

FPFWC Christian Development



God Delivers and Restores

June 2022

Summer Quarter

June 25, 2022

Lesson #4 – God Offers Deliverance

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Isaiah 51:1-8

Key Verse - Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged.—Isaiah 51:1

ICE BREAKER –

1. *What circumstances distract or discourage you from seeking righteousness or the Lord faithfully?*

2. *How do you manage feelings of fear when you feel threatened or unsafe?*

LESSON BACKGROUND

The opening lines of Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* are easily recognized by many readers: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." The same words could be used to describe Judah during Isaiah's ministry (see lesson 3 Lesson Context). The best of times were reflected in Judah's economic and military prowess (Isaiah 2:7); the worst of times were marked by the sin of idolatry and consequent exile in Babylon (39:6–7).

In many ways, Judah's punishment was an indictment of their false gods and of the sins those "gods" condoned. The people had turned from the true God in spite of the great acts of deliverance they had experienced as a nation, and the admonitions in the Ten Commandments to have no other gods or graven images (Exodus 20:3–6). And the exile did have a purifying effect. Following the Babylonian captivity, Jewish idolatry was never a serious problem again (though of course other issues arose). The Jews who returned stood firm on their faithful foundation (see Isaiah 51:1b–2, below), no matter what foreign invaders tried to tempt them with new gods. Though they had suffered through the worst of times, even better than their previous best times were still ahead.

We can also assert that Babylon was punished for following their false gods. Had their worship been rendered to God and concerned with justice and righteousness instead of acquisition and power, the story of the Babylonian Empire would have been very different. In Isaiah 46–47 God mocked the Babylonians' idolatry and its associated practices (see lesson 1). The idols have to be carried, but God's judgment would have them carried away (Isaiah 46:1). Though the people bowed to gods that they made, the God of the heavens had declared their end (46:10). Their "best of times" was about to come to a permanent close.

LESSON COMMENTARY

Having encouraged Israel by revealing the Servant's roles (49:1–13), reminding of the Lord's faithfulness (49:14–26), and reviewing the Servant's trust (50:1–11), the prophet next provides encouragement to Israel with a reminder of the Lord's promise of deliverance and restoration.

51:1–3. The Servant's calling, activity, and example provide the launching point for an articulation of Israel's hopeful future. The now-familiar exhortation to listen is addressed to those who **pursue righteousness** and **who seek the LORD** (v. 1). They are called to contemplate their origins, which are pictured metaphorically with mining imagery (**the rock from which you were hewn ... the quarry from which you were dug**). Abraham and Sarah are cited as an example of God's past action on behalf of His people. The certainty of the Lord's comfort to Zion is confirmed by the past blessing of Abraham and Sarah and God's covenant with them. The restoration of Zion will go beyond mere rebuilding. Instead, the city's surroundings will become **like Eden** and **her desert like the garden of the LORD** (v. 3). Certainly this would not be fulfilled at the return from Babylon but awaits the appearance of the messianic kingdom. At that time, God's care for the city will exceed any human expectations and will restore it to the glorious state of creation.

51:4–8. God gives another call to listen (v. 4), but in this case the Israelites are to hear the Lord's "instruction" (Hb. *torah* may be translated "instruction"—its use here is not a reference to the Mosaic law but God's instruction at the end of days; see comments on 2:3.) It is God who will be the source of justice and order that will become a light to the peoples (v. 4). God's righteousness and justice will not be unwelcome. Instead, **the coastlands** (see Is 41:1) **will wait** in anticipation of His coming (v. 5). God's justice is not transitory like the things of the world, or even like creation itself. God will usher in an everlasting salvation that will not **wear out**, but will continue to offer security and prosperity (v. 6). Israel is encouraged not to be afraid of the insults of humanity (v. 7). The description of people of Israel as knowing what is right and having God's law (instruction) in their hearts suggests that such knowledge can eliminate fear. Those who are obedient have no need to fear because those who mock and taunt will not last. They will be like moth-eaten clothes that are devoured over time (v. 8). The vindication of the Lord will last through **all generations** (v. 8; cf. v. 6). The contrast between the permanent and the transient in these verses is designed to highlight the value of the Lord's righteousness over the so-called treasures of temporal society.

LESSON NUGGET – God is here contrasting the temporary nature of creation to the eternal nature of His salvation. The earth will one day be destroyed. It is getting older and winding down. The law of entropy is acting on creation, as it gradually erodes and decays. (Of course, the law of entropy is acting on us even faster, as we erode and decay.) But God's salvation, that's forever.

If you have a relationship with Jesus Christ, you'll never really die. You'll just move into the presence of God to live with Him forever. This encouragement from God is that we put more value on the eternal than on the temporal. The

stuff down here is all going to burn; but eternity is something that we will enjoy forever.

Sources: Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, Wiersbe Study Bible and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary