

The Road to Jesus: The Gospel According to Isaiah
Israel's Release and Exaltation - Part 1
Isaiah 48 & 49
January 6, 2016

INTRODUCTION:

We have spent four months on Isaiah, so far. We have two months to go. Every 2 or 3 chapters, we have seen an explicit or implicit reference to Jesus Christ. The implicit references we know refer to Jesus due to the theology found in the passage and its connection to Jesus made in other passages. The explicit references to Jesus are prophecies that are connected to Him by the inspired New Testament writers, often Matthew but we have seen John do the same in his gospel and the book of Revelation.

There are 50 references or allusions to the book of Isaiah in Revelation so you should have an advantage in September when we study Revelation over someone who has not spent time in Isaiah. At the same time, Revelation actually leans more heavily on Daniel's prophecies, specifically chapters 2, 7-8, than on any other OT prophet. So, it is also advantageous that Josh July has led us recently in a study of the book of Daniel.

Beyond Isaiah and Daniel, the Revelation relies also on Ezekiel and Zechariah. We will not have time to deal with those two books, but it would be good to read them before we begin our study of Revelation in September. As of right now, it looks like I'll be teaching Revelation in Romanian in September.

We are in chapter 48 and 49 this evening. We are in a section of Isaiah (40-55) that pictures Israel in Babylonian exile and the subsequent return to the Promised Land. Of course many Jews would have a hard time believing the promises that Isaiah gives. God requires trust and patience and man often times has little patience which leads to a weak trust.

The question always is: "Will humans respond in trust? God's trustworthiness has been demonstrated (chs. 7-39), his grace has been offered (chs. 40-48), but it is all for naught unless humans will act on it" (Oswalt, 259). Thus, the grace of God *teaches us* to respond in faithful obedience (Titus 2:11-14).

Let's study Isaiah's message:

ISRAEL'S STUBBORNNESS - 48:1-5:

"Hear this!" - This verb is found *ten times* in the next sixteen verses with two synonyms also used (vss 18, 8). The primary target of the Gospel message is the human ear!

Notice the designations Isaiah gives his people: House of Jacob, Israel, those who came forth from the loins of Judah, those who swear by the name of the Lord and invoke the God of Israel. Each of these designations pictures the choice that God made of Israel. They were *His* people.

But, they were stubborn in their sins. Verse 1, they did not invoke the name of God or swear by His name in "truth or righteousness." Verse 2 - They went through the motions of *appearing* religious, swearing and invoking. But their worship was not in truth and righteousness. Today, we should not be deceived by the external appearance of Christianity or religiousness in our neighbors. It's not how religious you *appear* that makes any difference. The question is, is it in truth and righteousness - as God defines Truth and Righteousness.

Your attitude and action will betray whether you are serving God in spirit and in truth or in self-centeredness and will worship.

God had given His law and His expectations “long ago” (vs 3). They went out from His mouth; so Israel has no excuse. Notice verse 4 - they were “obstinate.” Their neck was an “iron” sinew. Their forehead was as hard as bronze.

God had showed them what all would happen to them, going all the way back to the Law of Moses, especially Deuteronomy. Because they had the law before them every generation, they should not have said, “My idol has done them, and my graven image and my molten image have commanded them.”

If Israel was without excuse when they had the law of Moses and 1,000 years of history, how much more inexcusable are we, today, with the full completion of God’s revelation and an extra 2,000 years of history? People today still want to say, “My preacher told me this.” Or, “My grandma practiced her religion this way and she could not have been wrong.” Man still trusts man today and ignores the will of God.

GOD’S GRACE IS STUBBORN - 48:6-22:

One of the points of our sermon Sunday morning is that God is a God of encouragement (Romans 15:4-5). That is the point Isaiah makes in this section:

God is patient - 48:6-11:

Oswalt (268) makes a good point about “predictive prophecy:” “It is given not so we can know the future, but as confirmatory evidence that we can and should trust God.”

In verse 8, God says that He knew Israel would deal very treacherously with Him and He called her a “rebel” from birth. But, please observe verse 9: “For the sake of My name I delay My wrath, and for My praise I restrain it for you, in order not to cut you off.” God had a promise to fulfill to Abraham, to bless the world through his seed, so God had to protect that seed until the Messiah could be born.

