

DIRECTION[®]**teacher**

Partners in a
New Creation

Quarter At-A-Glance

June 2022

Partners in a New Creation

Members of Christ's body have the grand opportunity to be co-laborers with the ever-abiding Spirit of God in reconciling, re-creating, and rightly restoring all things in the eternal reign of God. This summer quarter considers ways in which believers are partners with God in creation.

UNIT 1 • God Delivers and Restores

This unit has four lessons. Using three chapters of Isaiah, this study explores God's predictions of the future destruction of Babylon and deliverance for Israel. These events were evidence of God's power at work to grant mercy and redemption to the penitent and to restore God's people to a state of peace and prosperity.

Lesson 1: June 5, 2022 God Foretells Destruction Isaiah 47:10–15

Humans trust in their own abilities and the systems they develop to control their lives and the lives of others. How does this confidence shape us? Isaiah affirms that God, the Creator of all, humbles the proud and the powerful.

Lesson 2: June 12, 2022 God Foretells Redemption Isaiah 49:1–11

Individuals and nations aspire to accomplish great things even in the midst of great challenges. How can we make a difference? Creator God covenants with us to redeem us—even when we don't realize it—for a higher purpose and an important mission.

Lesson 3: June 19, 2022 God's Restored People Shall Prosper Isaiah 49:18–23

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

Lesson 4: June 26, 2022 God Offers Deliverance Isaiah 51:1–8

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

UNIT 2 • The Word: The Agent of Creation

This unit has five lessons taken from John's Gospel. The lessons stress how the Creating Word, at work in and with humanity, became flesh, healed the sick, saved the lost, resurrected the dead and granted—through the Holy Spirit—peace.

Lesson 5: July 3, 2022 The Creating Word Becomes Flesh John 1:1–14

People are often curious about how things began. How do we understand the origins of life? John begins by explaining that Jesus, the Word, was God's creating and redeeming agent in the world.

Lesson 6: July 10, 2022

The Word Heals

John 4:46–54

When we or our loved ones are sick, we seek restoration and healing. When all efforts fail, what can we do? Jesus invites our active, faith-filled participation with His power to create new life through healing—even at a distance.

Lesson 7: July 17, 2022

The Word Resurrects the Dead

John 11:17–27, 38–44

When people experience tragic situations, they long for comfort. Where can we find hope and strength for the future? Our faith in Jesus releases the power of God to bring resurrection and new life.

Lesson 8: July 24, 2022

The Word Saves

John 12:44–50

Most people acknowledge a sense of a higher, spiritual power that exceeds our human capabilities. How do we understand the mysteries of the universe, the world, and our lives? Jesus' mission is to save the world so that the world can live in an eternal relationship with His Father, God the Creator.

Lesson 9: July 31, 2022

The Word Gives Peace

John 14:15–29

People seek trustworthy guidance for their lives. How can we find guidance? Our love for Jesus, shown through our obedience to His words and the Holy Spirit's teachings, creates an incredible peace.

UNIT 3 • The Great Hope of the Saints

In this unit, a four-lesson study draws from Revelation to help learners envision the new home and city God has prepared for the redeemed. In this new heavenly environment, the saints will enjoy the new water of eternal life.

Lesson 10: August 7, 2022

A New Home

Revelation 21:1–8

People long for a place and time when life's stresses and death will not exist. Where can we find such a peaceful existence? The vision in Revelation 21 foretells that God will create a new heaven and earth where life's challenges will be banished forever.

Lesson 11: August 14, 2022

A New City

Revelation 21:9–21

It is difficult for people to imagine living in a place that is totally different from the one in which they presently live. What will the new place be like? Revelation 21 uses figurative language to describe the brilliant new city God will create.

Lesson 12: August 21, 2022

The River of Life

Revelation 22:1–7

Rivers give life and nourishment to the things that exist around them. How do rivers nourish our lives? In God's new creation, God's power will be in the river, nourishing and healing people and nations in the New Jerusalem.

Lesson 13: August 28, 2022

Come and Enjoy

Revelation 22:10–21

Everything has a beginning and an end. What is the source and ultimate purpose of human life? Revelation affirms that God, who is the Alpha and Omega, creates and controls all things.

DOROTHY WEST

(1907-1998)

Novelist, Publisher

Dorothy West's pioneering writing and publishing accomplishments have inspired writers throughout several generations. She was a novelist, short story writer, editor, publisher, and journalist, who masterfully explored issues of race, class, and color in the African-American community. Until her death at the age of 91, West was hailed as the last living figure of the Harlem Renaissance movement, where literature by Black writers flourished.



West was the only child of a former slave who became a successful businessman, Isaac Christopher West, and his wife, Rachel Pease Benson. Born and raised in Boston, West penned her first story when she was only 7 years old. The young West continued to write and by the time she was 14, she had received several writing awards. In 1926, West's story "The Typewriter" tied for second place with another Harlem Renaissance writer, Zora Neale Hurston, in a competition sponsored by the National Urban League's journal, *Opportunity*.

West continued to cultivate her writing skills at Boston University and the Columbia University School of Journalism in New York. When West moved to Harlem, she made contact with Hurston and other greats of this time, including Countee Cullen, Wallace Thurman, and Langston Hughes. The gifted writer also traveled with several

literary artists to London and the Soviet Union as a cast member of two drama productions.

West made a significant contribution to the Harlem Renaissance when she published the magazine *Challenge* in 1934. She, along with esteemed writer Richard Wright, founded the magazine with the \$40 West had in her savings. The magazine was the first to give Black writers of

the Harlem Renaissance a forum to present their writings, which realistically portrayed Black life.

Later, West moved to Martha's Vineyard, an island off the coast of Massachusetts, where she cared for a sick aunt. While there, she wrote for the island's newspaper and penned her first novel, *The Living Is Easy*, which was published in 1948 and later reprinted in 1982.

West's second novel, *The Wedding*, was not published until 1995 although she had begun working on it many years earlier. Because of the success of *The Wedding*, the publishing company soon bought West's collection of short stories, "The Richer, The Poorer." *The Wedding* was made into a TV miniseries by Oprah Winfrey's production company.

The talented writer lectured on the Harlem Renaissance until her death in 1998.

