiah had prophesized about "the Spirit of the Lord" resting upon God's ultimate Servant, Christ, who will rule the world. These same words spoken in Ch. 61:1-2, were the same words Jesus quoted in Luke 4:18-19, as He read to the people in the synagogue. This confirms that the voice in Isaiah 61:1-2, is that of the Messiah who will be the ultimate Preacher and Redeemer of Israel, who will rescue them. Jesus speaks of the initial fulfillment of this promise, referring it to His ministry of providing Salvation's comfort to the spiritually oppressed (again in Luke 4:18-19).

2. Why did the Spirit come upon people in the Old Testament, and what did the Spirit anoint Jesus to do? (v 61:1-2)

During Old Testament times, the Spirit came upon people in order to set them apart for special service or tasks for God such as priests, kings, and military leaders. Example: In 1 Samuel 10:1, the Lord chose Saul to be the leader of Israel and communicated His choice through a private anointing (with the use of oil) by Samuel, signifying a setting aside for God's service.

Jesus' anointing was much different. He was specially anointed/set apart by the Spirit, instead of with oil. The 3 persons of the Holy Trinity were functioning together in this verse (61:1 - Spirit...Lord God...Me.). Jesus had a commission from Him that is the fountain of power; the Father. He was to preach the gospel, so that the faith of the saints might be confirmed and encouraged. He was to be a healer, binding up the broken-hearted, and he was to be a deliverer.

3. What did anointing mean in ancient Israel?

The act of anointing in ancient Israel signified the pouring on of oil used for healing or consecration to sacred duty; figurative for divine appointment. People who received the pouring on of oil were prophets, priests and kings. Also, anointing (with oil) was used for refreshing the body, purifying the body, curing the sick, healing wounds, and preparing the dead for burial.

4. How did the Jews of Jesus' day often interpret Messiah's calling to proclaim liberty to captives?

The Jews' interpretation of the Messiah's calling to proclaim liberty to captives was that he would come and set people free from Roman rule; others hoped for deliverance from afflictions and demonic oppression. We know that this aspect of Jesus' ministry was clearly seen as He set people free from demonic possession. In Matthew 4:23-24, Jesus healed all kinds of sickness and all kinds of diseases. As His fame spread, many people afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics and paralytics, were healed by Him.

Spiritually, it was indeed a "proclamation." "Good tidings." Think of the iron power of Rome; the selfishness of the rich; the pride of the patrician (upper-class); the helplessness of the slave; the hopelessness of the philosopher. Christ came to the meek, not the mighty. It was a consolation. "To bind up the broken-hearted." To heal by the touch of his sympathy, and to save by the power of his cross. It was a deliverance. "To proclaim liberty to the captives," etc. Sin had woven its silken cords into iron bands. Men were slaves of lust and habit. The prison was opened; and the fetters which they could not shake off Christ struck from their souls." [W. M. S. The Pulpit Commentary (H. D. M. Spence-Jones, Ed.)]

The Birth of the Servant-Messiah

5. How was the announcement of Messiah's birth to the shepherds a fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1-2? (Luke 2:8-9)

In Isaiah 61:1-2, the Lord said he would preach good tidings to the meek. The meek are those who are not proud or arrogant. Those who have a spirit of submission or reverence. This announcement of the Messiah's birth (which is "good news") was not given to those who were arrogant or of great wealth or popularity. Nor was it given to the high priest or kings. The birth announcement was given first to the humble shepherds who were in the field watching over their flock and the message came by way of the angel of the Lord.

The shepherds were not considered elite or of high status, but were rather poor and meek. First-century Jews looked at shepherds with contempt. Shepherds were near the bottom of the social ladder...certainly not the kind of people, who could expect to receive an announcement about the birth of a king. It was to just such people, however, that God chose to announce the birth of His Son.

6. What was special about these shepherds? (Luke 2:9-11)

These shepherds were visited by an angel (a spiritual being; messenger of God) who threw them into a panic, but their fears were calmed when the angel assured them that he had joyful good news. This message of good news was for "all people (vs. 10) which included those of plain and ordinary lifestyles", it was personal: "unto you" (vs. 11) and it was specific: "this day". It was definite: "in the city of David". It was a message of good news because it was about "a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." They were the first to receive this message and were experiencing the fulfillment of God's promise.

To be continued...

JESUS IS ALL MINISTRIES

NOTES:



Sunday, December 24, 2023

Lesson 4 - "Good News for the World" (Part II)

Lesson Text: **Isaiah 61:1, 2; Luke 2:8-20**

Devotional Reading: **Isaiah 52:7-12**

Background Scripture: **Isaiah 61:1-3; Luke 2:8-20**

ISAIAH 61: 1-2

1 The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; 2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn.

LUKE 2:8-20

8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. 10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. 12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, 14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. 15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Beth' le-hem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. 16 And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. 17 And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. 18 And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

LESSON AIMS

- Review passages foretelling and proclaiming the birth of Jesus Christ.
- Affirm the literal birth of Jesus, Savior of the world.
- Help Christians celebrate the good news that the Savior has come.

LESSON BACKGROUND Time: About 700-695 B.C.; 6 or 5 B.C. Place: Jerusalem; Bethlehem

The event from Luke in today's text is that which takes place immediately after Jesus' birth. It is the announcement to shepherds that the Savior, the Christ, is in nearby Bethlehem as a baby in a manger. This part of God's plan for the ages had come to pass, just as it had been predicted through Isaiah and other prophets for centuries. The Commission of the Servant-Messiah.

7. What would the titles "Saviour," "Christ," and "Lord" have meant in ancient Israel? (Luke 2:11)

Saviour, Christ, and Lord were the titles given by the angel as it described the Messiah. "Saviour" would have brought to mind a deliverer, such as the judges of Israel who set the people from their enemies. "Christ" is the Greek equivalent of "Messiah," the coming King from David's line who would bring an age of peace and salvation, and "Lord" would have brought to mind a king and ultimately pointed to the fact that Jesus is God incarnate.

8. Why is the mention of the heavenly host (Luke 2:13) significant?

The heavenly host is an angelic army that is vast in numbers. Only on certain rare occasions did the host of angelic servants of God show up. It is only by divine intervention one would be able to see the normally unseen world of God's heavenly army. This

angelic army has the joy and privilege of being a part of this special event (by praising and worshipping God for the birth of Jesus). Other passages of Scripture that mention the heavenly host are in Dan. 7:10, 1 Kings 22:19; 2 Chron. 18:18, and 2 Kings 6:17.

9. *Were the wise men, the shepherds, and the star all together at Jesus' birth?*

The common scene with three wise men and the shepherds together with Joseph and Mary before a beautiful barn filled with clean hay and a brightly shining star above it all is not entirely accurate. The wise men, whose number is not told in Matthew where their visit is recounted, did not come until the child was older, which is why Herod killed all boys under the age of two (Matt. 2:16). The star that formed a sign for the wise men to follow was also not present at the birth, but occurred when the wise men came later. Most importantly, the Son of God was not born in a clean barn under pristine conditions, but in a room for animals. Although the shepherds were not told to go visit the newborn Saviour, they were given a sign that would verify the when they had found the Savior (he will be wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger). Swaddling clothes were bands of cloth used to keep a baby warm and give it a sense of security. These cloths were believed to protect its internal organs.

10. *What does the scene in Luke 2:15-20 reveal to us?*

The scene in Luke 2:15-20, is a show of the shepherds' faith. When the angels had departed, the shepherds hurried off to see those things that were told to them.

The *scene* of the Messiah's birth was in no way majestic. It was representative of God lowering Himself to be with humankind. Mary, the humble maidservant, a woman without great wealth, was the instrument of God to bring the Messiah into the world. A bunch of shepherds, men of low station in Israel's society, were the ones to receive the good tidings on behalf of the nation. This was not the atmosphere the Jews expected as the birthplace of the Messiah King. They thought their promised Messiah would be born in royal surroundings. Isaiah's prophecy was coming to pass, and because all of the events happened just as the angel had spoken, the shepherds didn't waste any time sharing the good

news. These Shepherd returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

11. *What does God's choice of the meek mean for us?*

God's choice of the meek means He comes to anyone with a heart humble enough to accept him. We must have a gentle attitude that is patiently submissive in every offense, while having no desire for revenge or retribution. We must be submissive to the will of God (Col. 3:12), we must be teachable (James 1:21), and considerate of others (Eph. 4:2). To be clothed in meekness is the most foundational Christian virtue because God can then use you to do His will, as he did with the shepherds. After the shepherds received the good news and found it to be true, they did not hesitate in sharing with others what they had seen and heard.

Conclusion

The prophecies and the birth of Jesus combine to make an unusual story. The prophecies that had accumulated through the centuries were fulfilled when Jesus became God incarnate - God in the flesh. As a new year dawns, will these things be just another telling of a familiar account, or will they make a difference in the lives of each one who has considered them again? As a new year dawns, will we resolve to make differences for Christ in the lives of others - differences that can determine where they spend eternity?

