

Isaiah

To Serve and to Save

Lesson #9 for February 27, 2021

Scriptures: Isaiah 41; 42:1-7; 44:26-45:6; 49:1-2.

1. As we have suggested in previous lessons, Isaiah is referred to as the “gospel prophet.” As we now begin to take on an understanding of the metaphors and idioms of the last 27 chapters of Isaiah which are chapters 40-66, we need to recognize that Isaiah was living in a very difficult time. He used metaphors that are not always easy for us to understand. In our lesson for today, we will notice that both Cyrus the first emperor of the Medo-Persian kingdom and then, later, Jesus Christ are referred to as *God’s chosen* or *God’s anointed* persons. *Messiah = Christ = Anointed One*.
2. In the passages we are studying this week, we will notice for the first time a prediction that the Messiah would be a “suffering servant.”

Many feel that it would be a great privilege to visit the scenes of Christ’s life on earth, to walk where He trod, to look upon the lake beside which He loved to teach, and the hills and valleys on which His eyes so often rested. **But we need not go to Nazareth, to Capernaum, or to Bethany, in order to walk in the steps of Jesus. We shall find His footprints beside the sickbed, in the hovels of poverty, in the crowded alleys of the great city, and in every place where there are human hearts in need of consolation. In doing as Jesus did when on earth, we shall walk in His steps.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 640.2.†

3. It is easy for Christians to pick out a few key words here and there that fit with what we know about the work of Jesus and suggest that those passages are prophecies of His coming. But, let us look at some of those prophecies very carefully and see if what we have suggested is correct.

Isaiah 42:3,7: ³ “He will not break off a bent reed
or put out a flickering lamp.

He will bring lasting justice to all...”

⁷ “You will open the eyes of the blind

and set free those who sit in dark prisons.”—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Isaiah 42:3,7). New York: American Bible Society.

4. Don’t these two verses in Isaiah 42 clearly seem to be pointing to the coming Messiah?
5. However, there are also verses **suggesting that God had a servant nation.** (Isaiah 41)

**Isaiah 41:8: “But you, Israel my servant,
you are the people that I have chosen [anointed],
the descendants of Abraham, my friend.”—Good News Bible.*†**

6. Some servant passages seem to clearly refer to Israel/Jacob, the ancestor of the Israelites, and in some cases their descendants, the nations of Israel and Judah. However, in yet other cases, it clearly seems to suggest that Isaiah was talking about the Messiah/Christ identified in the New Testament as Jesus. Let us see if we can distinguish between these two types of prophecies.
7. In Isaiah 41:8; Isaiah 44:1,2,21; Isaiah 45:4; and Isaiah 48:20, it seems very clear that the prophet was referring to the **nation of Israel** even though in some cases he used the name Jacob. Isaiah 48:20 specifically says that the Lord’s servant Jacob will be released from Babylonian captivity.

Isaiah 48:20: Go out from Babylon, go free!

Shout the news gladly; make it known everywhere:

“The LORD has saved his servant Israel!”—Good News Bible.*†

8. By contrast, in verses such as Isaiah 42:1; **Isaiah 50:10**; Isaiah 52:13; and Isaiah 53:11, the one referred to as God’s Servant is not named. In the earlier passages, such as in Isaiah 44, 50, and 52, it might not be clear who the servant is. But, when we look at **Isaiah 53:11** and **Isaiah 49:5-6**, it is clear that he was speaking about the future Messiah.
9. Isaiah 41:8-20 clearly spell out God’s original plan for His people. He offered to help them; He offered to protect them; He offered to save them. However, He recognized their weakness and the fact that they had failed Him. This collective servant called Israel or Jacob would be scattered by the storm; but, some of them would still be happy to call God their God.
10. In Isaiah 41:9, *NRSV** specifically, God said: “I have chosen [anointed] you and not cast you off!”[†] That is followed by a magnificent promise in verse 10: “Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.”
11. Notice very clearly in these passages that God was talking to a group of His Israelite children who were faithful to Him. What a contrast to earlier kings such as Ahaz.
12. Then God laid down a challenge to the so-called gods of other nations.
13. See Isaiah 41:7,21-24,28-29. Notice especially verses 23 and 29.

Isaiah 41:23,29: ²³ “Tell us what the future holds—

Then we will know that you are gods! ...