So, with that goal in mind, God refined Israel and tested her in the furnace of affliction. This would be a reference to the exile. For His own sake He acted. God’s name will not be profaned through idol worship. He cannot give His glory to an idol. Discipline, whether parental discipline or divine discipline, “are not a sign that God does not care for them, but that he does.”

God’s openness - 48:12-16:

Verse 12 is one of those verses/phrases that is repeated frequently in the book of Revelation and applied to Jesus. “Alpha and Omega” is simply a reiteration of the same principle. It is a figure of speech called a “merism” which gives both extremes of a concept in order to convey the idea of totality or completion. We have the expression: “black and white.” Israel might be unfaithful to her calling, but God will not be unfaithful to Himself. That is the message of Romans 9-11.

God is going to punish Babylon (vs 14) just as He said. The one whom God loves (here) is King Cyrus of Persia. He will punish Babylon. Notice the emphasis in verse 15 (in Hebrew; I, I, I have spoken). And all that God has said, He has said openly - verse 16. Verse 16 is another example of the inspiration of Isaiah. No message from God is esoteric, given to a handful of

specially selected men for their own benefit and for no others. We are not saved by knowledge alone. Knowledge is to be shared with others.

When God came to earth in the incarnate Word, in a sense, He was not doing anything strange or new. He was simply doing what He was calling on Israel to do - live the law of Moses in faithful obedience. Just as a father says to his son, "Here, let me show you how to do it."

God's instruction - 48:17-19:

God is a teaching God. Both Judaism and Christianity are taught religions. They are not inherited nor are they absorbed. They have to be taught, and they are taught, verse 17, for our "profit."

Listen to the plea in verse 18: "If only you had paid attention to My commandments." Their peace ("well-being" NASV) would flow like a river and their righteousness would boil up like waves of the sea. Their seed would have been blessed, like the sand, their offspring like the grain of sand. Their name would not be cut off or destroyed.

You simply cannot selectively obey God's commands. The organization of the church is just as important as the plan of salvation, just as important as the acts of worship, just as important as the fundamental command to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Be leery of someone who says, "It's not a 'salvation issue.'" If it is an "obedience" issue, it *is* a salvation issue! Period.

God's redemption - 48:20-22:

In verse 20, Isaiah calls Israel to flee Babylon. Remember, they are not *yet* in Babylon! This won't happen for 114 years from the time Isaiah is preaching. But, they are to keep themselves spiritually detached from Babylon once the exile begins and when God finally calls them to leave Babylon under King Cyrus of Persia, they need to leave Babylon.

They should leave, as we leave the bondage of sin, with joyful shouting and cry to the whole land, "The Lord has redeemed His servant, Jacob." There are six imperative verbs in verse 20. Believe God's promises and act like you believe them.

In verse 21, God reminds Israel of their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness - They did not thirst when He led them through the deserts. He brought water from the rock for them. If He provided for that generation, He'll provide for the current generation.

Finally, in verse 22, Isaiah warns those who will still refuse to repent and obey God's commands: "There is no peace to the wicked." No water in the desert sands for the disobedient. Israel might "come back to Canaan, but they still need to be brought back to the Lord" (Motyer, 346).

THE LORD'S SERVANT - 49:1-7:

Isaiah again gives us another picture of the Servant, a picture of Jesus Christ. Salvation is coming. It will be made available. Israel will be reconciled to God, through His Servant. But that salvation will not be available only to the Jews. It will be available also to the Gentiles.

Isaiah's call in verse 1 is to the "islands" - the Gentiles. They ought to "listen" [obey]. In this context, God had called His Servant from the womb and named Him from the body of His mother. There is a special Servant of God coming.

His mouth will have a special role in His work, a special power. Remember that Israel did not listen to God's instructions (48:18). They will listen to *this* Servant, or they will be cut off. His mouth is like a sharp sword. This is a reference to His teaching (Heb. 4:12; Rev. 1:16; 19:15). He is protected by the shadow of God's hand. But He also serves a specific purpose, just like a select arrow that God has hidden in His quiver.