The events associated with Jesus' birth were not ordinary! They are a part of the message of Christ, and they are to be preached and taught by His followers to those who have never heard. It bears repeating: The purpose is to make a difference in the eternal destinies of those who hear.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for the reason we celebrate Christmas. You looked down from Heaven and saw fit to send your Son to redeem your people who are in an oppressed world. Thank you for the Redeemer, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. For Jesus is the reason for the Season. In Jesus' name, amen.

Thought To Remember

In the Kingdom of heaven, wealth, power and authority are unimportant. Are your attitudes a carbon copy of the world's selfishness, pride, and lust for power, or do they reflect the humility and self-sacrifice of Jesus, your King?

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

In preparing for our lesson next week, "Pray for Everyone", study, 1 Timothy 2:1-15.

Have a Blessed Christmas!
From all of us at
JESUS IS ALL MINISTRIES

NOTES:



Sunday, December 31, 2023

Lesson 5 - "Pray for Everyone"

Lesson Text: **1 Timothy 2:1-8**

Background Scripture: **1 Timothy 2:1-15**

Devotional Reading: **Colossians 4:2-6**

1 Timothy 2:1-8

1 I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; 2 For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. 3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; 4 Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; 6 Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. 7 Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity. 8 I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.

INTRODUCTION

While most Christians believe in and acknowledge the importance of a strong prayer life, many do not pray as they should. The reasons for this neglect are various..."I work, I have a family to take care of, I'm way too busy to pray." "I want to pray more but something always comes up and prevents me from doing so." "I say 'grace' before I eat, that's prayer, isn't it?" And a well-known, favorite excuse that some give is, "Well, the Lord knows my heart."

Today's lesson reminds us that as Christian disciples, we are responsible for not only communicating with God through prayer for ourselves, but we must also learn to pray for others-especially for those who are in positions of authority over us and others, as today's lesson explains. We have got to get out of the habit of praying only for self and for no one else. "God bless my home, my family, my job, my health, my church, my this-that-and-the other."

LESSON BACKGROUND

TIME: A.D. 62

PLACE: Macedonia

Paul had left his "son in the faith" Timothy in Ephesus, sometime during the interim between his own imprisonments in Rome. It was a daunting task that he had assigned this young preacher. The great Ephesian church had some doctrinal problems that needed to be addressed. Timothy also had to cope with some strong personalities, who were espousing false teachings. This situation is what brought forth Paul's letter of instruction and encouragement.

Paul was a friend of several Asiarchs. Acts 19:31 tells where these friends of Paul's urged him not to go into an arena on the verge of a riot in Ephesus. Paul was far from being a man who shunned the company of Gentiles of even idolaters. Paul's attitude toward these powerful leaders makes his call to prayer more understandable in today's lesson.

1: Who were the Asiarchs, and what was Paul's relationship with them?

Asiarchs were not "high priests of Asia" as some people believe, but were according to the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, delegates of individual cities to the provincial Council, which regulated the worship of Rome and of the emperor. The New Bible Dictionary says that Asiarchs were men chosen from the most wealthy and influential families of Rome. Some were also chosen to become priests in the imperial cult to enforce the worship of Caesar.

2. Who exactly was Paul commanding the churches to pray for? (1 Timothy 2:2, 3)

Paul exhorted Timothy to arrange public prayer in the worship meetings for all people. The prayers of the believers were not to be only for each other-as some of us are guilty of doing today, but for "all men

(humankind)" (v. 2b), and for "kings and all who are in authority" (v. 3a).

Let us not fail to remember our local, state, national, and world leaders in prayer. It is not our position as Christians to go against our elected leaders. They are in office, and we must respect them even if we do not agree with their policies and decisions. What can we do? We can show our beliefs and convictions through public voting, and more important than this, we can petition God about our situations through our daily prayers. He always hears the voices of His children. This is His promise.

3: Why was Paul's command to pray for authorities especially surprising for the early church? (1 Timothy 2:1)

The early church's subjection to persecution by Rome and its mean-hearted leaders was a common and dangerous situation. Although the early believers had already been taught to love all mankind, here Paul specifically used four of seven New Testament terms for prayer for all of mankind: "supplications" which emphasizes personal need or requests, "prayers" which is the general word for prayer as we know it to mean, "intercessions" which suggests free access to God on another's behalf, and "giving of thanks" which is prayer with an attitude of gratitude or praising God for what He has done.

4. How would prayers like this lead to peace for the churches?

Prayers like the ones Paul suggests led to peace for the churches because followers of Christ should be good citizens in general, even if the state is evil. Jesus followed Roman law, and Paul commanded it in Romans 13:1-6. Jesus gave instruction to "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's" in Mark 12:17. The only time a believer is to disobey the state or the state's laws is when it contradicts God. Peter said in Acts 5:29 that "We ought to obey God rather than men."

By praying for authorities, Christians can live peaceable lives and be seen as supporters and not as rebels. Even more important as a motivational tool, prayer for the community and for leaders pleases God. Leaders include those in authority at all levels, from the neighborhood to the nation, and even other world leaders in other nations. God, who is our

Savior, accepts such offerings of prayer with pleasure.

5. What is the most important point to be taken from 1 Timothy 2:4?

Because God is for all people, not only those who already believe, it is His desire to see all people saved from their sins. He does not wish to see anyone lost. But salvation is a matter of choice. The main point of Paul's statement in this verse is that God is not a God who delights in condemning people; He delights in our salvation and works mightily toward that end.

6. How is Jesus the Mediator and Ransom? (1 Timothy 2:5-6)

A mediator is someone who stands between two opposing parties and works out a solution. Jesus is a mediator because we were God's enemies, children of His wrath (see Ephesians 2:3). God's plan for us at that time was judgment. We were to be punished for rejecting God and choosing our own sinful ways, but God was willing to allow Another (Jesus Christ) to take our punishment for us.

Paul also called Jesus our Ransom. A ransom is a payment to persuade someone more powerful to do something for someone less powerful. Jesus' death was a ransom, a payment in suffering. His suffering paid the debt owed by us to God, so that we are forgiven and accepted in Him. This debt, by the way, is one that Jesus did not owe, and one that we could not pay. The message of Jesus, as our Mediator and Ransom, is the testimony that we are to give to others. God's message of forgiveness, through faith, in the atoning death of the Messiah, was the message Paul preached. It was the message he taught others to preach.

7. What did it mean to "lift up holy hands?" (1 Timothy 2:8)

Paul's command for public prayer for men was to be done with lifted holy hands. Nehemiah 8:6 and numerous other Scriptures describe the lifting of hands as a Jewish posture of prayer. More than just lifting hands, Paul called for the hands to be "holy." In other words, Paul wanted the hands to be lifted for the holy purpose of prayer by holy men (and women), faithful to God. Instead of seeing men who battled with their hands, Paul wanted to see the men praying.

8. How does praying for the community help a church?

Since the local church is made up of and is located in a community of people, it benefits the church to pray for the community in which it is found. An obedient and prayerful church will have a sincere concern for its surroundings, and will regularly remember in its prayers—the community, the city, the state, the nation, the continent, and the world. When a church follows God's way, it will be blessed.

CONCLUSION

Paul knew that prayer has to be a priority in the church and with its leaders. He strongly encouraged intercessory prayer, especially for those in civil authority. Such prayer was consistent with the “will” of God, who desires all to come to a saving knowledge of the truth. Paul desired the leaders of the local congregation to be men of faith and character who could lead the congregation in prayer. Time has passed, but the great need for prayer among Christians has not decreased.

✓ Practical Application

Have you ever had someone ask you to pray for him or her, and you said that you would, but only walked away and continued your day without ever giving a second thought to the person's request? Prayer is a special thing. It is not something to take lightly or for granted. For someone to ask you to pray for him or her, says a lot about what that person thinks about you as being a child of God. This is a compliment and an opportunity to witness. Do not let the opportunity pass you by. The next time someone asks you to pray for him or her, stop right there that minute, and immediately lift him or her up in prayer. Whether it be in person, or on the phone, believe that the requester is sincere.

Let us remember J-O-Y in our prayer life. That is, thank JESUS for what He has already done; lift up OTHERS in prayer; and humbly close by praying for YOURSELF.

PRAYER

Father, help us to pray more intentionally, keeping in mind the things You have taught us in our lesson today. Help us to be more sensitive to the needs of others, both physical and spiritual. We trust You to create circumstances that will help bring about the answers to our prayers that are according to Your will and for Your glory. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Prayer comes first

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

In next week's lesson, “I Will Be With You,” we will be reminded that God is ever present with us, no matter where we go or in what situation we find ourselves. Study Isaiah 43:1-7; 11-12.

Lesson summarized by Kimbley Yamada Baker-
Richardson
Jesus Is All Ministries

NOTES:



Sunday, January 7, 2024

Lesson 6 – “I Will Be with You” (Part I)

Lesson Text: **Isaiah 43:1-7, 11,12**

Background Scripture: **Isaiah 43:1-28**

Devotional Reading: **Jeremiah 31:3**

Isaiah 43:1–7, 10–12

1 But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. 2 When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. 3 For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. 4 Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life. 5 Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; 6 I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; 7 Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.

