

Lesson 25
Isaiah 49:1 – 52:12

The Gracious Son of God, a Suffering Servant (Part 1)

Memory verse: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1 NIV)

The broad section of Isaiah 40 through 48 focused on the promise of God’s deliverance of His people from their captivity in Babylon, and the specific prediction of the Gentile king who would deliver them, Cyrus. Through the section, God shows that His desire to deliver His people proves His love, His ability to deliver His people proves His power, and His prophetic knowledge of the deliverer proves His uniqueness among all gods. Starting with Isaiah chapter 49, there is no longer a mention of Cyrus, now the focus is on the ultimate deliverer, the Messiah. Though there is still reference to the deliverance from Babylon’s captivity, the real focus is on the ultimate deliverance the Messiah will bring.

Israel’s sin had resulted in her going into the furnace of Babylon for a period of refinement. In the section of chapters 49 to 55, the prophet revealed that God would also deal with the more serious problem of sin in Israel that had resulted in her captivity. He would do this by using another Servant of His, the Messiah. This Servant would not only take care of Israel’s sin problem but that of the whole world. Thus Isaiah passed from dealing mainly with physical deliverance to dealing with spiritual salvation, and from Cyrus to Christ.

This first segment focuses on the anticipation of salvation. Israel needed to believe the promises of God concerning the coming salvation. The possibility of a restored relationship between Israel and her God becomes increasingly clear as this section (chapters 49 to 52) unfolds. Likewise, the cosmic dimension of this salvation becomes increasingly obvious. The section reaches its climax with the announcement that God has won victory and the people are free (52:7-12).

A plaque in an office reads, “The world is full of people who want to serve in an advisory capacity.”

But Jesus Christ did not come with good advice: He came with good news, the good news that sinners can be forgiven and life can become excitingly new. The gospel is good news to us, but it was “bad news” to the Son of God; for it meant that He would need to come to earth in human form and die on a cross as the sacrifice for the sins of the world.

The Jewish nation was called to glorify God and be a light to the Gentiles, but they failed in their mission. This is why Messiah is called “Israel” in Isaiah 49:3: He did the work that Israel was supposed to do. Today, the church is God’s light in the dark world (Acts 13:46–49; Matt. 5:14–16), and like Israel, we seem to be failing in our mission to take the good news to the ends of the earth. We cannot do the job very effectively when only five percent of the average local church budget is devoted to evangelism!

As Jesus Christ ministered on earth, especially to His own people Israel, there were times when His work seemed in vain (Isa. 49:4). The religious leaders opposed Him, the disciples did not always understand Him, and those He helped did not always thank Him. He lived and laboured by faith, and God gave Him success.

Our Lord could not minister to the Gentiles until first He ministered to the Jews (Is.49: 5–6). Read carefully Matthew 10:5–6; 15:24; Luke 24:44–49; Acts 3:25–26; 13:46–47; and Romans 1:16. When our Lord returned to heaven, He left behind a believing remnant of Jews who carried on His work. We must never forget that “salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22). The Bible is a Jewish book, the first believers and missionaries were Jews, and the Gentiles would not have heard the gospel had it not been brought to them by Jews. Messiah was despised by both Jews and Gentiles (Isa. 49:7), but He did God’s work and was glorified (Phil. 2:1–11).

In the next three studies, we will concentrate on the ministry of The Servant.

Scripture reading: Isaiah Chapter: Is. 49:1-7; 50:4-9; 51:1-8; 52:7-12.

Things to learn: 1) The Servant’s relationship with Gentiles 2) The Servant’s relationship with the Lord 3) The Servant’s relationship with Israel

Discussion Questions:

Q1. The Gentiles are being addressed by the Messiah in Chapter 49:1 to 50:3 and what is the message for them?

Q2. Previously in Chapters 42:1-7 and 49:1-7, there are hints of opposition to the Messiah’s ministry. What sort of relationship is described in Chapter 50:4-11?

Q3. In this section (Is.51:1 – 52:12), the emphasis is on the relationship of the Servant and Israel (the nation). Discuss the admonitions addressed to Israel found in the passage.