²⁹ **All these gods are useless; they can do nothing at all—these idols are weak and powerless**—*Good News Bible.*†*

14. Who do you think is being referred to in Isaiah 42:1-7?

Isaiah 42:1-7: ¹ The LORD says,

“Here is my servant, whom I strengthen—
the one I have chosen, with whom I am pleased.

I have filled him with my Spirit,
and he will bring justice to every nation.

² He will not shout or raise his voice
or make loud speeches in the streets.

³ He will not break off a bent reed
or put out a flickering lamp.

He will bring lasting justice to all.

⁴ He will not lose hope or courage;
he will establish justice on the earth.

Distant lands eagerly wait for his teaching.”

⁵ God created the heavens and stretched them out;
he fashioned the earth and all that lives there;
he gave life and breath to all its people.

And now the LORD God says to his servant,

⁶ “I, the LORD, have called you and given you power
to see that justice is done on earth.

Through you I will make a covenant with all peoples;
through you I will bring light to the nations.

⁷You will open the eyes of the blind
and set free those who sit in dark prisons.”—*Good News Bible*.*

15. **Clearly, these verses refer to the future Messiah, not to the nation of Israel.**

What is the role and character of God’s unnamed Servant, whom God chooses and on whom He puts His Spirit? (*Isa. 42:1-7*.)

Choose the best answer or combination of answers:

1. He provides justice for the nations.
2. He accomplishes His goals quietly and gently, but successfully.
3. He is a teacher.
4. He serves as a covenant between God and the people.
5. He gives light or hope by healing blindness and liberating prisoners.
6. All of the above.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Monday, February 22.[§]

16. It is clear that in Isaiah 42, there are some parallels to the prophecies in **Isaiah 11:1-5**. This is compelling evidence that the servant mentioned in Isaiah 42 is the Messiah mentioned in **Isaiah 9:6-7**. Did Isaiah see any of the events of Christ’s life in vision? Or, was he just told about them?

17. We are further convinced of the identity by the quotation of Isaiah 42 in Matthew 12:15-21.

Matthew 12:15-21: ¹⁵ When Jesus heard about the plot against him, he went away from that place; and large crowds followed him. He healed all those who were ill ¹⁶ and **gave them orders not to tell others about him.** ¹⁷ He did this so as to make what God had said through the prophet Isaiah come true:

¹⁸ “Here is my servant, whom I have chosen,
the one I love, and with whom I am pleased.
I will send my Spirit upon him,
and he will announce my judgement to the nations.

¹⁹ He will not argue or shout,
or make loud speeches in the streets.

²⁰ He will not break off a bent reed,
or put out a flickering lamp.

He will persist until he causes justice to triumph,
²¹ and in him all peoples will put their hope.”—*Good News Bible*.*†

See also Matthew 3:16-17; 17:5. These events happened 700 years after Isaiah’s day.

18. What did Jesus and His disciples actually do for the people? Very obviously, they: (1) Relieved suffering, (2) Raised the dead, (3) Corrected ignorance about God, (4) Cast out evil spirits, and (5) Relieved the oppression caused by Satan. **By His life and His death, Jesus clearly cast Satan out as the ruler of this world (John 12:31-33) and reestablished the covenant between God and created beings throughout the universe.** (Matthew 26:28)

19. Let us turn now and see what passages might give us a hint of a “**Persian Messiah.**”

20. Who is the one specifically mentioned by name to relieve Israel from Babylonian captivity?

Isaiah 44:26-45:6: ²⁶ “But when my servant makes a prediction,
when I send a messenger to reveal my plans,
I make those plans and predictions come true.
I tell Jerusalem that people will live there again,
and the cities of Judah that they will be rebuilt. [This must be future.]

Those cities will rise from the ruins.

²⁷ With a word of command I dry up the ocean.

²⁸ **I say to Cyrus**, ‘You are the one who will rule for me;

you will do what I want you to do:

you will order Jerusalem to be rebuilt

and the Temple foundations to be laid.’ ”

^{45:1} **The LORD has chosen Cyrus to be king!**

He has appointed him to conquer nations;

he sends him to strip kings of their power;

the LORD will open the gates of cities for him.

To Cyrus the LORD says,

² “I myself will prepare your way,

levelling mountains and hills.

I will break down bronze gates

and smash their iron bars.

³ I will give you treasures from dark, secret places;

then you will know that I am the LORD,

and that the God of Israel has called you by name.

⁴ I appoint you to help my servant Israel,

the people that I have chosen.

I have given you great honour,

although you do not know me.