10 Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen; that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. 11 I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no saviour. 12 I have declared, and have saved, and I have shewed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God.

INTRODUCTION – Strange Gods

Has anyone not noticed the wide variety of religious beliefs these days? In cities large and small, there are synagogues, mosques, temples, tabernacles, chapels,

churches, and other houses of worship. There is an ocean of Web sites to explain the belief systems of everything from atheism to voodoo. Religious TV shows feature outrageous “holy” men and women. The spirituality section in commercial bookstores is crammed with volumes on New Age religion, humanism, and witchcraft right alongside the Bibles.

This is not a new state of affairs, however. Ancient Israel was surrounded by nations with strange religions. They practiced such things as idol worship, temple prostitution, and human sacrifice. The Israelites allowed these practices to infiltrate their own religious life (2 Kings 17:17; Isaiah 44:17; Hosea 4:14). Yet the people of Israel had a heritage of worshiping and serving the one true God, the only God. Any other so-called “god” was false, and to worship a false god was futile (see Romans 1:21–23).

The Bible calls these deities, “strange gods” (Deuteronomy 32:16; see Psalm 81:9). They are strange or foreign in that they seem to be “distant” in more than one sense. They are alien and frightening in their imperfections and demands. These are not deities that we want to be like or whose image, we would be pleased to bear.

Isaiah was deeply concerned that his people understand that there is only one God. All other claims of gods are false and dangerous. Things have not changed. Despite the appearance of competition among religions in our world, there is still only one God. There is no one besides Him (Isaiah 45:6). This is not because He is the greatest of the gods, but because He is the only God. Any other god proposed to us is strange!

LESSON BACKGROUND

An important theme in the second half of Isaiah is that the people of Israel are to be God's witnesses to the other nations of the earth (Isaiah 45:20,21; 48:20; etc.). This was not witness in the sense of "evangelism," but that of "testimony." Such a witness proclaims eyewitness observation or experience (Isaiah 43:10, today's text).

The concept of using a witness to verify legal claims is very ancient, and the integrity of witnesses is the foundation of all legal systems (compare Exodus 20:16). The wisdom tradition of Israel saw the honest witness as "faithful" in contrast with the false witness (see Proverbs 14:5). The people of the Bible were very aware of the great damage a false witness could bring (see Proverbs 25:18).

The nation of Israel had many occasions in its history to be a witness of and to the power of God. They had seen the plagues inflicted on Egypt to force Pharaoh to release them. They had walked through the miraculously parted Red Sea to escape the Egyptian army. They had seen the glorious mountain of the Lord where they received the law; that peak had the appearance of a mountain on fire (Exodus 19:18). They had seen the collapse of the walls of Jericho without a human hand having touched them. These mighty acts of the Lord made the Israelites witnesses for their God to all other nations. The law required two or three witnesses to convict someone of a crime (see Deuteronomy 19:15; compare John 8:17). In Israel, God had a whole nation of witnesses.

TODAY'S AIM

- **Facts:** to show us that our God is ever present with us, especially in difficult situations.
- **Principle:** to show that God cares for His people and is present with them to strengthen them.
- **Application:** to know that when we go through difficult situations, our God is always there and ready to help us.

God's Redeeming Love (Isaiah 43:1-4)

1. What message did God have for Jacob and Israel (Isaiah 43:1-4)?

As in the other prophetic books of the Old Testament, the message was not Isaiah's, but God's. Hence, the familiar "thus saith the Lord" (Isa. 43:1) prefaced

this message to God's people from the prophet. Of course, the names "Jacob" and "Israel" are referring to the same person and group.

God's words at the beginning of this chapter remind Israel of the Genesis creation story. There God "created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1) and "formed man" from "the dust of the ground" (2:7). But then sin entered the picture, and God needed to redeem His creation. A key part of His plan is to regain possession of Israel. This is a reference to God's deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage (see Exodus 6:6). In this act, God created a new nation for His purposes (see Deuteronomy 4:34).

Isaiah portrays an intimate, personal relationship between Israel and the Lord, for the nation is called by name. This personal aspect is made even more resolute by God's declaration thou art mine. Such a relationship is exceedingly rare in the ancient world, where the gods of the nations are portrayed as fickle, terrifying deities. In Israel's case, the nation is not commanded to cower in fear, but to *fear not*.

2. What was the significance of God bringing Israel through waters, rivers, fire, and flame (v. 2)?

Not only was Israel created and formed by God; she was also promised divine protection. Using typical Hebrew parallelism, "waters" and "rivers" are equivalent, as are "fire" and "flame." While the above are likely figurative expressions, the history of Israel did include passing through the Red Sea on dry land (Exod. 14) and a miraculous crossing of the Jordan River when they finally reached Canaan (Josh. 3).

Once they were captives in Babylon, the faith of some Jews would literally be tested by fire. Daniel's three friends were thrown into the fiery furnace because they refused to bow before Nebuchadnezzar's image (Dan. 3). As God delivered these faithful men from the flames, so He would deliver His people from captivity.

"Because of God's past work in creating, redeeming, and caring for Israel, He would continue to protect her. Therefore, in difficult times, pictured as floodwaters and fire, Israel should not give up and fear, for God would be with her and protect her" (Walvoord and Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Cook).

We are reminded of the promise of Paul that nothing is able to separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:38, 39). We too may be determined to “not fear” (Hebrews 13:6), for we are assured of God’s protecting hand in our lives.

What Do You Think?

What are some specific ways that you have experienced God’s protecting hand?

How is your faith affected in times when God seems to be absent?

3. Where were Egypt, Ethiopia, and Seba located? How were these nations a ransom for Israel (v. 3)?

God does not need to justify His claim on Israel, but four aspects of God’s relationship with the nation are presented. First, the people are reminded that this is the Lord speaking, a use of God’s divine name that was revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14, 15). In addition, God is the Holy One of Israel, a favorite designation of Isaiah for God, used about 25 times in the book. This designation emphasizes both the solidarity of God with the nation as well as the separation that God’s holiness entails (see Isaiah 12:6).

Israel is a people of imperfect holiness, and no one knows this better than the prophet himself (see 6:5). It is a wonderful paradox that the perfectly holy God dwells in the midst of sinful humanity, a paradox that finds ultimate expression in the incarnation of God’s Son. God is also presented as Israel’s savior. This title has an active sense here, for God is the one who is saving Israel in the present as He has in the past. This is expanded by the fourth aspect: God as the one who has given a ransom for Israel. This is closely related to the concept of atonement, a price paid for redemption.

In this setting, the sacrificial ransom was the three nations of Egypt, Ethiopia, and Seba. Egypt is the nation of the lower (northern) Nile River valley, while Ethiopia (Cush) is of the upper (southern) region. We do not know where Seba is. But the Bible records a son of the original Cush named Seba (Genesis 10:7; compare Psalm 72:10), so this is likely a reference to the same people-group.

The imagery of ransom ... for thee reminds us of the devastation God brought on Egypt in the process of freeing the Israelites during the days of Moses. The people of Israel are to remember that God’s act of choosing them was not without cost to other nations, nations also loved by God.

4. What was the primary motivation for God to choose Israel (v. 4)?

Because of her creation and call, Israel was precious in God’s sight. “From the time the promise was given to Jacob (Gen. 28:14), Israel became precious to Jehovah. From that time on God placed the interests of Israel above those of other peoples.... Israel’s preciousness consists solely in God’s sovereign choice of her to be His servant” (Butler).

As Christians, we have also been called by God for the unique purpose of making the gospel known to our world (Mark 16:15,16). Like Israel of old, we are “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Pet. 2:9).

While God was willing to ransom other nations for the benefit of Israel, He was willing to pay an even greater price to redeem the whole world. This price, of course, was the death of His Son. “The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Since God’s motivation for selecting both Israel (Deut. 7:7; Isa. 43:4; 63:9) and the church (John 3:16; Eph. 1:4,5; 1 John 4:19) was love, neither they nor we can claim any special merit on our part.

To be continued...

Lesson summarized by Willie Ferrell,
Jesus Is All Ministries

NOTES:



Sunday, January 14, 2024

Lesson 7 – “I Will Be with You” (Part II)

Lesson Text: **Isaiah 43:1-7, 11,12**

Background Scripture: **Isaiah 43:1-28**

Devotional Reading: **Jeremiah 31:3**

Isaiah 43:1–7, 10–12

1 But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. 2 When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. 3 For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. 4 Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life. 5 Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; 6 I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; 7 Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him • • • 10 Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen; that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. 11 I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no saviour. 12 I have declared, and have saved, and I have shewed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God.

God’s Glorious Gathering (Isaiah 43:5–7)

5. From what different directions would God call Israel home (vs. 5,6)?

One of the great promises of the Bible is that we are not alone in our struggles. The obvious reason to set fear aside was that the Lord had promised, “I am with thee.”