Source:

Sedwick, Judith, photographer. Photograph used by permission from Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

Teaching Tips

June 5
Bible Study Guide 1

Words You Should Know

A. Perverted (Isaiah 47:10) *shub* (Heb.)—To turn back, apostatize

B. Prognosticators (v. 13) *yada'* (Heb.)—Those who show, teach, or make known their observations

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Nowhere to Run. Humans trust in their own abilities and the systems they develop to control their lives and the lives of others. How does this confidence shape us? Isaiah affirms that God, the Creator of all, humbles the proud and the powerful.

A. Read the Bible Background and Devotional Reading.

B. Pray for your students and lesson clarity.

C. Read the lesson Scripture in multiple translations.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Begin the class with prayer.

B. Write a few phrases on the board that relate to being humbled (e.g. taken down a peg, eat crow, put in one's place). Ask what the phrases have in common. Discuss situations in which a person needs to be humbled. How does God humble someone who defies divine authority?

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

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

P—Present the Scriptures

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

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

E—Explore the Meaning

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

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

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

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Summarize the value of welcoming God's presence everywhere.

B. End class with a commitment to pray to avoid arrogance and godlessness that result in God's judgment.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: God Foretells Destruction

Song: "You Are God Alone"

by William McDowell

God Foretells Destruction

Bible Background • ISAIAH 47

Printed Text • ISAIAH 47:10–15 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 137

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will UNDERSTAND why God would destroy Babylon; GRAPPLE with the destructiveness of delighting in power and pleasure; and REPENT from thoughts, actions, and feelings that separate us from God.

In Focus

Jeremy's life turned around when he earned a free ride scholarship to Yale. When he graduated, he went into investment banking. His salary was more than anything his family had imagined. He could afford the finer things in life, and he wasn't ashamed to flaunt it.

Time passed and Jeremy got married and had kids of his own. He rose up in the ranks at his company and even became vice president. Soon Jeremy abandoned going to church, claiming he was too busy and that the preacher only wanted money. He also rarely visited home and often talked down about the neighborhood where he came from.

One day his wife, Judy, said, "Your mom called earlier. Wanted to see if we could come over for dinner on Friday."

"We'll see her on the Fourth," Jeremy said. "Isn't that soon enough?"

"Maybe she just wants to see her son," Judy said.

Jeremy doubted it. "Or maybe Aunt Pearl wants to ask me again if I'll cover her rent."

"Times have been hard for people in your old neighborhood."

"They were hard for me, too, but I got out of it. Why can't they? They're poor because they're just lazy and wouldn't take advantage of the opportunities they have like I did."

One day everything Jeremy trusted in came crashing down. His doctor told him he had a brain tumor. Now he wished he had a stronger relationship with God, and in the corner of his office, he knelt down to ask God to forgive him for his pride.

Has your pride ever separated you from God?

Keep in Mind

"Thus shall they be unto thee with whom thou hast laboured, even thy merchants, from thy youth: they shall wander every one to his quarter; none shall save thee."

(Isaiah 47:15, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV **Isaiah 47:10** For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness: thou hast said, None seeth me. Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee; and thou hast said in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me.

11 Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know from whence it riseth: and mischief shall fall upon thee; thou shalt not be able to put it off: and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou shalt not know.

12 Stand now with thine enchantments, and with the multitude of thy sorceries, wherein thou hast laboured from thy youth; if so be thou shalt be able to profit, if so be thou mayest prevail.

13 Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee.

14 Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame: there shall not be a coal to warm at, nor fire to sit before it.

15 Thus shall they be unto thee with whom thou hast laboured, even thy merchants, from thy youth: they shall wander every one to his quarter; none shall save thee.

The People, Places, and Times

Isaiah. Isaiah was a prophet during the eighth century. His prophetic ministry spanned the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Manasseh. Scholars have argued that Isaiah was more than likely connected to the king's court in some way, based on his call narrative. Throughout his ministry, Isaiah's prophecies are directed at Judah and its idolatry and oppression. Isaiah's prophetic ministry can be summarized as judgment, renewal, and hope as he foretold Judah's Babylonian captivity as well as its return from exile and the coming of the Messiah. Tradition tells us Isaiah was eventually sawn in half during the reign of Manasseh.

Babylon. Babylon is an ancient city, and the name Babylon can be translated as "the gate of gods." It is mentioned in the Bible, along with Egypt, as the antithesis to God's people. When Israel sinned against God through idolatry and injustice, God allowed the Babylonians to punish Israel by sending Nebuchadnezzar to conquer Judah and send the Jews into exile. Babylon remained a superpower until the

Medes and Persians conquered Babylonia in 539 BC.

Background

Isaiah prophesies the demise of Babylon (Isaiah 45). Isaiah announces the conquest of Babylon by King Cyrus of the Medo-Persian Empire. This prophecy is linked to the salvation and restoration of Israel as they return from exile under Cyrus' reign. Babylon is condemned for its idolatry (Isaiah 46). The idols of Babylon are deemed powerless. They are made from created things and cannot save their worshipers. The reign of Babylon is over, and its gods cannot protect its people.

God calls the Babylonian sorcerers and astrologers to account (Isaiah 47). Their knowledge is world-renowned, but it is powerless against the sovereign judgment of the Lord. None of their astrological understanding or spells of witchcraft can prevent the disaster coming upon them. The once proud city will be humbled through the divine arrangement of its conquest by a foreign power.

What is bad news for the Babylonians is good news for the Jews. Because of Babylon's conquest, they will gain an ally in Cyrus who will give them freedom to return to their homeland and rebuild their capital Jerusalem as well as their Temple. God assures them no idol could have foretold these things and establishes His superiority over the gods and idols of other nations (Isaiah 48). He is God and He is in control of the destiny of not only Israel but all the nations of the globe.

At-A-Glance

1. The Pride of Babylon and Its Consequences (Isaiah 47:10–11)
2. False Trust in Babylon's Expertise (vv. 12–13)
3. The Ultimate Demise of Babylon (vv. 14–15)

In Depth

1. The Pride of Babylon and Its Consequences (Isaiah 47:10–11)

God, through Isaiah, calls out Babylon's prideful attitude. They have committed wickedness brazenly as if they were accountable to no one. The Babylonians were renowned for their knowledge, and this knowledge was the source of Babylon's pride. Because of this they put themselves in the place of God by saying, "I am, and none else beside me" (v. 10). These are proud, blasphemous words which display the inward attitude of the heart.