⁵ “I am the LORD; **there is no other god.**

I will give you the strength you need,

although you do not know me.

⁶ I do this so that everyone

from one end of the world to the other

may know that I am the LORD

and that **there is no other god.**”—*Good News Bible*.^{*††}

Isaiah’s ministry lasted from about 745 B.C. to about 685 B.C. After mentioning a conqueror from the east and from the north (*Isa. 41:2, 3, 25*) and implying that this was to be good news for Jerusalem (*Isa. 41:27*), **Isaiah accurately predicted Cyrus by name and described his activities**. He did come from north and east of Babylon and conquer it in 539 B.C.; he did serve God by releasing the Jews from their Babylonian exile; and he did authorize the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem (*see Ezra 1*).

Put this prediction into perspective. Since there are about one hundred forty-six years from the time of Isaiah’s death to the fall of Babylon, his prophecy was a century and a half ahead of its time. It would be like George Washington predicting that a man named General Dwight Eisenhower would help liberate Europe in 1945!

Because the actions of Cyrus are well attested from a variety of ancient sources, including Babylonian chronicles, his own report in the “Cyrus Cylinder,” and the Bible (*2 Chron. 36:22, 23; Ezra 1; Daniel 5; Dan. 6:28; Dan. 10:1*), **the accuracy of Isaiah’s prophecy is beyond dispute. This confirms the faith of people who believe that true prophets receive accurate predictions from God, who**

knows the future far in advance.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Tuesday, February 23.^{†§}

2 Chronicles 36:22-23: ²² **In the first year that Cyrus of Persia was emperor, the LORD made what he had said through the prophet Jeremiah come true.** He prompted Cyrus to issue the following command and send it out in writing to be read aloud everywhere in his empire:

²³ “This is the command of Cyrus, Emperor of Persia. The LORD, the God of Heaven, has made me ruler over the whole world and has given me the responsibility of building a temple for him in Jerusalem in Judah. Now, all of you who are God’s people, go there, and may the LORD your God be with you.”—*Good News Bible.*^{*†}

Jeremiah 25:11: “This whole land will be left in ruins and will be a shocking sight, and the neighbouring nations will serve the king of Babylonia for **seventy years.**”—*Good News Bible.*^{*†}

Jeremiah 29:10: “The LORD says, ‘When Babylonia’s **seventy years** are over, I will show my concern for you and keep my promise to bring you back home.’”—*Good News Bible.*^{*†}

Daniel 9:2: In the first year of his reign, I was studying the sacred books and thinking about the **seventy years** that Jerusalem would be in ruins, according to what the LORD had told the prophet Jeremiah.—*Good News Bible.*^{*†}

21. At first glance, these verses might raise some questions in your mind. Notice that both Ezra and Cyrus—as quoted in 2 Chronicles—refer not to Isaiah, but to Jeremiah as the one who prophesied the events to take place. Why is that? Well, Isaiah mentioned Cyrus by name. However, it was Jeremiah who mentioned the 70-year period of time that Judah would be in captivity in Babylonia.
22. So, why did God call Cyrus His *anointed*, or *chosen leader*?

Isaiah 45:1: The LORD has chosen Cyrus to be king!

He has appointed him to conquer nations;
he sends him to strip kings of their power;
the LORD will open the gates of cities for him.

To Cyrus the LORD says....—*Good News Bible.*^{*†}

The Hebrew word for “anointed” here is the word from which we get the word *Messiah*. Elsewhere in the Old Testament, this word could refer to an anointed high priest (*Lev. 4:3, 5, 16; Lev. 6:22*), an anointed Israelite king (*1 Sam. 16:6; 1 Sam. 24:6, 10; 2 Sam. 22:51*), or the Messiah, a future ideal Davidic king and deliverer (*Ps. 2:2; Dan. 9:25, 26*). **From Isaiah’s perspective, Cyrus was a future king, sent by God to deliver His people.** But he was an unusual messiah, because he was non-Israelite. He would do some things the Messiah would do, such as defeat God’s enemies and release His captive people, but he could not be the same as the Messiah, because he was not descended from David.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Tuesday, February 23.^{†§}

23. So, what does it mean to be *God’s anointed*? From the paragraph above, we see that the high priests were anointed and so were the early kings of Israel. But, Psalm 2:2 talks about a future King who was to be anointed; that chapter was a clear prophecy of the coming Messiah.
24. **How do you suppose Cyrus felt when he learned that his name and actions were prophesied by Isaiah almost 150 years in advance, and the specific time periods were prophesied more than 70 years in advance by Jeremiah?**
25. Once again, we see that there is a clear distinction between the real God who can predict precisely hundreds of years in advance something was going to happen while other “gods” can

do nothing.