Whether addressed to Israel or the church (Matt. 28:20), this promise did not necessarily mean all perils would be avoided. Difficult days lay ahead for the Jews of Isaiah's day. The siege and fall of Jerusalem, their deportation to Babylon, and seventy years of captivity all lay ahead of them when Isaiah penned these words. Even so, they would not be abandoned by their God.

It is always easy to believe God is on our side when experiencing peace, prosperity, and physical well-being. It is when these things are taken from us that we may be tempted to doubt God's presence. God has nevertheless declared, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb. 13:5,6).

After the time of the Captivity, the Jews would return to their homeland. Since the four points of the compass are mentioned (Isa. 4.3:5,6), some see this is a two-pronged prophecy. The larger picture, however, is of a gathering of God’s people in a glorious unity. Hundreds of years after Isaiah, Jesus will speak of a time when the heirs of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will be joined at the table by people from all over the world (Matthew 8:11). Isaiah sees a new people of God determined not by their lineage and genealogy, but by the call of God to the table of faith.

What Do You Think?

Since God will call people from the ends of the earth to Him, how should we react toward other peoples and nations?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Our reaction to ethnic labels
- Our plan to take the gospel to other nations

6. What important purpose was Israel given (v. 7)?

In what ways is this also true for Christians? This future gathering is not for the advancement and prestige of Israel, but for God's glory. Isaiah returns to the earlier language of creation, of a people formed and made (compare Isaiah 43:1, above). The existence of the gathered people of God is a manifestation of God's overall plan for humanity's redemption. We should always be mindful that we exist for God's glory, not the other way around.

God's Saving Presence (Isaiah 43:11,12)

7. How was Israel supposed to be a witness to the world (v. 11)?

God tells His people that this role of witnesses is given to them (v. 10, not in today's text). They must give testimony to the reality of the one true God, uncreated and eternal. God was not formed, in striking contrast with the forming of the first man (Genesis 2:7) and of the nation of Israel (Isaiah 43:1,7, above).

The modern phenomenon of shopping for a religion that one likes is debunked here in verse 11 ("I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no saviour.") To see any given religion as a choice among many valid options is ridiculous. There is only one God, not a competing stable of gods. This God is the I am, the Lord. There are no other viable options. Therefore, any attempt to look elsewhere for salvation from the human condition is futile. The God of Israel is the only Savior.

When we integrate these exclusive claims of God as the sole Savior with Isaiah's promises of a coming Messiah, we begin to understand the great significance of the birth of Jesus. He is the God-intended and God-provided Savior of humanity. There are no other options that have a promise of salvation, for He alone is "the way" (John 14:6). There is no pathway to salvation other than God's chosen Messiah, Jesus our Lord (Acts 4:12).

8. What is the role of a witness? How can we witness today (v. 12)?

Again, one of the primary purposes for which God called Israel was to be a witness to what He had done for them. Just as Rahab was convinced concerning the truth of Israel's God by what she heard about Him (Josh. 2:8-11), so Israel was to witness to the mighty

deeds of the Lord in order to declare Him to the larger world.

"The absolute sovereignty of Jehovah is the message Israel is to proclaim. They are witnesses to it. They have seen and heard first-hand—for that is what a witness is. A witness does not tell what he thinks or feels—he tells what he has seen and heard. What Israel has seen is only Jehovah can save...Jehovah did not reveal His saving power to Israel in a systematic philosophy—He revealed it in deeds, events, in the historical, human frame-of-reference. He also demonstrated experientially that none of the gods of man, none of the pagan idols, could save" (Butler).

As Christians we must also remember that we are to be the Lord's witnesses. As Christ told the apostles, "Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). To be sure, we cannot be witnesses in the exact same sense the apostles were, as they were eyewitnesses of the risen Lord (v. 22). Nevertheless, we are to communicate to others what the Lord has done for us.

This, of course, must be done within the framework of the objective truths of the gospel: "how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3,4).

We do not, in fact, go out to witness. We are witnesses—either good ones or poor ones. Which are you?

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Since God has created and redeemed His people, they need not be paralyzed by fear (Isaiah 43:1).
2. In any situation, God's omnipresence can bring comfort and courage to His own (v. 2).
3. God's people can rest and rely on His love, for it undergirds all that He does in their lives (vs. 3,4).
4. Nothing is too hard for God; when He commands, all creation must obey (vs. 5,6)!
5. The Creator's children should reflect His glory (v. 7).
6. The truth remains: God alone can change a heart and save a soul (vs. 11,12).

CONCLUSION - Witness

Isaiah's theme of witness is continued in the New Testament, where the risen Jesus charges His disciples to be His "witnesses" to all the people of the earth (Acts 1:8). In this, believers are following Jesus himself, for He is presented as the ultimate "faithful witness" to the power and holiness of God (see Revelation 1:5). But unlike ancient Israel, our witness should have the result of evangelism (Matthew 28:19,20). In this way, Christian believers are the new nation of witnesses of the power of God to unbelievers.

Our faith should lead us to testify to the mighty works of God, particularly to the power of the resurrection of Jesus (see Romans 1:4). God does not leave this task to us alone, for He gives us His Spirit as a witness to our status as His children (Romans 8:16). This is the "Spirit of truth" that adds His witness to our own (John 15:26; see 1 John 5:20).

Continuing Theme: Only One God

Our consumer society has given us many choices when it comes to products we purchase. I recently did a quick count of the different varieties of soda pop for sale in the supermarket next door, counting nearly 100. We are spoiled by this dizzying array, and sometimes we are paralyzed by too many choices. We are like the proverbial donkey that was placed between two feedboxes and starved to death while trying to decide which one he should eat from.

Some like to think that there are many choices in matters of faith as well. We want to worship, but we want a God who fits our lifestyle and preferences. So, we choose a church as we would choose a new car.

Isaiah's insistence that this is mad still speaks today. There is only one God, whether we believe this or not. Our faith or lack of it does not change the reality. God's eternality, power, and singularity do not depend on our acceptance. Similarly, God's ongoing presence in the world is not contingent on our recognition of that fact. God declares that there is no other God. God promises that He is with us. He is our

Savior, the only deliverer from the mess we have made of our lives.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we pray to You to save and protect us as You have promised. We pray to You, O God of all nations, never to withdraw Your comforting presence from us, even if we walk through the darkest valley of death. May You find us worthy and useful as Your witnesses to a world that denies Your loving concern. We pray these things in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Be a witness of the only God.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

In our lesson next week, "Turn to Me and Be Saved", we see that God offers us a new future, a new beginning. Beginnings with God happen when we denounce our sin and trust in His redemption. Study Isaiah 45:1-25.

Lesson summarized by Willie Ferrell
Jesus Is All Ministries

NOTES:



Sunday, January 21, 2024

Lesson 8 – “Turn to Me and Be Saved” (Part I)

Lesson Text: **Isaiah 45:18–24a**

Background Scripture: **Isaiah 45**

Devotional Reading: **Deuteronomy 4:29; John 4:23**

Isaiah 45:18–24a

18 For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the Lord, and there is none else. 19 I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain: I the Lord speak righteousness, I declare things that are right. 20 Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, ye that are escaped of the nations: they have no knowledge that set up the wood of their graven image, and pray unto a god that cannot save. 21 Tell ye, and bring them near; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have not I the Lord? and there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me. 22 Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. 23 I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. 24 Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength.

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

- Tell how Isaiah describes the one true God.
- Explain why it is important for people in idolatrous eras—both ancient and modern—to believe in God.
- To show how God’s very best for us in the future begins with our coming to Him.

INTRODUCTION

In many nations of the world, religious pluralism is on the rise. That is certainly the case in North America. Consequently, public religious events are often required to have many faiths represented.

To suggest that there is one God and that Christ alone is Saviour is seen as narrowminded and bigoted. Failure to be tolerant of opposing views will simply not be tolerated by those who demand tolerance! As Bible-believing Christians, however, we must stand firm on the truths of God's Word. There is but one way to heaven, and that is through the Lord Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). This does not mean that we should be obnoxious or disrespectful toward people who believe otherwise, but we must not yield to the viewpoint that all religions are created equal. Isaiah also lived in a world where religious pluralism was widespread. Each nation had its own gods, and Israel had succumbed to the lure of idolatry. They had not ceased to believe in the Lord, but they had begun to worship other gods too. The Israelites deserved to be punished. Thus, God allowed Babylon to sack Jerusalem and exile many people. But in the process the Babylonians and others went too far and dragged the name of Israel and Israel’s God through the mud. Those whose wickedness exceeded that of Israel appeared to thrive. So Israel awaited vindication. The people longed for God to restore them and give the nations the judgment they deserved. In today’s passage, Isaiah anticipates this very restoration. Our confidence today is in the God who vows to vindicate the name of Jesus and His people.

LESSON BACKGROUND

695 B.C. Place: Jerusalem

Time: about 700 -

The sections of the book of Isaiah appear to address different time periods. Chapters 1–39 clearly discuss events that took place during Isaiah’s lifetime in the eighth century BC. God spoke through Isaiah in this section to warn the Israelites that if they did not repent of their sin, then God would use foreign nations to punish them.

