

**The Book of Isaiah
Chapters 49-55**

Introduction: Chapters 49-55 address a second major problem facing the exiled people

1. We are still in the third major subdivision of Isaiah (40-55)
2. Remember Isaiah pens these words in the 700's but they will be digested by the Jews in Exile in the 500's while in Babylonian Captivity (587-539 BC)
3. Two problems confront these exiled people
 - A. Problem #1: Captivity in Babylon makes it difficult to be the redeemed servants of the Lord — they need to be set free and to live and minister in the land of God's promises
 - B. Problem #2: What is to be done about the sin that got the people into this dilemma in the first place? How can a sinful people be servants of a holy and just God?

NOTE: Physical separation from their land and spiritual separation from God are the two issues addressed

4. The response to the two problems addressed above
 - A. Chapters 41-48 made clear that God had a **plan of deliverance** before it occurred and the Babylonians can't stop this plan from becoming a reality
 - B. Chapters 49-55 will address the **spiritual captivity** by indicating that the Servant of the Lord will be their deliverer

NOTE: His servanthood will make possible theirs — and ours — (not Cyrus but the Servant)

5. Three sections make up this subdivision and could be called **The Greater Deliverance** (49-55)
 - A. 49:1-52:12 — The anticipation/hope of restoration
 - B. 52:13-53:12 — The Suffering Servant as the means for restoration
 - C. 54:1-55:13 — The invitation to participate in this restoration

I. The Anticipation of Being Restored Back to God (49:1-52:12)

- A. Restoration from Babylon is promised and is a reality through Cyrus, King of Persia

²⁸ who says of Cyrus, "He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt," and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid."

"This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut ... Isaiah 44:28-45:1, NIV

This material is copyrighted. Its use in the local church or in any other setting as a teaching tool or ministry presentation requires written permission from the author.

- B. But who will restore us back to God and deal with the sin problem?
- C. The Servant (Deliverer) Himself calls for the world to “listen” to what He is going to reveal (49:1-6)

The Servant’s revelation consists of the following:

- 1. His call and His confidence is without doubt (49:1)
 - a. Called from the womb

NOTE: Inside the womb, there is life, purpose, value, and even divine calling

⁴ Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, ⁵ “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.” – Jeremiah 1:4-5, NASB

- b. His vocation is no secondary thing, it is His primary purpose
- 2. He is divinely equipped and perfectly suited for ANY task (49:2-3)
 - a. “sharp sword”
 - b. “select arrow”
 - c. He will accomplish exactly what God wants at the appointed time

⁴ But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under ^[a] the Law, ⁵ so that He might redeem those who were under ^[b] the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. ⁶ Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” - Galatians 4:4-6, NASB

- 3. He is certain that though His servanthood may appear to be futile (in vain, empty, useless), He is confident that God will not fail him and will vindicate Him (49:4)

(ILL) — Work at Grissom, Reach 3

D. Who is this “Servant” that is spoken of?

NOTE: Keep in mind, this was written in the 700’s BC and would have been read by those in Babylonian exile?

³ He said to Me, “You are My Servant, Israel, In Whom I will ^[a] show My glory.” — Isaiah 49:3

- 1. The nation of Israel?

- a. Descriptions do not match what is said of Israel
 - b. 49:5-6 clears it up
 - c. Israel can't be the agent to restore Israel back to God
2. The prophet? — Too sweeping of language to be applied to ordinary humanity
 3. Ideal Israel?
 - a. Likely answer
 - b. Messiah will be "Israel" as Israel was meant to be
 - c. He will show the Lord's glory (49:3)
 - d. He will be the one to restore the tribes of Jacob (49:5)
 - e. How this is accomplished will be addressed in 52:13-53:12
 - f. This restoration will be FAR REACHING even to the Gentiles (49:6)

E. The Servant will be a representative of God's covenant to His people (49:7-12)

1. The Servant will be "despised" and "abhorred" (49:7a)
2. But a day will come when kings and princes will bow down because of His faithfulness (49:7b)

PHIL 2:5-11

3. Like a new Joshua, He will settle them in a land of freedom and abundance where God will tend to them as a shepherd (49:8-11)
4. The remnant will return from all directions and the scope of the Servant's ministry appears to all-inclusive (49:12)

F. The Servant's work will bring forth praise (49:13)

See 42:10-17

NOTE: The following chapters will show how the ideal Servant will bring comfort to His people

TRUTH

- 1.) We can participate in the benefits brought forth by the Servant's work if we share in the life of the servant

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me. John 15:4, NASB

- 2.) We can be assured that God has given us a call suited for our uniqueness — we have purpose & value

- 3.) Despite being rejected, ridiculed, or despised, we can know if we are faithful to God we can trust the outcome of our service to Him

In God, whose word I praise, In God I have put my trust; I shall not be afraid. What can mere man do to me? Psalm 56:4, NASB

NOTE: Again, recall this will be read by those in Babylonian exile wondering if there is hope for their return, if they can truly trust God, and if they can be completely restored back in right relationship.