God would not allow Babylon to remain unpunished for this sin of pride. Calamity and disaster would come upon the city in the form of the Medo-Persian Empire and King Cyrus. None of Babylon's sorcery and knowledge could conjure an escape from the Medes and Persians.

Their kingdom would be taken over, and they could do nothing about it. As believers we have no reason to despair when proud and wicked rulers or leaders are in power. Eventually all of us will come before the judgment seat of God. There none of our knowledge, wealth, or social standing will be of any use—only whether we were righteous and humble before Him.

What is your response when you see wicked and proud people in power?

2. False Trust in Babylon's Expertise (vv. 12–13)

Isaiah mocks the knowledge and abilities of Babylon's sorcerers and astrologers. No matter what they do, they could not stop the judgment of God. Isaiah taunts them by pointing out that although they are experienced in enchantments and sorceries, they still will not withstand God's disaster. Astrology and sorcery were ways to control destiny. Babylon would soon face the truth that it was not in control of its destiny.

With all of their counselors, they weary themselves. They cannot figure a way out of their situation. Their astrologers try to predict an overturning of their fate, but it will not make a difference. Babylon's wisdom and knowledge will not be able to help it. Nothing they take pride in will pull them out of the ditch they dug for themselves through blasphemous pride and wickedness.

This same understanding of reality needs to be imprinted on our own hearts and minds. We are not in control, and any attempt to control our destiny is empty and vain. God is sovereign over our lives, and we need to look to Him for help. He controls our future and our destiny.

How do you respond to the fact that God controls your future and your destiny?

3. The Ultimate Demise of Babylon (vv. 14–15)

The astrologers and sorcerers of Babylon are compared to straw or stubble burning in the fire. They will not be able to save Babylon. Their fate was with the city and its empire. Looking to them for help would be fruitless. Sitting by their fire would bring no warmth. They can't save Babylon because they can't save themselves.

The nations who have dealt with Babylon since its origin will turn their backs on it. They will not help Babylon when calamity strikes. The pride of Babylon will be broken by the sovereign will of God. Babylon will have no way to escape it, no one to turn to, and no resources to meet this disaster.

Where do you turn when you are facing an impossible situation?

Search the Scriptures

1. What is Babylon's declaration of pride (Isaiah 49:10)?
2. What did Babylon rely on in times of disaster (vv. 12–13)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. What are the modern equivalents in our country to Babylon's knowledge and witchcraft? What do we trust in as a nation?
2. Why do people turn to things like astrology and witchcraft?

Liberating Lesson

We may be tempted to despair as we see the world and its leaders walk in pride and wickedness. When it comes to our own nation, hyper-patriotism and blind allegiance has puffed up many with misplaced pride. They believe we as a nation are superior to others and continually progressing toward increasing splendor. Our Scriptures tell us God is in control of the nations. He lifts up some and casts down others. Loyalty

to your country is a good thing but blind loyalty and pride absent of dependence on God is a path to ruin. We may despair at the injustice we see in the world, but God will call the nations to account for their pride and wickedness. Oppressive regimes and unjust laws are a result of human pride. But human pride will always be brought low under the sovereignty of God.

Application for Activation

No nation is beyond the pride we read about in Isaiah's description of Babylon. As individuals, we are equally in danger of exhibiting this kind of pride. In the coming week, take some time to pray for our nation and its leaders. Also make a plan to serve others. This is a surefire way to root out pride in your life.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Isaiah 47:10–15

In Isaiah 46, the prophet begins to focus on the nation of Babylon. First, he attacks the so-called gods of Babylon for being powerless and pathetic (see 46:1–7). Now, in Isaiah 47 he turns to pronounce judgment on Babylon itself. For centuries the Southern Kingdom of Judah had rebelled against God and been unfaithful to the covenant He had made with them. The time for their judgment had come, and God had chosen Babylon as His instrument of judgment against His own people. God now reminds Babylon that it was He who had “given” Judah into their hand (v. 6). Historically, this took place in 586 BC, when Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple, and carried many of the people into exile. However, Babylon had overstepped their bounds and showed them no mercy (see v. 6). For this and other crimes, Babylon is now just as deserving of God’s judgment as Judah (see also Isaiah 13).

10 For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness; thou hast said, None seeth me. Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee; and thou hast said in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me.

The Hebrew word for “wickedness” is *ra’ah* (ra-AH), the most common word used to refer to moral evil in the Old Testament. Babylon’s wickedness includes idol worship (46:1–2, 5–7), pride (vv. 5, 7–8), love of luxury and “pleasures” (v. 8), and sorcery and enchantment (v. 9). All of these sins may be in mind in verse 10, but perhaps sorcery above all since it was just mentioned and will be the main focus of the following verses. Babylon feels perfectly secure in their evil because they are the current world superpower, and no one on earth can hold them accountable for their actions. They boast in their “wisdom” and “knowledge.” This is a worldly kind of wisdom,

polluted by sin and based on the magical arts of false religion. This is quite different from true wisdom that comes from God alone (see Proverbs 1:7). In their pride and arrogance, they conclude, “I am, and none else [are] beside me,” an attitude also stated previously (v. 8). Babylon believes that they are supreme, independent, and cannot be defeated. They can do whatever they please.

But God has made this very same claim to be alone and unique in greatness and supremacy (see 45:18, 21; 46:9). Also, Babylon’s simple statement, “I am” echoes God’s words of self-identification (Exodus 3:14). In reality, though, Isaiah’s description of God’s incredible power (Isaiah 40) makes it quite clear that the arrogant claims of Babylon and all other earthly powers are simply laughable: all people are “as grasshoppers” (v. 22); the world’s rulers are as “nothing” (v. 23); God can merely “blow upon them, and they shall wither” (v. 24). When Babylon’s power confronts God’s, there is simply no contest.