Chapters 40–66, however, assume that foreign nations already have come and punished Israel. The concern of this section is to comfort a nation that has been beaten down. This section reassured the Israelites that God had not abandoned them. He planned to restore them and use them as His vehicle of blessing to the nations. In short, God’s purpose for Israel would not fail.

Babylon’s sack of Jerusalem in 586 BC (compare 2 Kings 25) was an event that was jarring beyond description. The temple was destroyed and the kingship was lost, with both commoners and prominent leaders taken into exile. In short, Israel’s world was turned upside down, and the people were driven to desperation. For this reason, God commissioned the prophet Isaiah, in anticipation of the time when the punishment for their sins would be complete (Isaiah 40:1,2).

This comfort takes several forms over the chapters leading up to today’s passage: Israel is told that God is coming to save her (Isaiah 40:9–11); God is sovereign over the nations (40:15–24); Israel is God’s chosen servant (41:8–10); God is uniquely divine (44:6–8); the idols of the nations are nothing (44:9–20); Jerusalem has a bright future (44:24–28); and God will use the Persian ruler Cyrus as His tool to release the Jews from exile and rebuild Jerusalem (45:1–13). Today’s passage follows immediately after this statement of Cyrus’s commission.

FORMATION OF THE WORLD (Isaiah 45:18,19)

1. For what purpose did God save Israel (Isaiah 45:17)? Why did He mention the creation of the world (v. 18)?

In spite of the coming Babylonian captivity, and the subsequent return of Jews under the beneficent hand of Cyrus, there would still come an “everlasting salvation” (Isaiah 45:17) to the Jews from the Messiah who would arise from among them.

No, the Israelites were not the most powerful nation. They may, in fact, be the nation that suffers the most abuse, ridicule, and shame. But Israel is God’s people, chosen to usher in the Messiah. Though they walk with heads bowed into Babylonian exile, they will march out with heads held high (Psalm 126). God is their salvation and will vindicate them. However, as already alluded to, it was their failure to serve the true God, that got them into the dilemma they were now facing.

While it was certainly basic, Israel needed to be reminded that the Lord was their Creator (Isaiah 45:18). Israel’s future is not to be grounded in self achievement, but in divine promise. The God who “created the heavens” and “earth” is the guarantor. God has an impeccable, unmatched track record of accomplishments. He created the world with a purpose that will not fail. He formed it deliberately in order to fill it with vegetation, animals, and thriving civilizations. Though human sin introduced chaos into God’s good creation, God has willed to bring order to this chaos through His people Israel. His will for Israel is to be done.

Since the God of Israel was the original Creator, the people of Isaiah’s day also needed to be reminded that He was “the Lord; and there is none else” (v. 18). Similarly, Christians need to be reminded that, amid the religious pluralism so prevalent today, there is but one true God (1 Cor. 8:5,6; Eph. 4:4-6).

2. How has God “spoken” to Israel (v. 19)?

For those who might have accused God of being elusive (v. 15), the Lord made it clear that He had not spoken in secret. When He speaks to His people He does so with unmistakable clarity. God spoke forthrightly to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, setting them apart as witnesses to His purposes in world history. Yet God is also clear, that should the offspring of these men forsake God’s ways, then He will punish them by sending them into exile (Deuteronomy 28:15–68). So, it is not because of the power of Assyria and Babylon that Israel finds herself beaten, bruised, and exiled.

God means it when He promises the Israelites that He will bless both them and all nations through them (Genesis 12:1–3; Exodus 19:5,6). What He declares is true and right and will come to pass without fail. Israel does not follow God in vain. Though God

appears to leave them behind, they must remember His prior promise to restore them (Deuteronomy 30:1-10).

FUTILITY OF IDOLATRY (Isaiah 45:20,21)

3. Who are those who have "escaped of the nations" (v. 20)?

In verse 20, God summons refugees from scattered Israel as His witnesses. The Babylonians take many Israelites to Babylon, but the Israelites actually are scattered in multiple directions. Some are dispersed throughout the nations by the Assyrians (compare 2 Kings 17:6); others flee to Egypt (25:26).

God further reminds His people that these nations to which they are scattered are fountains of misinformation. God reminds them of this because the Israelites are and will be tempted to believe the lies of these nations. It may appear that the foreigners who claim that Israel's God is powerless to save them are correct (Isaiah 36:18-20). But the foreigners are duped into thinking that false gods are not only real but, more powerful than Israel's God.

As God said through Isaiah, to worship an idol was to pray to a god with no power to save. As for those who bow before various false gods throughout the world today, they face the same dilemma. Like those of Isaiah's day, they believe that these gods are real. In the end, however, they will realize "they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone" (Isaiah 37:19).

"Superstitious persons know that idols need the aid and assistance of men, instead of men needing the assistance of idols, which cannot even be made to stand upright without the agency of men. ... for what can be more foolish than to address vows and prayers to wood and stone? and yet infidels run about to dead statues, for the purpose of seeking salvation from them" (Calvin).

4. Who was God challenging to "take counsel together" (v. 21)?

As if in a courtroom, God challenged the false gods to present their case. If these idols (or their prophets) needed to "take counsel together" as a group of defense attorneys might do, so be it. Of course, God knew that these idols could not consult with each

other, as they did not actually exist, except in the minds of their devotees. If false prophets consulted with one another, it would be as futile as it was on Mount Carmel (cf. 1 Kings 18:16-40).

In contrast to the false gods, which were powerless to do anything, the Lord could foresee from ancient times, things that had yet to come to pass. Once they occurred, however, they would affirm the veracity of His word. "I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done" (Isa. 46:9,10). "Jehovah alone knows the future and He has demonstrated it from the beginning of time by predicting events great and small in minute detail, thousands of years before their fulfillment. Much of this was prior to Isaiah's time! There was plenty of evidence even in Isaiah's day that Jehovah's word always came to pass" (Butler, Isaiah, Vol. III, College Press).

Because God could faithfully and accurately foretell the future, He could then declare, "There is no God else beside me" (Isa. 45:21). Besides being omniscient, the Lord is just, righteous, and the only source of eternal salvation. As Yahweh was the only hope for Israel, so Christ is the only hope for today's world. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). That being so, we must faithfully proclaim this message to the ends of the earth (Mark 16:15).

To be continued

Lesson summarized by Willie Ferrell
Jesus Is All Ministries

NOTES:



Sunday, January 28, 2024

Lesson 9 – “Turn to Me and Be Saved” (Part II)

Lesson Text: **Isaiah 45:18–24a**

Background Scripture: **Isaiah 45**

Devotional Reading: **Deuteronomy 4:29; John 4:23**

Isaiah 45:18–24a

18 For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the Lord, and there is none else. 19 I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain: I the Lord speak righteousness, I declare things that are right. 20 Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, ye that are escaped of the nations: they have no knowledge that set up the wood of their graven image, and pray unto a god that cannot save. 21 Tell ye, and bring them near; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have not I the Lord? and there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me. 22 Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. 23 I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. 24 Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength.

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

- Tell how Isaiah describes the one true God.
- Explain why it is important for people in idolatrous eras—both ancient and modern—to believe in God.
- To show how God’s very best for us in the future begins with our coming to Him.

GOD OFFERS SALVATION / FUTURE REDEMPTION (Isaiah 45:22-24a)

5. How does salvation come to "the ends of the earth" (v. 22)? Does this mean that everyone will be saved?

God has made His case and has offered irrefutable evidence. Now it is time for a response. In this light, He invites “the ends of the earth” to look to Him for salvation. Although Israel had a unique relationship with the Lord under the old covenant, redemption has now been extended to the ends of the earth through the gospel. Salvation was offered first to the Jews, but once most of them rejected it, it was offered to the Gentiles (Acts 13:44-48; Rom. 1:16). As Isaiah 42:6 tells us, Israel was to be “a light [to] the Gentiles.”

Acts 13:44-48

⁴⁴ *And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God.*

⁴⁵ *But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.*

⁴⁶ *Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.*

⁴⁷ *For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.*

⁴⁸ *And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.*

Romans 1:16

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

We can affirm that the one true God is the source of salvation for the entire world. Furthermore, God does not seek to save Israel from its captivity only for Israel's sake. Rather, He rescues Israel so He may continue His mission to use Israel as His vehicle of blessing to the entire world. As Christians, we affirm that people everywhere must turn to God's Son alone for salvation.

6. Why would God swear by Himself (v. 23)?

That God wants all nations to come to Him for salvation is evident from the invitation given in verse 22. To undergird this great invitation, the Lord made a solemn oath, swearing by Himself. "Because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself" (Heb. 6:13).

Like all of God's promises, the message of salvation will be taken to the ends of the earth. This part of Isaiah will culminate in the promise of the suffering Servant, whose sacrifice is detailed in Isaiah 53. While Isaiah may have wondered whether his efforts at preaching God's word were futile (cf. Isa. 6:9-12), he was promised that the message would not return void but would accomplish God's purposes (55:11).

Modern believers face the same predicament. We often wonder whether our sermons, lessons, and witnessing efforts are falling on deaf ears. Whether people listen should not be our primary concern, however. We have been commanded to go to all nations (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15). The results are in God's hands, not ours (1 Cor. 3:6).