Verse 3 - This is God's Servant. The perfect Israelite, through Whom God wills how His glory. I'll talk more Sunday about what it means that God is a God of glory.

But the Servant is frustrated with the response of Israel, verse 4 (see Luke 9:41; Mark 8:21; 14:27). But He still has word to do, verse 5 - to bring Jacob back to God so Israel can be gathered to the Lord. As the Servant fulfills His work, verse 5, He will be honored in the sight of the Lord and God will be His source of strength. This surely is no one else except Jesus of Nazareth.

What is that work? Verse 6 - To raise up the tribes of Jacob, out of sin and rebellion and to restore the preserved ones of Israel, the faithful remnant. He will also be a light to the nations so that He can carry the salvation of God to the "ends of the earth." Isaiah connects the "light" to the Messiah several times: 42:6; 9:2; 60:1-3. As I mentioned Sunday night in my sermon, when Christians fulfill the great commission as Paul and Barnabas were doing in Acts 13:47, you and I also fulfill this portrait in verse 6.

Verse 7 is a message that God gives to His Servant, to Jesus Christ - the one "despised" and "abhorred" by the nation of Israel - "Kings will see and arise, princes will also bow down, because of the Lord who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen" Jesus Christ.

GOD WILL GUIDE THE SERVANT - 49:8-13:

Verse 8 is directed partly at Israel and partly at Jesus Christ, the Servant. At the right time, He answered Israel and in the day of salvation He helped them. That, it seems to me, refers to the day when the Messiah came. But it is the Messiah whom God "kept" - that is, protected - and He is the one who is the "covenant of the people." His role was to "restore the land, to make Israel inherit the heritages that had been desolate."

To those bound, the Messiah calls out, "Go forth." To those who are in darkness, He says, "Show yourselves. Come out into the light." He will bless them, verse 9-10. Because He has compassion on them. In the overall context of Isaiah and the Bible, we are looking at something more than simply a return to the physical land of Palestine. This pictures the spiritual return to God through Jesus Christ and Paul's use of verse 8 in 2 Corinthians 6:2 shows that Paul understood this to refer to the coming Messianic Age.

Verses 11-13 also portray the blessings the Messiah will bring to His people. And when they are blessed, they should shout for joy. They should "break forth in joyful shouting" because the Lord has comforted His people and had compassion on those afflicted.

BUT SOME IN ZION STILL DOUBT - 49:14-21:

Seventy years of exile are going to take their toll. Man struggles with doubts and uncertainties, he struggles with walking by faith. That is nothing new. Zion says, "The Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me" (vs 14). It is easy to see the exile, not as God's punishment in His presence, but as God permanently throwing Israel away.

But God cannot forget Israel, verse 15, no more than a nursing mom can forget her baby. Israel, in fact, is inscribed on the palms of God's hands (vs 16). Those who have been destroying Jerusalem will leave - vs 17. But God will not.

Jerusalem will, in fact, wear their enemies as jewelry (vs 18). God will bless them so much that in their present present land of Palestine, they will be cramped (vs 19-20). They will be so blessed that they will wonder, verse 21, where all their children came from.

GOD'S VINDICATION - 48:22-26:

Yes, God is going to raise His flag, His "standard" (NASV; vs 22) - the flag who is Jesus Christ (11:10) and the nations will be drawn to Him and all of His plans will be vindicated.

Kings will bow down to the Israelite and want to follow their God - as happened in the days of Esther. But ultimately, the fulfillment is in the time of Jesus. If man waits on God to work, he will not be ashamed (vs 23).

God can rescue those who are oppressed by the tyrant; woe to the one who picks a fight with God! (vs 25). God will make the oppressors eat their own flesh and drink their own blood (vs 26). This is apocalyptic language to emphasize the power of God over those who oppress His followers.

One day, truly, "all flesh will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob." Do you believe in that God? Can you stay faithful to Him until the end?

Next week:
Israel's Release and Exaltation - part 2
Isaiah 50-51
One more lesson before Isaiah 53!