We may often treat pride as one of the so-called “acceptable sins.” In other words, we acknowledge that pride is wrong, but don’t take it seriously when we see it in ourselves or in others. But the Bible teaches that God “resisteth the proud” (James 4:6). One of the sins the prophets most often emphasize that leads to God’s judgment on various nations is the sin of pride (e.g., Isaiah 10:5–19). Pride is also at the root of the first sin committed by Adam and Eve (Genesis 3). They were created to submit to God’s good rule, but instead they wanted to make their own rules and determine good and evil for themselves. When they sinned, then, they were arrogantly trying to elevate themselves to the place of God. Anyone, even those who are poor and of lower social status, can develop a prideful heart and must humble themselves before the Lord. However, as in Isaiah’s day, it is usually the most powerful and

wealthy individuals and nations of the world who are most likely to echo the prideful words of Babylon: “I am, and none else [are] beside me.” Around the world, there remain many “Big Men” who engage in corruption, live as though they are above the law, and feel secure in their wickedness. But God will ensure that justice is done.

11 Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know from whence it riseth: and mischief shall fall upon thee; thou shalt not be able to put it off: and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou shalt not know.

Verse 11 shifts from the sins of Babylon to the judgments that God will bring against the nation as a result of their sin. This verse includes three statements, and all three make the same point: Judgment is coming, and they won't be able to do anything about it.

Isaiah warns that “evil,” “mischief,” and “desolation” will come upon them. The first word is once again the Hebrew word *ra'ah* (ra-AH). Because Babylon had committed *ra'ah* against God (verse 10), they will now receive *ra'ah* from God. Here, though, the word is best translated as “disaster” or “trouble” in English since when *ra'ah* comes from God it indicates the judgment people deserve for sin rather than moral evil. These three terms are probably not three separate kinds of judgment, but three ways of describing the one general idea of God's coming punishment.

When it comes, they won't be able to charm it away or buy their way out. The first expression is from a rare verb *shachar* (sha-HAR), which occurs only here and in verse 15 in the entire Old Testament, and thus its meaning is somewhat uncertain. The KJV translates this “thou shalt not know from whence it riseth,” but most scholars today suggest that it means “you will not be able to cause it to disappear by magic.”

This would mean their well-known attempts to use magic and sorcery to change the future are powerless against God's judgment. It does not matter how much wealth Babylon possesses. It does not matter how powerful they are or that they have conquered much of the known world. It doesn't matter how skilled they believe they are in controlling the spiritual world. None of it will do any good. God cannot be controlled or manipulated. This judgment is unavoidable.

While such words of judgment are meant to warn and terrorize the powerful wicked, these same words are meant to comfort and encourage those who suffer at the hands of oppressors. In recent centuries, those of African descent have been especially abused and oppressed by others who possess greater power and wealth. In many cases, justice seems unattainable. Yet the oppressed can be assured that God does not let the guilty go unpunished (Exodus 34:7). This justice may come in the present, as it did for Babylon when Medo-Persia conquered them. It may come in the more distant future. In many cases, wicked individuals live out their days on earth in comfort, but will receive justice when Jesus Christ returns one day. Ultimately, God will make sure that justice is done. It is in His character to raise up the weak and bring down the proud (1 Samuel 2:2–8).

Predictions of judgment in the prophets should also be a constant reminder of the need of all people for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Judgments like those that God brought against Babylon in history are a small taste and warning of the greater, eternal judgment that will fall upon all those who persist in prideful sin and refuse to repent and turn to Christ in faith. Yet for those who do humble themselves and cling to Christ alone for the forgiveness of sins, God's judgment upon sin has been absorbed by Jesus' taking their place at the Cross (see Romans 5:6–11).

12 Stand now with thine enchantments, and with the multitude of thy sorceries, wherein thou hast laboured from thy youth; if so be thou shalt be able to profit, if so be thou mayest prevail. 13 Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee.

Isaiah has already stated in verse 11 that this judgment cannot be avoided, especially not through their magical religious practices. But now, with a tone of sarcasm or mockery, he invites the Babylonians to give it their best try anyway! If ever there is a time to use their religious powers, this is it! The prophet, then, is addressing Babylon in the same way that Elijah addressed the prophets at Baal of Mount Carmel (see 1 Kings 18:27). He encourages them to put their faith to the test so that the worthlessness of false religion might be exposed.

The Babylonians were well-known in the ancient world for their rituals that were designed to influence the present and the future through magic (see Daniel 1–5). Some spells, for example, were meant to bring immediate health or prosperity, while others were designed to bind harmful spiritual powers and avoid future trouble. This is the false religion that emerges out of cultures that do not know or have rejected the true God. The terms “enchantments” and “sorceries” are the same Hebrew words used in v. 9, where these techniques were already said to be powerless to stop judgment. But since this is the normal strategy of the Babylonians to avoid trouble, they might as well try it: “maybe they will do you some good” (v. 12, NLT)!

Verse 13 refers specifically to the astrologers who attempted to understand the future by interpreting patterns in the sky. It was the ancient Babylonians who created what we now know as the horoscope. The term for “astrologers” is

literally “those who divide the heavens,” based on the rare verb *havar* (ha-**VAR**), which appears only here in the Old Testament. They too are useless, so Isaiah mocks them as well: Let them “save thee from these things that shall come upon thee”!

All of these practices are illegal under Israel’s law and bring harsh penalties (Deuteronomy 18:9–14). Witchcraft was one of the practices of the evil queen Jezebel (2 Kings 9:22). Magical rituals involve evil powers, and they are attempts to control God and His world. Instead, Israel is called to submit to God’s good and wise control. Of course, Babylon did not follow the laws of Israel, but they are still accountable before the Lord for these worthless evils.

Isaiah and the other prophets consistently teach that there is only one way to avoid judgment, one response that God is looking for: repentance. This repentance means turning from their sins against God and others, and turning toward God in worship and toward others in love (cf. Isaiah 1:16–20). This is the same response demanded of those who would follow Christ today: turning from sin in repentance and toward Christ in faith. But in this case the prophet does not even call them to repentance, perhaps because he knows they will not listen, or perhaps because they are beyond the point of avoiding punishment. Instead, he encourages them to march further down the path to destruction.