Matthew 28:19 KJV

¹⁹ Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

Mark 16:15 KJV

¹⁵ And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

7. When will every knee bow and every tongue confess? How is this text used in the New Testament?

In the end, all nations will bow before the Lord and acknowledge Him as the true God. Both the idolaters of Isaiah's day and the skeptics we encounter today will ultimately bow the knee to the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:10). For those who have received Him, this will be a willing confession. For those who have rejected Him, this confession will not result in their salvation, but seal their damnation!

8. What happens when a believer acknowledges that the Lord is their righteousness and strength (v. 24a)?

Indeed, in the Lord alone is our "righteousness and strength" (Isa. 45:24). "As these are the two principal parts of our salvation, when believers acknowledge that they receive both of them from God, they ascribe to him the undivided praise of a happy life, and testify that by nature they do not possess that which they acknowledge that they owe to his grace" (Calvin).

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. A person must believe in the God of the Bible, or he has no real god at all (Isaiah 45:18).
2. God speaks openly and truthfully in His Word, unlike the prophets of the false gods of Isaiah's day (v. 19).
3. God alone is able to foretell the future. The wise man will examine the clear evidence and believe (vs. 20,21).
4. Salvation is available to all who will turn to God, admitting that He alone is worthy of their worship (v. 22).
5. All men will someday bow before God, but for many it will be too late (vs. 23,24).

CONCLUSION - The Vindication of Christ

Christians continue to suffer under oppression they've done nothing to deserve. May we learn this lesson from Israel's history: as long as we fix our hope on the only one who is able to save, we will be vindicated. May we remember our Savior Jesus, who also appeared to have been forsaken by God (Matthew 27:46)...He suffered a cruel death and had His name dragged through the mud of crucifixion with criminals. But God raised Him from the dead and seated Him at the right hand of the Father. There Jesus awaits the day when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that He is Lord (Philippians 2:5-11).

PRAYER – Lord God, You alone are powerful to save. You have proven yourself time and again in Scripture, in world history, and in our lives. Keep our heads turned straight toward You, in whom alone we have hope, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER – God and only God saves.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON – “Reassurance for God's People”, Isaiah 48:14-19, 21,22.

Lesson summarized by Willie Ferrell
Jesus Is All Ministries

NOTES:



Sunday, February 4, 2024

Lesson 10 - "Reassurance for God's People" (Part I)

Lesson Text: **Isaiah 48:14-19, 21,22**

Background Scripture: **Isaiah 48**

Devotional Reading: **1 Kings 8:33-40**

Isaiah 48: 14-19

14All ye, assemble yourselves, and hear; which among them hath declared these things? The LORD hath loved him: he will do his pleasure on Babylon, and his arm shall be on the Chaldeans. 15I, even I, have spoken; yea, I have called him: I have brought him, and he shall make his way prosperous. 16Come ye near unto me, hear ye this; I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, there am I: and now the Lord GOD, and his Spirit, hath sent me. 17Thus saith the LORD, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I am the LORD thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go. 18 O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea: 19Thy seed also had been as the sand, and the offspring of thy bowels like the gravel thereof; his name should not have been cut off nor destroyed from before me.

Isaiah 48: 21,22

21And they thirsted not when he led them through the deserts: he caused the waters to flow out of the rock for them: he clave the rock also, and the waters gushed out. 22There is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked.

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

- Show that our God is truly the One who is there for us, acting on our behalf.
- Realize that our God gives us reassurance when we need it most.
- Express a resolve to serve God in a specific manner in light of having been freed from spiritual captivity.

INTRODUCTION – What Might Have Been

Past failures can be paralyzing. Some who have made poor educational and career choices are now crushed under the weight of unfulfilling jobs. Some who rushed quickly into marriage struggle to maintain healthy relationships and keep promises. Others who neglected spending time with their children now regret the quality of the relationships that have resulted. Christians and non-Christians alike are plagued with regrets about the past. Sometimes we wish we could do it all over again. We wonder “what might have been” if only we had made better choices.

The Israelites found themselves in a similar situation. They had a bright future when God called them out of slavery in Egypt. With His promise to be with them and to prosper their every step, they were poised to flourish. Yet they violated their side of the covenant and traded success for failure.

It was tempting for them to give up altogether (see the book of Lamentations). But God would not allow them to do that. In today's Scripture, He both reminds the Israelites of what might have been and beckons them to the new future that still could be. In so doing, God also reminds us that our worst failures need not be the last word for our lives. Though we cannot change the past, God can guide our future.

LESSON BACKGROUND **TIME:** about 700-695 B.C. **PLACE:** Jerusalem

As we noted last week, the Babylonians had taken full control of the southern kingdom of the Israelites, called Judah, by 586 B.C. That was about 136 years after Assyria had done the same as the northern kingdom, called Israel. In 586 B.C., the temple was

destroyed, its vessels were confiscated, and many people were deported to Babylon.

God had foretold that this would happen if the Israelites did not repent of their sin. Yet it was still difficult for the people to process what was happening to them. They were devastated. The book of Lamentations captures the sense of desperation that overcame God's people at this time.

Last week we saw God promise to vindicate Israel in the eyes of the nations. This week He encourages Israel not to dwell on her past failures. God is ready to move forward. Those who wish to go forward with Him had to get on board.

God's Love (Isaiah 48:14-16)

1. Who was called upon to "assemble" and "hear" (Isaiah 48:14)?

God now called Israel to "assemble yourselves, and hear" (Isa. 48:14). In the Old Testament, to "hear" usually carries the connotation of obedience. In this text, though, the emphasis was on listening to what God was saying to them—something they had neglected to do in the past. The question "Which among them hath declared these things?" is a reference to idols. Israel had put their trust in idols, which could not foretell the future, as they were but imaginary deities. "Throughout the preceding chapter, this argument (the ability or inability to predict) was used to expose the unreality of the idol-gods and the true and only deity of the Lord" (Motyer, the Prophecy of Isaiah, InterVarsity).

Thus, the answer to the question which among them hath declared these things (?) is obvious: "*none of them*" (compare Jeremiah 10:5). Only God can declare the things we have just read in verse 13.

2. What is the identity of the one the Lord loved in verse 14?

The one whom "the Lord hath loved" is Cyrus, since he is the Persian ruler who overthrows Babylon and sends the Jewish people home from exile to rebuild Jerusalem (compare Ezra 1:2–8). Though Cyrus is not mentioned by name in this passage, he is named specifically in Isaiah 44:28; 45:1. Cyrus is still in view here in 48:14.

We should not think that God "loves" Cyrus more than God loves the pagan kings of, say, Babylon or

Greece. We learn in Daniel 7 and 8 that, from God's perspective, the rulers of these nations (including Persia) are like beasts. Rather, the term love sometimes simply means that God has chosen for His purposes one particular person or nation rather than another one (compare Malachi 1:2, 3; Romans 9:13).

3. What did the Lord mean when He said, "I, even I, have spoken" (v. 15)?

This verse, using good Hebrew repetition, reinforces the point made above. Since God declares that He will use Cyrus, king of Persia, for His purposes, Israel can rest assured that this will happen. This is good news for Israel.

Cyrus, who is not yet born as Isaiah prophesies, will have no special affection for Israel. He will not know that God is prospering him in order to judge Babylon and begin restoring Israel. Cyrus merely will choose what he sees as a good foreign policy. He gains the loyalty of vassal nations by sending their leaders back home and supporting their rebuilding projects. Cyrus will be happy as long as these vassals pay him the tribute he requires.

When God is finished using Cyrus for His purposes, then God's special favor will be lifted. Then He will use Greece to judge Persia, just as He used Persia to judge Babylon (Daniel 8). Israel is blessed, as well as we are today, in that God's love for His chosen people does not come and go.

4. What did the Lord mean when He said, "I have not spoken in secret" (v. 16)?

God wraps up His summons by reminding the Israelites that He has been forthright about His purposes since the beginning. He predicts Israel's fall to Babylon, and He predicts the rise of Cyrus and eventual fall of Babylon. God has kept Israel in the loop concerning His plans for the nations. The Israelites are therefore His witnesses. God reminds them of His past word in hopes that they will stand at attention and heed the new word that He has for them now.

We also read here about the prophet's own commission. Cyrus is not the only one sent. The prophet himself is sent by God's Spirit. With all the speaking God does throughout this book, Isaiah's voice can be overlooked. We should not forget that the original audience does not hear God speak

directly to them, but hears God speaking to them through the prophet by God's Spirit.

To be continued...

