

The Greater Deliverance

Invitation to pray: Ask God to strengthen you in His Word this week as you study.

Chapter 49 brings us to a new section in the second half of the book. The prophet passes now from dealing with the physical deliverance of Israel from Babylon to dealing with the more serious problem that led to her captivity. In last week's lesson we saw that a small remnant of the exiles would return from Babylon, but a change of scene would not bring a change of heart. The unchanged relationship with the Lord, expressed in Isaiah 48:22, provides the backdrop for the greater deliverance about to be enacted.

The focus of chapters 49-55 is on the spiritual salvation that the Lord is creating for His people. With powerful language, the prophet describes how the grace of God will deliver the people out of the bondage of sin through His Suffering Servant. Through the ministry of the Servant, spiritual restoration will come, and lost hope will turn to joy!

1. Describe a time when you have experienced the joy of a mended relationship.

Isaiah records four unique prophetic messages that relate to the magnificent Servant of the Lord. Isaiah 42:1-7 was the first passage in which the Lord began to reveal to Isaiah the character of the mighty Deliverer He was going to send, who would also be a lowly servant.

2. **Review Isaiah 42:1-7.** Then tell briefly what you learned about the character and mission of the Servant. (Refer to lesson 16.)

Chapters 49-53 present an increasingly clear vision of the Servant-Redeemer. In this week's passage the mission, the person, and the work of the Servant are set forth more clearly in Isaiah's second Servant Song (49:1-6).

3. As chapter 49 opens, the Servant is speaking. Notice the personal invitation in the words "listen to me". **Prayerfully read 49:1-7.**
 - a. To whom is the message addressed? Who does this include?

- b. What does the Servant reveal about Himself in v.1b?

4. This “Servant” was later revealed as the Lord Jesus Christ. (See Matthew 12:18-21.) Tell how the following passages corroborate the statements of the Servant in verse 1b: Micah 5:2; 1 Peter 1:20; Luke 1:31-33; and Matthew 1:21-22.

The Servant’s call stretches back far beyond all the decisions we have made, all the choices, all the mistakes. The chain of our salvation runs all the way from His eternal foreknowledge to our final glory! (See Romans 8:28-30.)

Cyrus’ calling was to liberate with the sword, but God’s divine Servant needs only to speak! His very words have power and authority.

5. What do the phrases “sharpened sword” and “polished arrow” (v. 2) suggest about the Servant’s words? (Compare Jeremiah 23:29; Ephesians 6:12-17; Hebrews 4:12; Revelation 1:16.)
6. How was Jesus Christ the embodiment of this word from God (John 1:1-4, 14-15)?

The metaphor “polished arrow” in the Father’s quiver (v. 2) is linked to his ability to judge (cf. Deuteronomy 32:23, 42).

7. Recall a time when you recently experienced the penetrating touch of the Servant’s words.

In verse 3, when God refers to His Servant as *Israel*, He is referring to the Servant’s function, not His identity. Throughout this book we have seen that the nation of Israel was not able to carry out her function of being a light to the nations because she was blind, deaf, and rebellious. God would provide an individual to do what the nation had failed to do.

8. In light of the above, what all is God saying to His Servant in verse 3?

In spite of the Servant’s calling it would appear, even to the Servant Himself, that He was less than successful (v. 4). (Compare John 1:10-11, 6:66-67.)

9. What consolation do verses 4-5 offer us when we experience opposition in ministry?

Note: Feelings of futility and faith in God need not be mutually exclusive. The Servant trusted God for the final outcome of His ministry, though as He was carrying it out it appeared to be ineffective. The Apostle Paul took the same view of his ministry (1 Corinthians 4:1-4).

Re-read 49:5-7. A fuller picture of the Lord's plans for His Servant comes into view in this section.

10. a. What wider commission is given to the Servant in verses 5-6? What will be its result? (Compare Ephesians 2:11-18.)
 - b. Romans 11 provides additional insight into the unity of God's sovereign plan for Jews and Gentiles. Take a few minutes to read this chapter. How does this section enhance your understanding of Isaiah's prophecies?

11. In Isaiah 49:7 two aspects of the Servant's ministry are highlighted. How are they characterized? In what general time periods might they occur?

Read and reflect on verses 8-12. It is beautiful to imagine Jesus comforting and strengthening His soul with these promises as He anticipated and endured the ordeal of the cross. He could know, based on the promise of verse 8, that the LORD would hear, help, and preserve Him.

Isaiah now announced more about the work of the Servant. In an immediate sense, these verses wonderfully describe the sustaining of the exiles during their return from Babylon to Judah, through the unseen hand of the Messiah. *Even before His incarnation, the Messiah brings blessings to His people!* In the larger sense it speaks of the mercy and provision of the Servant in enabling people around the world to return to God. (These, of course, are metaphors for the way in which God goes before and provides for His people as they walk through difficulties.)

12. In verse 8 what does it mean that the Servant Himself will be a "covenant" for the people? (See also Matthew 26:26-29 and Isaiah 42:6.)

Part of the salvation provided by the Servant will be the liberation of captives—physical and spiritual (v. 9). (Compare Isaiah 61:1-4; John 8:31-36; Galatians 5:1.)

13. How have you experienced the liberating ministry of the Servant in your life?

When we commit our life to Jesus Christ without reservation, then we can meet our mountains of difficulty with confidence in Jesus. If we do that, the mountains between us and God's land of blessing become the way into it.

14. Can you share a personal example of this? (Either a current "mountain of difficulty," or a past mountain in your life that became a road of blessing.)

15. Isaiah concluded this section by calling on the whole created universe to rejoice! For what are they rejoicing? Pause and join them in their adoring praise of the Lord God!

Read 49:14-26. Note Israel's response to what has been said and God's renewed promise of His tender love and care. (*"I can no more forget you than a nursing mother can forget the child she nurses; your name is written indelibly on my hands; I see your walls constantly before my eyes".*) The last section of the chapter turns from emphasizing the children who will return, to the oppressors who will be destroyed. Mark the verses you would like to return to for further study.

16. a. In summing up this section, what does the Lord say is the ultimate purpose of His dealings with Judah and their oppressors (v. 26b)?

b. How has this passage enlarged and expanded that truth for you?

17. Review your lesson and reflect on the Servant's far-reaching ministry. Are there any specific ways that you could act on the deliverance Jesus wrought, or the example He has set? If so, what one or two aspects would you like to concentrate on for the near future?

18. What prayer or action can you pursue to apply this truth?

Close by taking a few minutes to thank Jesus for fulfilling Isaiah's prophecies in your life!