Similar magical practices can be found in today’s world. Some in modern Africa attempt to combine Christianity with magic, consulting the pastor on Sunday and the witch doctor or medicine man on Monday. These aspects of African traditional religions are attractive because they claim to give one control over the spirit world, which enables them to control their own present and future. Some aspects of the so-called “prosperity gospel,” which originated in the United States and has been

influential in Africa, are attractive for the same reasons. Many preachers are telling Christians to “sow seed” by giving money to the church with the guarantee that they will receive back 10 times the money they give. They are encouraged to purchase “anointed” oils, handkerchiefs, and water that will ward off evil and bring prosperity. Some sleep with a Bible under their pillow for spiritual protection. These are some examples of a Christianized form of magic or sorcery that has more in common with evil Babylonian magic than with the Christian faith. As in Babylon, these are attempts to control God and one’s life. Instead, God’s people should bring their concerns to the Lord in prayer and trust that He hears and responds as a loving Father in ways that are for our good.

14 Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame: there shall not be a coal to warm at, nor fire to sit before it.

Here the prophet further emphasizes the uselessness of the astrologers and other so-called religious experts. Fire is a common image for destructive judgment, and in this case these men who supposedly possess great power are no better than “stubble,” or straw, thrown into the fire. Clearly, God’s power, represented by the flame, is far greater. They will be quickly consumed, and cannot even save themselves. If this is true, how foolish to think that they can save anyone else? The second half of the verse warns that this is not a welcome fire; it is not a fire to keep one warm. This is purely destructive.

15 Thus shall they be unto thee with whom thou hast laboured, even thy merchants, from thy youth: they shall wander every one to his quarter; none shall save thee.

It is possible that the “merchants” are a new group introduced at the end of Isaiah’s message to Babylon. But it is more likely that the astrologers and sorcerers are still the focus, but are referred to more figuratively as “business men.” This is because the religious specialists were making a great deal of money from their fraudulent services to the people. But when God’s judgment comes, they will be no help at all and will suddenly disappear. It will now be “every man for himself.” The last statement in the chapter summarizes the main point of verses 10–15: judgment is coming, and “none shall save thee.” Not their gods, not their wisdom, and not their religious experts.

The last word in the chapter in Hebrew is literally “savior,” based on the Hebrew verb *yasha* (ya-SHAH). This verb is the basis for the Hebrew name Joshua, and for the Greek name Jesus (Matthew 1:21). Babylon had no savior from their physical judgment in this world, but today there is a Savior who rescues from the greater final judgment that is coming upon all people for their wickedness. Other gods cannot save us (Isaiah 46:7). We cannot save ourselves (vv. 11–14). Others cannot save us (v. 15). Only God Himself can rescue us, and He has done so by sending His Son to suffer God’s judgment in our place out of love (see John 3:16). Indeed, there is no other Savior but Jesus (see Acts 4:12; Isaiah 46:4).

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Say It Correctly

Jotham. JAW-thum.

Ahaz. AYE-hazz.

Manasseh. Mah-NAH-suh.

Antithesis. an-TIH-thuh-siss.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Babylon's Days Are Numbered
(Jeremiah 29:8–14)

TUESDAY

Let Your Compassion Come Speedily
(Psalm 79)

WEDNESDAY

Persecution Foretold
(Mark 13:1–13)

THURSDAY

Keep Awake!
(Mark 13:28–37)

FRIDAY

Rise Up, O God!
(Psalm 74:10–23)

SATURDAY

The Humiliation of Babylon
(Isaiah 47:1–9)

SUNDAY

No Security in Wickedness
(Isaiah 47:10–15)

Notes

Teaching Tips

June 12
Bible Study Guide 2

Words You Should Know

A. Gentiles (Isaiah 49:6) *goyim* (Heb.)—Various people groups of the world apart from the Jews

B. People (v. 8) *am* (Heb.)—The Jews, as opposed to the Gentiles

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—A Mission to Save. Individuals and nations aspire to accomplish great things even in the midst of great challenges. How can we make a difference? Creator God covenanted with us to redeem us—even when we didn't realize it—for a higher purpose and important missions.

A. Read the Bible Background and Devotional Reading.

B. Pray for your students and lesson clarity.

C. Read the lesson Scripture in multiple translations.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Begin the class with prayer.

B. Begin class by writing a list of words on the board. These can be any part of speech, but try to list words that have clear opposites. Ask for volunteers to choose one word and give its opposite. Continue until all words are used. Then ask for the opposite of “servant” (a common response might be “ruler”).

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

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

P—Present the Scriptures

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

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

E—Explore the Meaning

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

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

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

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Summarize the value of reflecting the light of Jesus.

B. End class with a commitment to pray to seek the same servant heart when ministering to the world around them.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher
Theme: God Foretells Redemption
Song: “Make Me a Servant”

God Foretells Redemption

Bible Background • ISAIAH 49:1-17

Printed Text • ISAIAH 49:1-11 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 111:9-10

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will UNDERSTAND that God’s mission for the people of Israel is to show all people the way to God, CELEBRATE that all people who serve God are included in God’s promises, and TELL others about God’s never-ending love and salvation for all people.

In Focus

For two centuries, African Americans were slaves with seemingly no hope of deliverance. As they toiled in wretched conditions, they sang songs and prayed prayers, hoping for relief. God heard their cries, and He allowed someone to rise among them. Her name was Harriet Tubman, and she was known as the “Moses” of her people.

Tubman was born in slavery and experienced many hardships. Unlike some who had accepted their lot, she longed for freedom. God did indeed allow her to escape the bonds of slavery. She enjoyed her freedom, but she couldn’t forget her brothers and sisters who were still in bondage. She returned to the South many times and led her people to freedom, just as Moses had done in Egypt for his people.

The slaves were clever. They included coded escape signals in their songs. After dark, “Steal Away” was the song used to signal slaves to move to a meeting place from which to escape to the North via the Underground Railroad. Harriet Tubman helped more than 300 slaves escape to freedom this way. And though she only delivered relatively few from the bonds of slavery, her heroic deeds focused attention on the need for emancipation. Moses, Harriet Tubman, Martin Luther King Jr., and others were powerful leaders led by God. Each came to lead a particular people at a particular time. However, Jesus came for ALL people and His great work has and will be felt through all eternity.