Lesson summarized by Deloris H. Washington
Jesus Is All Ministries

NOTES:



Sunday, February 11, 2024

Lesson 11 - "Reassurance for God's People" (Part II)

Lesson Text: **Isaiah 48:14-19, 21,22**

Background Scripture: **Isaiah 48**

Devotional Reading: **1 Kings 8:33-40**

Isaiah 48: 14-19

14All ye, assemble yourselves, and hear; which among them hath declared these things? The LORD hath loved him: he will do his pleasure on Babylon, and his arm shall be on the Chaldeans. 15I, even I, have spoken; yea, I have called him: I have brought him, and he shall make his way prosperous. 16Come ye near unto me, hear ye this; I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, there am I: and now the Lord GOD, and his Spirit, hath sent me. 17Thus saith the LORD, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I am the LORD thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go. 18 O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea: 19Thy seed also had been as the sand, and the offspring of thy bowels like the gravel thereof; his name should not have been cut off nor destroyed from before me.

Isaiah 48: 21,22

21And they thirsted not when he led them through the deserts: he caused the waters to flow out of the rock for them: he clave the rock also, and the waters gushed out. 22There is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked.

God's Leading / Result of Disobeying His Commands (Isaiah 48:17-19)

5. In what threefold manner did God introduce Himself? (v. 17)

God introduces himself here in a threefold manner that points back to His deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt. First, He introduces himself as LORD, which all-capitalized means Yahweh; this is the personal name that God revealed to Moses on the mountain. Second, God introduces himself as

Redeemer, the one who redeemed the people from slavery in Egypt. Third, He repeats that He is the Holy One of Israel, a phrase used 31 times in the Old Testament, 25 of which occur in Isaiah.

Furthermore, God is the one who gave His law through Moses to teach the people the right way to live. In God's role as leader, He guided the Israelites through the wilderness and into the promised land. God reminds the people that He is the God of the exodus from Egypt because He intends in their own day to launch a new exodus from Babylon, some nine centuries after the first one.

6. If Israel had hearkened to God's commandments, what would have been the result? (v. 18)

But the Israelites of the Egyptian exodus did not obey God. In rejecting His commandments, they rejected the means God was using to show them abundant life and use them as a witness to the nations. If Israel had ordered her life according to God's law, the people would have experienced peace, they would have exemplified righteousness, and they would have provided the nations a glimpse of God's wonderful intentions. They would have been blessed by God and would have become a blessing to all nations.

7. What other promise did Israel miss out on? (v. 19)

God continues to enumerate the blessings He would have poured out on Israel. A blessing echoed here is the promise to the patriarchs that their descendants would be like the sands of the seashore (Genesis 22:17; 32:12).

Yet, this promise has not come to fruition. What might have been is not reality. The Israelites reject the way of life God intends for them. Instead, they

choose the ways of the nations around them. In refusing God's way, they have rejected God's strategy for blessing all nations. The nations are supposed to see God's wisdom manifested in Israel and be drawn to it (Deuteronomy 4:5–8).

To reject God's way is thus to reject God's mission. God cannot accept this, so He destroys the Israelites' sinful ways. He cuts the nation down to size in order to begin anew, to remake the Israelites into a people willing to carry out His plan.

What Do You Think?

What lessons has God taught you from your experiences of disobedience?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Blessings that were lost
- Ministry opportunities gained
- Changed attitude toward others who stumble

God's intention has not changed. God sends Jesus to instruct people, to atone for our sins, and to send us out with Holy Spirit power in order to carry out our mission. God uses Christians to show the world what He intends for all. The church is called to be a sign, foretaste, and herald of God's kingdom. As Jesus teaches us, if we are not salty salt and bright light, we become useless for God's purposes (Matthew 5:13–16) and will relive the rejection that Israel experienced.

God's Hope for Israel (Isaiah 48:21,22)

8. How did God encourage Israel (v. 21)?

After being reminded of what could have been, the Israelites can fall into deep depression. There is a danger of merely wallowing in self-pity. But God doesn't rub our noses in our failure only to increase our misery. Nor does He pretend the past never happened. Rather, He meets us where we are now and helps us begin anew, while accepting the reality of what has gone before.

For Israel, a new beginning will mean a new exodus. God will send the Israelites forth singing from Babylon (v. 20). As Moses and Miriam sang of God's great deliverance from Egypt (Exodus 15). He frees them from bondage so they may proclaim to the end of the earth that God is their Redeemer.

Though the captive Israelites will certainly welcome God's deliverance from Babylon, they will also entertain doubts. How will they be able to survive their homeward journey of 1,000 miles? How will they be able to rebuild after arriving?

Yes, there will be many unknowns of the journey home for Israel. Yet the God who created the heavens and earth has plenty of resources to provide for His people (Isa. 48:21). So He reminds them again of their ancestors who left Egypt. God provided not only water as this verse notes (Exodus 17:6), but also manna (Exodus 16:14,15) and quail (Numbers 11:31). God has unlimited resources, and He desires to meet His people's every need.

9. Why did God say that the wicked have no peace (v. 22)?

Wicked rebellion is always a breath away. So God reminds the Israelites that His offer of a new start is not for the wicked; it is only for those who accept His grace in faith. The Israelites have a choice to make. Though God offers them new life, Israel may still choose death.

For those who obey God's commandments (Isa. 48:18), there is peace ("shalom"), namely, a state of well-being. In contrast to the obedient are "the wicked" (v. 22). For them, however, "there is no peace." True peace can come only as we surrender to the Redeemer and respond to His leading. As Paul put it, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1).

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Our sovereign God can accomplish His purposes however and through whomever He chooses (Isa. 48:14,15).
2. You can trust a God who has openly foretold the future without one failure (v. 16).
3. Our holy God seeks to lead His people into what is best for them and His glory (v.17).
4. Obedience leads to God's fullest blessing (v. 21).
5. There will never be lasting peace for those who reject God and His word (v. 22).

CONCLUSION – WHAT WILL BE

Past failures were not the final word for the Israelites. After the Babylonian captivity, many returned to Jerusalem to rebuild. Life was not easy. It took

several Persian emperors and Jewish leaders plus 10 decades of time before Jerusalem, its temple, and the walls were rebuilt.

Indeed, the mills of God grind slowly from an earthly perspective. So, it is tempting to lose hope. Christians continue to suffer: sometimes because of personal unfaithfulness; sometimes because of the unfaithfulness of others.

Yet we are to keep focused on the hope that is before us (Philippians 3:13,14). Sometimes God delivers us from the trials that befall us, sometimes He delivers us through them. May Christians always be those who push forward to that which will most certainly be, not being held back by what might have been.

PRAYER

Gracious God, we thank You for new starts. Though our failures overwhelm us, Your creative power bursts through. Increase our faith, so we may see Your power for what it is, and draw on that power to move forward. In Jesus' name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Embrace what now may be (Philippians 3:13,14).

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

“The Servant’s Mission In The World”, Isaiah 49:1-6.

Lesson summarized by Deloris H. Washington
Jesus Is All Ministries

NOTES:



Sunday, February 18, 2024

Lesson 12 - "The Servant's Mission in The World" (Part I)

Lesson Text: **Isaiah 49:1-6**

Background Scripture: **Isaiah 49:1-6**

Devotional Reading: **1 Peter 5:5**

Isaiah 49:1-6

1 Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far; The Lord hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name. 2 And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me; 3 And said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified. 4 Then I said, I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God. 5 And now, saith the Lord that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength. 6 And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

- Describe the mission of God's servant in Isaiah 49.
- Compare the mission of God's servant with the mission of the church.
- Express his or her own personal mission statement in terms of this passage.

INTRODUCTION

After Saul of Tarsus was converted, a Jewish believer named Ananias was told to go to him with further instructions. He was told that Saul was a "chosen vessel . . . to bear [Christ's] name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts

9:15). Before long, the Jews plotted to murder Saul, making it necessary for him to flee by night (vs. 23-25). As Saul soon discovered, his Jewish brethren were less than enthusiastic about his newfound faith in Christ.

A few years later, when Saul, now called Paul (Acts 13:9), embarked on his mission journeys, he failed to win many of his own countrymen to Christ. After Jews in Pisidia rejected the gospel, Paul declared, "Lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (v. 46). Besides what he had been told at his conversion, Paul also had scriptural authority for this decision. "For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth" (v. 47). Paul was quoting from Isaiah 49:6, part of this week's lesson text.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Today's passage in Isaiah 49, like chapters 45 and 48 from the two past weeks, is addressed to the Israelites after they have been beaten and bruised by the Babylonians. We remind ourselves, however, that the Babylonian captivity won't even begin until at least 95 years after Isaiah writes.

When that captivity occurs, the people are beaten down not only physically, but psychologically, as the book of Lamentations makes clear (also Psalm 137). It was obvious to everyone that Babylon was the stronger nation. It dwarfed Judah numerically, militarily, and territorially. Up to the point of today's lesson, God had assured the Israelites that He had not abandoned them, that He had not been defeated by Babylon's gods, and that He intended to restore them. In chapter 49, we hear partially from Israel's perspective and partially from God's perspective.

One challenge to understanding today's passage is that Isaiah 49 is one of four chapters containing the so-called "Servant Songs" of that book. The other songs are in chapters 42, 52, and 53. In the Servant Songs, the Servant himself has the task and mission "to bring Israel back" and "to gather" Israel unto himself (see vs. 5,6). Therefore, the Servant of the Lord cannot be totally equated with Israel in all respects. The terminology is all-inclusive of Israel; and yet, simultaneously, it is focused on the One representative of Israel in whom was embodied all of its hopes.