- G. The people question God's promised redemption (49:14)
- H. God responds to their doubt (49:15-23)

NOTE: Focus is once again on a return to God not a return to a physical land

1. God has not forgotten His ancient promises to Abraham (49:15-16)
2. The promise of a vast amount of descendants will become a reality (49:17-21)
 - a. Even if sin makes it look like an end is coming to the line of Abraham, God will still protect His seed
 - b. The seemingly impossible becomes possible with God
 - c. The barren, bereaved woman without a man can't have children, yet not only will those who are exiled return (17-18), but more children are born (19-21)
 - d. Picture here is of God's reconciling work through His Servant
 - e. God is the initiator of this return (22-23)
- I. The people questions God's promised redemption, again (49:24)
- J. God responds to their doubt a second time (49:25-26)
- K. God responds to another question (50:1-3)
 1. The implied question, "Are you the one who sold us to these captors in the first place?"
 2. God answers in 50:1-3
 - a. Where is the certificate of divorce? (1a)
 - b. You are here because of your own sins (1b)
 - c. God has the power to deliver them not just from physical bondage but spiritual bondage as well — sin

TRUTH:

- 1.) God's timing is NOT our timing and we may be required to wait on the Lord (Ps. 13)
- 2.) God does not forget His promises

Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands ... Isaiah 49:16

- L. The perfect obedience of the Servant brings about spiritual freedom — freedom from sin (50:4-51:8)
 - 1. It is revealed here that obedience will bring suffering (Israel’s rebellion also brought suffering)
 - 2. The Servants declaration of news (50:4) will bring abuse (50:6), but He is willing to bear it because God will vindicate Him (50:7-9)

But with righteousness He will judge the poor, and decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; and He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. Isaiah 11:4, NASB

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, Because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners. Isaiah 61:1, NASB

- 3. Transition (50:10-11)
 - a. Fearing the Lord is equivalent with obeying His voice (10)
 - b. Listening to the Lord = trusting Him (11)
- 4. The Servant’s Speech (51:1-8)
 - a. He is addressing those among the Judeans who are inclined to trust God

Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness – Isaiah 51:1a

- b. The others had been dismissed (50:10)
- c. The Servant has a message of deliverance that is universal (51:4-6) and timeless (51:6-8)
- d. Therefore, He calls them to “listen” (1, 4, 7)

NOTE: We too have a message of deliverance that is for ALL people at ALL times, so we must be communicating that message

NOTE: Israel’s primary problem is NOT captivity in a foreign land, it’s alienation from God — the same is true in our culture today

- e. The Servant calls for the righteous ones to look back, to remember God’s prior work of deliverance (51:1-3)

The God who brought the world into existence will have no problem in restoring the “ruins” of Zion — John Oswalt

Question: In times of spiritual captivity, have you looked back to remember and recall God's faithfulness? What do those moments look like?

- f. The work of the Servant is both universal, eternal, and beyond returning to land (51:4-6)

Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel. Acts 9:15, NASB

Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. Acts 11:1, NASB

- g. The Servant's encouragement to those who remain faithful despite insults (51:7-8)

Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Matthew 5:11, NASB

- h. The words of the Servant go against the proclamation of the prosperity gospel

M. The dialogue between the Servant and the captives regarding their spiritual bondage (51:9-52:12)

1. A series of "Awake, Awake" calling for their attention
2. Question: Why hasn't the Lord acted on our behalf before now? (51:9-10)
3. There is confidence in his ability, but they question his timing (51:11)
4. God's reply: Focus on Him (comforter) not your oppressors (51:12-16)

KEY: In this lament, the call is to focus on the Creator/Redeemer, not the world (Peter on water)

-In 51:9, the people called God to "awake" to see if He was going to bring to reality the promises but now calls them to "awake" (51:17)

5. The people are called to maintain their faith so when God does act, they will be ready to receive (51:17; 52:1)
6. Zion's punishment has come to an end and now judgment is upon their enemies (51:17-23)

Day of destruction has past

7. God will not allow His people to remain alienated from Him
 - a. Transferred from slave to queen (52:1-2)
 - b. Not the result of a deal with captors (52:3)
 - c. Example of the Egyptian exodus (52:4-6)

This material is copyrighted. Its use in the local church or in any other setting as a teaching tool or ministry presentation requires written permission from the author.