26. Those who do not believe that even God can predict the future have really struggled with these prophecies about Cyrus. The dates for Isaiah are clearly known, and the dates for Cyrus are clearly known. So, many who call themselves scholars have suggested that Isaiah needs to be cut into two parts, with one author writing chapters 1 through 39 and another author writing chapters 40-66 many years later. It is interesting to note that while they are trying to cut the book of Isaiah in half, Isaiah himself was sawn in half by Manasseh. (See Hebrews 11:37.)

There is, however, no historical witness to the existence of a second “Isaiah.” If he did exist, it would be strange for the Bible not to mention him, because his message is profoundly important, and his literary artistry is phenomenal. Not even the oldest Bible manuscript, the Isaiah scroll from Qumran, has any break between Isaiah 39 and 40 that would indicate a transition to the work of a new author.

Isaiah’s basic message is consistent throughout his book: Trust the true God, including His Messianic Deliverer, rather than other powers. Scholars rightly emphasize the shift in focus from the Assyrian period in Isaiah 1-39 to the Babylonian period in chapters 40 and following. But we have found that Isaiah 13, 14 and 39 already envisage a Babylonian captivity. It is true Isaiah 1-39 emphasizes judgment and Isaiah 40-66 emphasizes consolation. But in the earlier chapters, divine comfort and assurance are abundant also, and later passages, such as Isaiah 42:18-25, Isaiah 43:22-28, and Isaiah 48:1-11, speak of God’s judgments on Judah for forsaking Him. In fact, Isaiah’s predictions of *future* comfort imply suffering in the meantime.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Wednesday, February 24.^{†§}

27. So, we have seen that Isaiah’s message is consistent right through his book. There is absolutely no evidence for cutting it in two, separating it, and claiming that two different authors wrote the book of Isaiah at different times.
28. It is interesting to notice that many of the prophecies that Isaiah gave are similar to prophecies that had been given many years earlier by Moses as recorded in Leviticus 26:40-45.

Leviticus 26:40-45: ⁴⁰ [The LORD said:] “But your descendants will confess their sins and the sins of their ancestors, who resisted me and rebelled against me, ⁴¹and made me turn against them and send them into exile in the land of their enemies. At last, when your descendants are humbled and they have paid the penalty for their sin and rebellion, ⁴²I will remember my covenant with Jacob and with Isaac and with Abraham, and I will renew my promise to give my people the land. ⁴³First, however, the land must be rid of its people, so that it can enjoy its complete rest, and they must pay the full penalty for having rejected my laws and my commands. ⁴⁴But even then, **when they are still in the land of their enemies, I will not completely abandon or destroy them.** That would put an end to my covenant with them, and I am the LORD their God. ⁴⁵I will renew the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I showed all the nations my power by bringing my people out of Egypt, in order that I, the LORD, might be their God.”—*Good News Bible*.^{*†‡}

29. Turn now to Isaiah 49:1-12. See especially verses 4, 7, and 8.

Isaiah 49:4,7,8: ⁴ I said, “I have worked, but how hopeless it is!

I have used up my strength, but have accomplished nothing.”

Yet I can trust the LORD to defend my cause;

he will reward me for what I do....

⁷ Israel’s holy God and saviour says

to the one who is deeply despised,

who is hated by the nations
and is the servant of rulers:

“Kings will see you released and will rise to show their respect;
princes also will see it,
and they will bow low to honour you.”

**This will happen because the LORD has chosen his servant;
the holy God of Israel keeps his promises.**

⁸ The LORD says to his people,
“When the time comes to save you,
I will show you favour
and answer your cries for help.
I will guard and protect you
and through you make a **covenant with all peoples.**

**I will let you settle once again
in your land that is now laid waste.**”—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

God calls and names Him before He is born, makes His mouth like a sword, and will be glorified in Him. God uses the Servant to bring the nation of Israel back to Himself, to be a light of salvation to all the world, to be a covenant, and to release prisoners. **There is plenty of overlap between this description and that of Isaiah 42, where we identified the Servant as the Messiah.** The New Testament finds the Servant’s attributes in Jesus Christ, in both comings (*Matt. 1:21, John 8:12, John 9:5, John 17:1-5, Rev. 1:16, Rev. 2:16, Rev. 19:15*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Thursday, February 25.^{†§}

30. One final point needs to be seen very clearly in these verses. Clearly, we are beginning to see hints that the future life and mission of the Messiah would not be an easy one.