GOD'S SERVANT (Isaiah 49:1-4)

1. What is the prevailing view among Christian scholars concerning the Servant?

Without going into all of the reasons, most Christian scholars believe that the Servant in these chapters ultimately refers to Israel's Messiah, the Lord Jesus. Since the New Testament makes this connection (Luke 2:32), this is not just an attempt to read something into the Old Testament that is not already there. As might be expected, Jewish scholars do not agree with this interpretation.

2. What does the mention of being called "from the womb" suggest about the Servant (Isaiah 49:1)?

That God called His Servant "from the womb" (Isa. 49:1) is reminiscent of both Jeremiah's prophetic call (Jer. 1:5) and Paul's apostolic call (Gal. 1:15). "But not only was this person divinely appointed before his birth to perform an unusually high task, he was also equipped with the requisite gifts to achieve his destined purpose" (Leupold).

Mention of the Servant being named from the womb also lends support to the view that the Servant is Christ. Although "Israel" was a divinely given name, it was not revealed until the third generation of Abraham's seed (Gen. 32:28; Gal. 3:8-16). In the case of Christ, however, the Angel Gabriel told Mary, "And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS" (Luke 1:31). Joseph was also told that the child's name would be Jesus (Matt. 1:21).

The "isles" (Isa. 49:1) refers to distant lands to which the Servant's message will be sent. We know that the Servant was to be a "light to the Gentiles" (v. 6).

3. How was the mouth of the Servant like "a sharp sword" (v. 2)?

The Servant's mouth is described "like a sharp sword" (v. 2), a figure used elsewhere of Christ (Rev. 1:16; 2:16; 19:15, 21). "The penetrating character of the Servant's message is likened to two sharp weapons" (Barker and Kohlenberger, eds., *The Bible Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Zondervan).

"The words which would come out of the mouth of the Messiah would be the instrument of his power, the words which would judge men and angels on the last day (John 12:48). That the Servant was hidden in the shadow of God's hand meant that God would protect and preserve Him, though some have suggested that this meant that the Messiah would be hidden for a while and later revealed to the world.

The Servant is also depicted as "a polished shaft" (Isa. 49:2), that is, an arrow ready to be used to pierce the hearts of those who listen to Him. "Isaiah does not have in mind a war-making task for the Servant (the theme of chapters 56-66), but the warfare of the word. The sharpness of a sword is its effectiveness; a polished arrow is rubbed free from roughness or unevenness which might deflect its flight, hence its accuracy" (Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, InterVarsity).

"The ministry of the man in question apparently is calculated to wound men for their own good. His ministry to men may involve pain and suffering on their part" (Leupold).

4. Since Israel is identified as the Servant in verses 3, how could this be applied to a person?

Since Israel is clearly identified as the Servant in Isaiah 49:3, some are quick to dismiss any view that sees this as anything other than a reference to the nation of Israel. To be sure, Israel was the servant nation of Yahweh. A study of how "Israel" is used throughout the Bible reveals that there are a number of different ways this name is employed (cf. Gen. 32:28; Exod. 1:1-4; Jer. 31:31; Hos. 8:14; Matt. 19:28; John 1:47; Rom. 9:6; 11:26; Gal. 6:16).

Verse three of today's lesson appears to follow smoothly from the previous one. However, the identity of the servant does seem to change here and in verse 4. The servant now seems to be identified as Israel. The Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 helps bring

this into clearer focus. Christ "fulfilled the destiny that was assigned to the nation at large, to be the bearer of the message of divine truth to the nations, a task which Israel after the flesh executed but poorly" (Leupold).

Unlike the nation of Israel, which caused the name of the Lord to be profaned among the heathen (Ezek. 36:20-22), His Servant would cause God's name to be glorified (Isa. 49:3).

To be continued...

Lesson summarized by Willie Ferrell
Jesus Is All Ministries

NOTES:



Sunday, February 25, 2024

Lesson 13 - "The Servant's Mission in The World" (Part I)

Lesson Text: **Isaiah 49:1-6**

Background Scripture: **Isaiah 49:1-6**

Devotional Reading: **1 Peter 5:5**

Isaiah 49:1-6

1 Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far; The Lord hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name. 2 And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me; 3 And said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified. 4 Then I said, I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God. 5 And now, saith the Lord that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength. 6 And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

- Describe the mission of God's servant in Isaiah 49.
- Compare the mission of God's servant with the mission of the church.
- Express his or her own personal mission statement in terms of this passage.

GOD'S STRENGTH AND COMMISSION (Isaiah 49:5)

5. What was the Servant's "work" (v. 5)?

Part of the Servant's ministry was to bring Jacob back to God. Since the Servant was Israel's Messiah, He had an important role to play regarding the

nation's spiritual renewal. To be sure, there were Jews who followed Christ during His ministry and accepted the gospel when it was first preached (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 6:7). But for the most part, the Servant was rejected by Israel. That men reject the Lord does not thwart His eternal purposes. Although "despised and rejected of men" (Isa. 53:3), the Servant would "be glorious in the eyes of the Lord" (49:5). "He is, before the Lord, an honoured person, in vocation, status, name and task" (Motyer).

Despite disappointing results from His labors, the Servant would find God to be His strength. What was true of the Servant must also be true of us. It is when we begin depending on our own strength, whether physical, financial, or intellectual, that failure is inevitable. "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18). As Paul discovered with his "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7), God's grace is always sufficient (v. 9).

GOD'S SALVATION (Isaiah 49:6)

6. What was the ultimate role of God's servant (v. 6)?

As mentioned in Isaiah 49:5, part of the Servant's mission was to bring Israel back to God. "To raise up the tribes of Jacob" (v. 6) meant to restore them. Remembering that the Israel of Isaiah's day had wandered away from the Lord is critical to understanding the relevance of this message to the people of his time.

The ultimate role of God's servant is not to restore Israel to the promised land. God's ultimate goal is to use His people Israel to be a blessing to all nations as God originally promised to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3). God restores Israel so Israel may be God's city on a hill, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation (Exodus 19:5, 6). Israel loses sight of her mission throughout

her long and trying history. When the Israelites are in the promised land, they want to be a nation like other nations. They want to have a king like other nations, a standing army like other nations, and a capital city with a religious shrine just like other nations (1 Samuel 8:5, 19, 20). When God calls His servant to restore Israel, God's goal is not to make Israel what Israel mistakenly tries to make herself. Rather, He calls Israel back to her original mission...to be apart from other nations in order to be a light to those nations.

Today's church should never think that her ultimate task is to gather weekly and conduct worship services. Rather, we gather weekly so God can shape us in such gatherings to continue His mission of shining the gospel light. Like ancient Israel, the church does not exist for her own sake, but for the sake of the world.

What Do You Think?

In what ways might God's vision for our church be different from our own vision?

Why is it important to ask this question?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Thinking locally versus thinking globally
- "Making disciples" versus "filling seats"

7. How were both Israel and Christ the light to the Gentiles? How can we participate in the Servant's mission in our world?

Besides the nation of Israel being a light to the world, Christ was the ultimate "light of the world" (John 8:12). As God's Servant, "he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). "He is not only to be the bearer of salvation, but in his own person is to be the Saviour" (Leupold).

Even if we did not have this text telling us that the Servant's mission was to be a light to the whole world, there is ample evidence in the New Testament that the gospel was to be preached "to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). Each of the four Gospels has some form of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16; Luke 24:46-47; John 20:21). So as the Servant was to take "salvation unto the end of the earth" (Isa. 49:6), Christians are to be "witnesses ... unto the utter-most part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Since this divine directive has

never been rescinded, we must ask, "What am I doing to accomplish the Servant's mission in today's world?"

GREAT COMMISSION SCRIPTURES:

Matthew 28:18-20 KJV

¹⁸ And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. ¹⁹ Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: ²⁰ Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

Mark 16:15-16 KJV

¹⁵ And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. ¹⁶ He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

Luke 24:46-47 KJV

⁴⁶ And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: ⁴⁷ And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

John 20:21 KJV

²¹ Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.

CONCLUSION – For the World

It must have been great news to the Israelites that their time of punishment would draw to an end. After decades of suffering and humiliation, they received a new lease on life. But with that new lease on life, came a reminder of a larger purpose. God does not set apart a people for himself merely to have them praise Him for setting them apart. He set us apart so we may join His mission of proclaiming His reign to the entire world (Matthew 28:19, 20). What God requires is for us to be His hands and feet on this earth, to grant a dying world a life-giving glimpse of His eternal reign. To neglect this task is to neglect our reason to be. The church, like ancient Israel, exists for the world.

PRAYER – Lord God, we thank You for giving us a mission that is bigger than ourselves. Help us be a people who live in such a way that the children of

this world may catch a glimpse of the light of Your Son. We pray in His name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

It is too small a thing to be nothing more than recipients of God's salvation.

Lesson summarized by Willie Ferrell
Jesus Is All Ministries

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