- d. Messenger signals “good news” (52:7)
- e. Watchman shouts for joy (52:8)
- f. Freedom available (52:9-12)

TRUTH:

- 1.) A lack of resources and knowledge leaves us in a position of complete dependence on God (51:8) — Gideon’s 300 men, horn, and jar
- 2.) Good and bad news

Preach the Law until they are convicted, then preach grace until they are converted (John Wesley).

It is great good news to a person who knows he has just fallen out of an airplane to be told he has a parachute. By contrast, if that person is not aware of the what is happening to him and does not realize he is plunging to the earth at an alarming rate of speed, the news about the parachute will seem irrelevant at best (John Oswalt).

You can’t be found until you are found

NOTE: People need to know they are lost

-52:11-12 is the final anticipation

II. The Means of Being Restored Back to God (52:13-53:12)

NOTE: In 50-52, the “Arm of the Lord” gave hints of deliverance, but in 53 we will see not what we expected

SUMMARY: Who is the mighty arm of the Lord (49:1-52:12)? Who makes possible invitations in 54 and 55? By what means is the alienation of sin overcome? The arm of the Lord is the ideal Servant — Israel as he was meant to be

A. Introduction (52:13-15)

- 1. There is a note of triumph (“will prosper”) at the beginning (52:13)
- 2. Poem closes with triumph (“victor gets the spoils” – 53:12)

NOTE: Reason for this “sandwich” is because the middle of this section won’t look like victory to the common eye

- 3. This servant is unlike any conqueror before or after

B. The rejection of the Servant (53:1-3)

- 1. The Servant = “the arm of the Lord,” which is their means of deliverance (53:1)
- 2. This message is disbelieved, but why?

This material is copyrighted. Its use in the local church or in any other setting as a teaching tool or ministry presentation requires written permission from the author.

- a. He (Servant) comes onto the scene in a quiet and unassuming manner (53:2)
- b. His appearance was ordinary (53:2)
- c. He takes on himself pain and “suffering” of the world (53:3)
- d. This does not measure up to be the “Servant” they are expecting

(ILL) – Palm Sunday

NOTE: The Servant came to take away the sins of the world, but no one paid attention to Him

C. The Servants carrying of sin (53:4-6)

1. The reason for the Suffering Servant is given (53:4-6)
2. Not because God inflicted deserved punishment (53:4)
3. He bore our suffering; it is for “our transgressions” and “our iniquities” that He suffered (53:5)

NOTE: He suffered in OUR place

4. “We” blind, rebellious ones (42:18-25) are sheep who have gone astray but He (Servant) gets beaten for our willfulness (53:6)

D. The results of carrying our sin (53:7-9)

1. His Suffering is unjust, but He accepts it without protest (53:7)
2. He is deprived of justice and no one cares (53:8)
3. He is buried among the rich (obtained through violence and deceit) even though He did not do what they do (53:9)

E. The atoning nature of the carrying of our sin (53:10-12)

1. Not accidental but intended suffering (53:10a)
2. The sin offering accomplishes God’s purpose
3. “Seeing of offspring” pictures a resurrection
4. The hard struggle will be worth it (53:11a)
5. The Servant “knows God” and is “righteous” allowing Him to make many people righteous, how? Bear their iniquities (53:11b)

He who knew no sin became sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus – 2 Corinthians 5:21

6. He reiterates the how (53:12)

TRUTH

- 1.) Jesus is the Suffering Servant — no fanfare, disfigured at the cross, no protest, prayer in the Garden re: Father's will, substitutionary death (Matt. 26:28, Col. 1:19-20, Phil. 2:5-11)
- 2.) We too are called to lay down our rights so others can live (Live Dead)

Carrying around the death of Jesus so the life of Jesus may be revealed —

III. The Invitation to Participate and Celebrate in God's Promises (54:1-55:13)

-Chapter 54 is a love song by God to Zion — estranged bride — telling her all the things he is going to do in restoring her (two metaphors are used: disgraced woman and ruined city)

-Chapter 55 is the invitation proper — calling the bride not to miss through unbelief what is hers