“Thus, Isaiah foresaw a Servant with a real human nature, tested like we are and proving himself to be the author and perfecter of the way of faith, a real, personal faith that can still say *my* God when nothing any longer seems worthwhile.”—*The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 387.—[as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Thursday, February 25].^{†§}

31. Review what you know about the life of Jesus. What an incredible experience that was. Facing difficulties with the entire forces of Satan and all his evil angels arrayed against Him at every step in His life, how did Jesus handle it? At what point in His life, do you think Jesus understood this?

In the work of soul-winning, great tact and wisdom are needed. The Savior never suppressed the truth, but He uttered it always in love. In His intercourse [dealings] with others, He exercised the greatest tact, and He was always kind and thoughtful. He was never rude, never needlessly spoke a severe word, never gave unnecessary pain to a sensitive soul. He did not censure human weakness. He fearlessly denounced hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity, but **tears were in His voice** as He uttered His scathing rebukes. He never made truth cruel, but ever manifested a deep tenderness for humanity. Every soul was precious in His sight. He bore Himself with divine dignity; yet He bowed with the tenderest compassion and regard to every member of the family of God. He saw in all, souls whom it was His mission to save.—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers** 117.1.^{†‡}

32. We know that difficult times will be coming to God’s people in the future. Are we ready to follow the example of Jesus? Are we doing so even now?

33. Is it clear to you that the book of Isaiah was written by a single author, not by two or multiple authors at different times? Do you think you could explain your reasons for this belief to someone?
34. We have seen that God's nation—His people, His chosen ones—were delivered on more than one occasion: (1) They were delivered from Egyptian bondage. (2) In this lesson we find out they were delivered by a predicted future deliverer, Cyrus by name, who allowed them to return from Babylonian exile. (3) We also learn about an unnamed Servant whom we have previously identified as the true Messiah who would restore justice and bring us back to God.
35. In this lesson, we have briefly touched on three main topics: (1) The covenant relationship to God established and reestablished with His people; (2) The fact that God is known by different titles or different names which represent different aspects of His character; and (3) An introduction to the idea of Israel as God's servant or messiah/anointed.
36. The personal name of God in Hebrew is *YHWH* translated as LORD. He called and established a relationship with Abram and reaffirmed that covenant later in Abram's/Abraham's life and promised to make him a great nation. (See Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:1-27.)
37. This covenant relationship with Abram/Abraham must have been very important to Him because God promised to be his shield. Think of Abraham moving to a new territory inhabited by hostile tribes and having God promise him that this land would in the future belong to his descendants.
38. It is interesting to notice that this name *YHWH* is translated as, "The Eternal One," "the I Am who I Am," etc. What is important for us to notice is that Jesus took that name upon Himself.
- "He is with us, for good or ill, depending on our response to him. He is the one like whom there is no other; he is the only noncontingent being in the universe, the only one who can say 'I Am.'"—*The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, (1998), p. 84.—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 120-121].[§]
39. In the many ways in which God chooses to relate to His faithful children, He refers to Himself as our Redeemer, the Holy One, and He encourages us to be holy as He is holy. (Leviticus 19:2) This verse is repeated several times even in the New Testament.
40. Some important points need to be remembered about the covenant relationship between God and His people.
- "First**, that Israel came to be the Lord's servant by divine choice ([Isa. 41:]8b, 9d; Eph. 1:4); **secondly**, that the relationship began with Abraham. My friend (2 Chron. 20:7, [James] 2:23) is literally 'my loving one' / 'who loved me.' **Thirdly**, it tells us that the extension of the covenant promise to Abraham's descendants (lit. 'seed,' Gen. 17:7) still stands (chosen you . . . not rejected you); and, **fourthly**, that in his choice and calling of Abraham the Lord showed that his power extends to the ends of the earth . . . its farthest corners. In all this there is nothing of any function the servant may perform; only that Israel has an honoured status."—*Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), vol. 20, p. 286.—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 122; brackets and content in brackets in the paragraph above are in the *Bible Study Guide*].^{†§}
41. How do you feel about having the supreme God of the universe, the King of kings and Lord of lords approaching His followers, including you and me, and asking us to be His friends?

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