How have you helped spread the Word of God’s deliverance to all people?

Keep in Mind

“Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages.” (Isaiah 49:8, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV **Isaiah 49:1** 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 laboured 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.

7 Thus saith the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the LORD that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee.

8 Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages;

9 That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places.

10 They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them.

11 And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted.

The People, Places, and Times

The Suffering Servant. Arising out of the complex prophecies of Isaiah, this enigmatic figure serves God and will suffer for others (see Isaiah 42:1–4; 49:1–7; 50:4–11; 52:13–53:12). In their original context, these passages attempt to explain the harsh suffering the Israelites would pass through during their exile.

One song explicitly identifies the servant as Israel (Isaiah 49:3). But the servant was also said to be God's perfect Servant, which can only be Jesus. This paradigm makes sense of the most difficult aspect of the Jesus tradition—His suffering. Equally important, it pointed to

the Gentiles as the object of God's healing and forgiveness alongside the Jews.

Background

God instructed His prophet, Isaiah, to write concerning Israel's captivity in Babylon. For seventy years, the nation suffered under this oppression. Then the Lord allowed them to return to Jerusalem. He gave them the resources to rebuild the Temple and establish themselves once again as God's representative.

But the Israelites got comfortable in Babylon. They became accustomed to the Babylonian ways and their gods. Most of the Israelites

refused to move. Only a small remnant traveled back to Judah.

God speaks through Isaiah about these upcoming problems (Isaiah 48). In the first part of the chapter, he rebukes their negative attitudes and behaviors. However, God changes His tone in the last half of the chapter. In several of the later chapters of Isaiah, the Lord offers hope and help with the promise of the Messiah's coming. Like a loving mother attempting to get her cranky toddler to take a nap, the Father begins to speak softly. He highlighted promises about a coming Savior, Jesus, to save Israel and the entire world.

Are you willing to move forward on God's promises? Or are you staying behind, enjoying Babylonian, worldly comforts?

At-A-Glance

1. The Servant's Call and Mission (Isaiah 49:1–7)
2. The Servant Saves and Restores (vv. 8–11)

In Depth

1. The Servant's Call and Mission (Isaiah 49:1–7)

In the book of Isaiah, four passages are called “the Servant Songs” (Isaiah 42–50). The second song found here outlines the coming Messiah's mission on earth. Jesus, God's redeemer, brings light, healing, and restoration. He offers His salvation promises to the Jewish people and the entire world.

God speaks through the Messiah in the first person. He asks for listening ears. His calling started in the womb of His mother. Before the Holy Spirit placed Jesus' embryo in Mary's body, the angel said, His name is Jesus, the Savior of all humanity (Luke 1:31).

Isaiah compared Jesus' mouth, His words, to instruments of war. The well-polished sword and the shaft pierces the intended target. God kept Jesus out of the main limelight until a particular time in history. At the appointed time, He introduced the Savior and His penetrating message (Galatians 4:4–5).

Isaiah calls the Servant, whom we now understand to be the Messiah, by the name Israel. This nation originally carried God's salvation message. When the Jewish people rebelled, the Messiah picked up the baton, committed to completing God's assignment.

God called Jesus to draw back the Israelites to Jehovah. God raised Him and gave Him the might and power to carry out the task. The first Christian missionaries and the authors of the Bible were Jewish people, God's instruments to introduce salvation to the world. The Servant fulfilled the covenant God made with the Israelites, and He is the actual covenant. Some of the Jewish people pushed Jesus aside, denying His claim as Messiah. They looked down upon Him, calling Him unclean, a liar. However, God viewed Him as valuable and deemed worthy of praise (1 Peter 2:4).

Jesus respected those in positions of authority in the secular government and within the Jewish religion. But both plotted against Him. When Jesus returns to the earth for the second time, He will be honored and worshiped. Rulers and every human being will prostrate before Him (Philippians 2:10–11).

How did Jesus complete the work that Israel was supposed to do?

2. The Servant Saves and Restores (vv. 8–11)

Jehovah heard the prayer of the Servant and helped Him fulfill a fruitful ministry. God is committed to lifting this universe out of its critical condition, placing His Spirit in desolate, godless places. His desire is for the

entire human race to know the truth through His Son Jesus.

God frees captives. God freed the captives in Babylon, and He offers freedom to all humanity bound in sin. It is now possible to bask in the presence of a Holy God—no sin hinders or divides (Isaiah 61:1).

Messiah bids everyone come openly to the light. Christ found the Jews enslaved to the law, covered in the darkness, and separated from God. Christ lifted their burdens. The Compassionate Shepherd is always leading to greener pastures. Jesus keeps His sheep away from the scorching sun, leads them to lush feeding grounds and fresh water. Even in places that are downtrodden and barren—God provides for His sheep.

These promises are not only for the Jewish nation or people in biblical days. Jesus still saves and restores anyone willing to come to Him.

In a letter to the Corinthians, Paul references these verses and explains that “today is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). How does this affect our reading of Isaiah?

Search the Scriptures

1. Use the Scripture verses in Isaiah 49:1–11 to describe the characteristics and mission of the Lord’s servant. (Example characteristics, v. 1 called before birth, v. 2 words of judgment are sharp, v. 3 a Servant; Example mission points: v. 1 wants people in distant and faraway lands to listen, v. 4 work seems useless)

2. In verse 1, Isaiah addresses the “isles,” meaning a place far, far away from him. What expression would we use today to confer this understanding?

Discuss the Meaning

The Scriptures clearly state Jesus’ job description. He came to seek and save humanity. His death on the Cross allowed freedom from the bondage of sin. This lesson reminds

Christians that the Savior is light out of darkness, He restores and is our Shepherd to lead us into His beautiful pastures. Think about the past couple weeks. How have you seen Jesus do this in your life? What kinds of people or things have you or others turned to instead of Christ to foster a better life?

Liberating Lesson

The word “servant” does not always sit well with African Americans. It rakes up pictures in our minds of Black people as slaves or only getting a job as a maid, driver, or butler. Yet, when the word “servant” is used in the Bible, God desires for Christians to have a different picture. Jesus came to serve all humanity. He, too, was mistreated and unappreciated. But He kept placing Himself in God’s protective hands, being assured of God’s watchful eye.