A. The restoration and hope for the disgraced woman (54:1-10)

1. God refers to Israel as a disgraced woman who is spiritually alienated from God because of her sin
2. Uses the following images: barren woman (1-3), widow (4-5), and divorced one (6-8) all of which in their culture carried some form of shame (no child, alone, rejected)
3. God promises restoration and hope: hopeful language (1-10)
4. Means to restoration (9-10) is found in the Suffering Servant (previous section) who found a way to bring her back (54:10)

B. The restoration and hope for a ruined city (54:11-17)

1. God refers to Israel as a ruined city
2. Uses the following images: storm-tossed (11), oppression and terror (14), ruin (16)
3. God is the one who brought this destruction to pass (because of their rebellion and sin) therefore he can change it all (15-17)
4. The benefits of this restoration are made available to those who accept the invitation to become “servants of the Lord”

TRUTH:

- 1.) Chapter 54 communicates the heart of the Gospel: God reconciled a lost world to himself not waiting on us to bridge the gap that we created with sin, but instead taking the initiative through the death of His Son (Suffering Servant) – God pursues us in our “lostness”

¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 1 John 4:10, NASB

- 2.) God has and will go to great length to see that his children — though stubborn, rebellious, and sinful — do not get what we deserve — we deserve death, but the GIFT of God is eternal life (Romans 6:23)
- 3.) Since the work of Christ at Calvary was “finished,” from God’s perspective there is “no weapon forged against us” that will prosper (54:17)

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:38-39, NASB

- 4.) We are “accepted in the beloved,” but we must continually choose to live under its term

Work out your salvation with fear and trembling ... Philipians 2:12, NASB

C. The invitation proper to experience divine forgiveness

1. Chapter 54 announced the availability of forgiveness and restoration
2. Chapter 55 is the invitation to share in and experience the fullness of that forgiveness
3. Imagery: table is set, now come to the table to experience the feast
4. It would be tragic if one were invited to come dine at the table but rejected or failed to come
5. Imagery: bride is restored, the city is rebuilt, now the people must choose to come
6. The invitation is first extended to those who have no resources in themselves (55:1-5)

“Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk Without money and without cost. ² “Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And delight yourself in abundance. Isaiah 55:1-2, NASB

A banquet table is worse than useless to the person who is either too proud or too ashamed to come and eat from it (John Oswalt).

7. The invitation is secondly extended to those who hear it with clarity, yet simply “hearing” is not enough to experience the blessing (55:6-11)
 - a. The choice before this group is clear: stay where they are in unbelief or go forward in immense uncertainty
 - b. In the day of Isaiah as well as during the exile, the message of the Suffering Servant (52:13-53:12) would have been a complete mystery
 - c. 700 years before Christ is even born
 - d. Challenge presented: exercise faith first and let understanding come later ... His word is reliable (55:11)

This material is copyrighted. Its use in the local church or in any other setting as a teaching tool or ministry presentation requires written permission from the author.

- e. If the wicked will turn from his ways and thoughts (55:7)
- f. And turn toward God's ways and thoughts (55:8-9) even if they aren't completely intelligible
- g. Joy and peace — reconciliation (back to land) and most importantly God will be experienced (55:12-13)

Conclusion

Luke 14:16-24 — Parable of the King's Banquet

- Those who were first invited to the banquet, refused or rejected the invitation (made up excuses)
 - The king instructed his servants to go out to the roads and country lanes and invite the poor, lame, blind, etc. and make them come in, so the house would be full
- 1.) It can be challenging for those full of “human wisdom” or “worldly wealth” to embrace the invitation of salvation when they see very little “need” in themselves and demand the ways of God to be made “intelligible”
 - 2.) The lowly, the helpless, and the poor aren't usually looking for an explanation rather they see an open door and loaded tables and gladly accept the invitation (may be why preaching Jesus in third world countries resonates with many)
 - 3.) Our spiritual journey will take us places that will not make sense, cannot be explained in advance, and may not resonate with human wisdom; therefore it requires complete confidence, total trust, and full faith in the One who has created us and redeemed us for His glory (Abraham, Jews in Exile)

So faith always involves letting go of secure footholds and (apparent) certainties to do things God's way ... As long as we first insist that everything about God's ways and plans be made completely intelligible to us before we decide to act on his invitation, we will never act — John Oswalt.

- 4.) God calls us all to abandon the “life outside of God” (hunger, thirst, sadness, death) and embrace the life of Christ — that which truly satisfies our souls (food, water, joy, and life)
- 5.) God calls us all to abandon our life of comfort and familiarity and launch out in paths of service and living that do not depend on our own strength but His.