Get alone with God and express any anger or hostility you may feel about the mistreatment of people of color. Ask God to begin a transformation in your heart about how to be a true servant.

Application for Activation

Many individuals today continuously wonder, “What about me? What about me?” God saw the need for salvation. He sent Jesus to meet that need in our world, and Jesus completed God’s assignment. As Christians, we are to answer the same call. Pray for more sensitivity to the Holy Spirit as we go through our daily activities. How can I help those around me foster the same attitude and be less selfish and self-centered?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Isaiah 49:1–11

I 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.

Scholars often identify Isaiah 49:1–13 as the second of four “Servant Songs” that focus on an individual that we can now identify as the Messiah, Jesus Christ. (The others are found in Isaiah 42:1–9; 50:4–11; and 52:13–53:12.)

It is clear that this is a message that needs to be heard by all nations since even the “isles” are addressed. This remains true even today: the following message is relevant for all nations and all peoples, including African nations and those of African descent.

The speaker emphasizes that God had a special purpose for him even before he was born. God had chosen and “called” him even while in his mother’s womb. This was certainly true of Jesus (Matthew 1:18–25). Every human being is placed on earth by God Himself, born in His image with great dignity, and with a purpose to bring God glory. So in a sense all people are named by God from birth. But in this case, the speaker has received a unique calling that applies only to Jesus.

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;

The speaker now describes how God has used him, based on his special calling. He is compared to a “sharp sword” and a “polished [arrow] shaft,” images that likely mean that he will be used as an agent of God’s judgment. But he will accomplish this task not through actions but through his mouth, through his words. He is described here as a prophet, since the prophets served as God’s spokesmen, declaring God’s judgment (see Jeremiah 23:29). The speaker also emphasizes that God “hid” him. God has protected him and kept him so that he will be available for God to use at the right time.

During Jesus’ ministry on earth, teaching about the kingdom of God was His highest priority (see Mark 1:14–15). Through His words, He called sinners to repent and rebuked religious leaders and others with prideful and hard hearts. Though His ultimate purpose was to bring salvation, He also proclaimed judgment and warned of the eternal wrath of God upon those who do not turn to Christ. This is a warning that all must hear in every time and place.

3 And said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.

God now speaks to this man He has chosen from birth. His first words summarize his identity and purpose. We might call this his commission. First, He refers to him as “my servant.” The Hebrew word for “servant,” *ebed* (EH-ved), appears many times throughout Isaiah 40–66 as a theme of this part of the book. In general, those God refers to as servants are those He has claimed for Himself and called for a special purpose in His plans. The nation of Israel is described as God’s “servant” (Isaiah 41:8–10; 43:8–10), but they are blind and deaf, and have failed in their mission to the nations (42:18–20). So God now raises up an individual “servant,” whose mission is about to be defined in verses 5–6.

God addresses this servant as “Israel.” Because of this, one might be tempted to think that God is speaking to the whole nation here, but it is clear that this servant has a mission *to* Israel (vv. 5–6), so it cannot at the same time *be* the whole nation. Most Christian scholars suggest that this does indeed refer to an individual, but God calls him “Israel” because he is now going to take on the role God had given the nation—and he will succeed where they have failed. The nation is no longer worthy of the name God had given to it (48:1–2), so this one servant will now represent the nation and carry out its task.

God’s goal in using this servant is that He might be glorified. The word translated “be glorified” is *pa’ar* (pa-AR). This is a rare word that expresses God’s desire to receive the honor and praise that He deserves. He will mainly achieve this through the salvation He brings to the nations through this servant (49:5–6).

All followers of Christ today are among the foreign “servants” Isaiah speaks of later in the book (Isaiah 56:6). We as believers have benefited from the work of the servant, who has died for our sins that we might be forgiven (Isaiah 53). Our ultimate goal is similarly to bring glory to God. We do not do this as Jesus did by dying on the Cross, but we do spread this message of salvation through evangelism. We also bring glory to God in many other ways through living as Christ did, including pursuing love and justice.

4 Then I said, I have laboured 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.

Despite this high calling, the servant replies to God with discouragement. The work has not been easy, he has faced much resistance, and he feels as though it has all been “in vain” and useless. This servant will not minister in power but in weakness and suffering, which will be especially clear in later Servant Songs

(Isaiah 53:3–12). But the servant expresses not only discouragement but also confidence in God. He leaves the outcome of his work to God’s judgment and in God’s hands. Jesus faced exhaustion in His ministry at times, and was discouraged even with His own disciples in their inability to understand His teachings and have faith in Him (Mark 4:35–41). Still, He strove to do the Father’s will and in the end, commended His spirit to the Father.

Many will find it easy to identify with the feelings of the servant here, especially those who have been neglected and forgotten. Many may work faithfully unto the Lord, but see little of the fruit or results of their labors. Many remain unrecognized and unappreciated. Nevertheless, the follower of Christ must place their ultimate confidence in God, knowing that He alone remains the judge of our work on earth. We must, then, seek to use our time and efforts to bring glory to Christ and advance His kingdom, and trust that we will one day be rewarded despite the hardships involved now.

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.

The focus now shifts back to the Lord and His announcement of the servant’s mission. God connects the servant’s calling from birth (from verse 1) to his role as God’s servant (from verse 3). He then reveals “part one” of his mission: to bring the nation of Israel back to God. This does not refer to Israel’s physical return to the land of Canaan (as in 48:20–21), but their spiritual return to God Himself. Throughout Israel’s history they have been rebellious, worshipping other gods and disregarding the God who had delivered them from Egypt. Yet God will use this servant to finally restore Israel to fellowship with God, repairing the broken relationship.

The servant further explains his relationship with God in the second part of the verse. He is fully dependent on the Lord, looking to Him for strength to accomplish his mission. And because of his obedience and success, God Himself makes him “glorious.”

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.

This is the central verse in the text, where God clearly describes the mission of this servant: he will restore the “preserved” of Israel. This indicates that it is not necessarily the case that every ethnic Israelite will be redeemed, but only that portion of the nation that turns back to God (a remnant). But then God says that restoring Israel is not enough! This is only “part one” of his mission! This statement comes as some surprise because restoring Israel is not a small or “light” (KJV) matter at all. This has been a major focus of the Old Testament, something God’s faithful people have awaited for centuries. Yet God has even bigger plans in mind.

“Part two” of his mission is to be “a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth” (see also Isaiah 42:6). The Hebrew word translated “Gentiles,” *goyim* (go-YIM), typically refers to the various people groups of the world apart from the nation of Israel. God’s plan, then, is for salvation to reach all peoples, even to “the end of the earth.” This has always been true. From the time God first called Abraham and blessed him, He did so not simply so that Israel could enjoy being blessed, but so that they might be a channel of blessing to all peoples (see Genesis 12:3). Israel had failed to be this blessing. But the individual servant, the new “Israel,” will now succeed.

Jesus is this servant. He calls Himself the “light of the world” (John 8:12; see also John 1:9). The name Jesus is based on the Hebrew word for “salvation,” *yeshuah* (ye-shu-AH), because “he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). He accomplishes this when He takes the deserved punishment for sins upon Himself at the Cross (see Isaiah 53:4–6), and then defeats death through His resurrection. Because this salvation is not only for the Jew but the Gentile as well, He commissions His followers to “teach all nations” (Matthew 28:19).

We are living in a time when we can see that God’s salvation in Jesus Christ truly has reached to the ends of the earth and covered the globe. From the very beginning, it was God’s design to incorporate African peoples into His Church, and today there are more professing Christians in Africa than on any other continent. In response, God’s people should worship, praise, and give thanks to God for His grace and mercy toward undeserving sinners, and continue to spread this good news among those who have not yet experienced this salvation.

7 Thus saith the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the LORD that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee.

We now see the response of the people to the servant. After the joyful tone of verse 6, it is surprising to discover that this man who has brought salvation to all nations will be despised and abhorred. He is also described here as “servant of rulers.” Although “servant” has been used in a positive sense throughout the passage so far, in this case it is negative, and probably better translated “slave.” This may refer to Jesus’ experience of being dominated and abused by

Jewish and Roman rulers as He was sentenced to crucifixion.

But God's message for His servant is that this is not the end of the story. Though rejected initially, kings and princes will eventually give him the respect and honor that he deserves. He will be acknowledged as King of kings and Lord of lords. This dramatic change from rejection to honor, and the exaltation is entirely the Lord's doing. He is faithful to His chosen servant. Verse 7 summarizes and anticipates the final "Servant Song" (Isaiah 52:13–53:12). There, his rejection is described in greater detail, but the story again ends in triumph and the submission of kings (see 52:13–15; 53:12), all brought about by the Lord.

Many of African descent have similarly experienced being despised and rejected. But they too will experience God's faithful vindication, as Christ did, if they are united to Christ by faith. The book of Revelation envisions that one day, when Christ returns, all of His people will reign over the world with Him as kings and queens (see Revelation 5:10; 22:5). But this is only true of those who have received the forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ.

8 Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages;

God assures His Servant that He will be with him to help in his greatest need, which probably refers to the road to the Cross. God again describes His purpose for the servant, but says it in a different way: "I will...give thee for a covenant of the people." Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant described in the prophets (Jeremiah 31:31–34). His death for the sin of the people is the basis for the new covenant. The blessings of the new covenant in the Church

today are only experienced "in Christ" (see Ephesians 1:3–14). Since Jesus is at the center of this new covenant relationship between God and His people, it is appropriate to identify the servant Jesus with the covenant itself.

Who the "people" are in this covenant is not entirely clear. On one hand, the term here for people, *am* (AHM), is usually used to refer to the nation of Israel, to be distinguished from the *goyim* (go-YIM) mentioned in verse 6. On the other hand, verse 6 just emphasized that salvation will be for all peoples. Also, in the chapters to come Israel is redefined so that foreigners who worship the Lord are fully included in the new people of God. So the "people" could include all of the "servants" who follow Jesus, regardless of their ethnicity.

9 That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places. 10 They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them.

In the ancient world, a just and good king would provide for his people, bring prosperity, and free prisoners. This is what this servant King does as well. He proclaims that those imprisoned are free and brings those living in oppressive darkness into the light. Although God is surely concerned with unjust physical bondage, as seen in the Exodus, His greater concern is with spiritual bondage to sin and the powers of darkness, which is likely the focus here (Colossians 1:13–14).

It is tempting to rely on our own efforts, others, or even the government for protection, provision, and freedom. But ultimately as God's people we must look to Christ for these things as our Good Shepherd. We look to God to provide for our needs while on earth when

we seek first His kingdom (Matthew 6:33). And we endure hardships, knowing that they are just a light momentary affliction compared to the eternal rest we will experience with Christ when He returns one day (see 2 Corinthians 4:16–18).

11 And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted.

In the ancient world without cars and airplanes, natural features such as mountains, valleys, and bodies of water were significant obstacles for travel. So one of the common images of return to the Promised Land is that God will make the journey as easy as possible. He will flatten the mountains. He will lift up a broad highway above the valleys so that the path is visible, straight, and smooth. Nothing will get in the way of this grand gathering of peoples to God. Even if these verses have a physical return to land in mind, this is clearly figurative language. The point is not really that God will cut down mountains but that He will enable a smooth return at every step along the way. As explained above, though, it is likely that these images from the exodus from Egypt and the return from Babylon are being used to describe a greater, more important exodus: a return to a right relationship with God through the forgiveness of sins, brought about through the work of the servant.

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Say It Correctly

Enigmatic. eh-nig-MAH-tik.
Eunuch. YOU-nik.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

God's Redemption Defies
Human Wisdom
(1 Corinthians 1:18–25)

TUESDAY

Righteousness, Sanctification,
and Redemption
(1 Corinthians 1:26–31)

WEDNESDAY

God Sent Redemption to God's People
(Psalm 111)

THURSDAY

Christ Brings Eternal Redemption
(Hebrews 9:11–14)

FRIDAY

Pardon My Guilt, O Lord
(Psalm 25:1–11)

SATURDAY

Redeem Israel, O God
(Psalm 25:12–22)

SUNDAY

The Lord Will Have Compassion
(Isaiah 49:1–11)