



FOCUS VERSES

Isaiah 9:6-7

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

LESSON TEXT

Isaiah 53

1 Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?

2 For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.

8 He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.

9 And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

11 He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

12 Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.



FOCUS THOUGHT

Isaiah foresaw Christ as a suffering servant who would bring comfort, hope, and restoration to Israel and would be the light of salvation to the Gentiles.



CULTURE CONNECTION

The Seeds of Hope

The Norwegian government has proactively attempted to save the world from famine by collecting seeds throughout the world and storing them in the Svalbard Global Seed Vault, located on one of the Svalbard Islands in the Arctic Ocean. Also known as the “Doomsday Vault,” this storage facility would serve as a lifeline to humanity in the event of widespread war, natural disaster, or botanical calamity. Recently, the Norwegians opened the vault due to the civil war in Syria (www.cnn.com/2015/10/19/Europe/Svalbard-global-seed-vault-syria/index.html).

The withdrawal from the seed bank reveals the necessity of preserving life on a planet filled with the chaos of erratic weather patterns and quickly spreading disease. Sadly, the latest extraction from the bank came not

from an unpredictable natural crisis, but from those who chose to sow the seeds of their own destruction and others through a potentially preventable war.

While resilient in the face of natural disaster, humans often serve as the instruments of their own demise. Given time, communities can bounce back from a flood or a tornado. However, the horrors of war leave lasting devastation and lingering problems.

Thankfully, the Lord has sown the seeds of hope in our hearts. When we face unforeseen circumstances, God is there to pick us up and help us grow again. When we war within our own spirits or with others, God is there to speak peace into our hearts. We can let the seeds of hope take root by removing the weeds of hatred, strife, and envy.

OUTLINE

I. THE TWO BOOKS

- A. Book of Judgment (Isaiah 1–39)
- B. Book of Comfort (Isaiah 40–66)

II. THE TWO KINGS

- A. Sennacherib
- B. Hezekiah

III. THE TWO SERVANTS

- A. Cyrus
- B. Christ

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Isaiah held a unique position in the kingdom of Judah because he served as a prophet in the royal court during the reigns of Uzziah (Azariah), Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Although other prophets, particularly in the northern kingdom of Israel, found themselves out of favor with the monarchy, Isaiah had direct access to the king. The kings Isaiah counseled needed his insights because the land of Judah faced trouble on multiple fronts. All the kings dreaded the Assyrian war

machine to the east that would eventually march toward world dominance. Judah had more localized problems created by the Assyrians. During the reign of King Ahaz, Judah faced the combined might of the northern kingdom of Israel (Ephraim) and Syria.

These nations attempted to force Judah to join their coalition to fight against the Assyrians. Led by the Lord, Isaiah instructed King Ahaz not to partake in this alliance. When Judah refused their terms, the Syrians and the Ephraimites went to battle with the goal of forcing them to comply. In the Syro-Ephraimite War, Judah faced incredible odds. Instead of trusting in the Lord, Ahaz sought help from the Assyrians, an act that would continue to place the kingdom in jeopardy for years to come and particularly plague Hezekiah.

Ahaz should have trusted in the Lord. Like his contemporary Hosea, Isaiah’s name derives from the Hebrew word meaning “salvation.” Isaiah continually told the kings of Judah not to rely on anyone but the Lord. They should not attempt to appease the

Assyrians, join the Syro-Ephraimite alliance, or seek help from Egypt.

Isaiah's call required him to hold fast to his message even as kings like Ahaz wavered in heeding his advice. Isaiah, however, knew that God had strategically placed him in the royal court to deliver his prophecies. According to Jewish tradition, Isaiah was the cousin of King Uzziah. However, Isaiah's official call happened the year that King Uzziah died. Isaiah may have felt down because of his cousin's death. Perhaps he also feared what God would ask him to do.

The Lord gave Isaiah a heavenly vision in which the prophet expressed his unworthiness even though he was willing to answer the prophetic call. He felt unworthy because he was a man of unclean lips, but God accepted his answer of "Here I am" and cleansed his lips with one of the coals from the altar. Isaiah's vision gave him the strength to advise the kings of Judah to continually trust in God's salvation instead of relying on human strategies and pacts.

His message of salvation can clearly be seen in Isaiah 12:2: "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation." Just as the names Isaiah and Hosea come from the Hebrew word for "salvation," so does the name *Yeshua* (Jesus). In Isaiah 12:2, the prophet identified the Lord God as Jesus because he said the Lord JEHOVAH has become my salvation (*Yeshua*), thereby identifying Jesus as the one true God. Isaiah's one-God message can be seen throughout the book (42:8; 43:9–13; 44:8; 45:5–6, 14, 18, 21–22; 46:9). Isaiah's proclamations of salvation not only spoke to the kings of his day but to us as well. The Book of Isaiah offers many prophecies concerning the coming of Jesus and the salvation made available to humanity.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. THE TWO BOOKS

A. Book of Judgment (Isaiah 1–39)

Isaiah's message of salvation began with the fierce reality of the sure judgment that comes from disobedience. In fact, some

scholars refer to chapters 1–39 as the Book of Judgment. God condemned Judah, Israel, and even the entire world.

Rebuke. Isaiah began his court case against the offending parties by calling Heaven and Earth to be witnesses. Such lawsuits were common among the prophets. For example, the Lord indicted the Israelites in Hosea 4:1 by noting that He had a controversy against them. Similarly, the Lord called the mountains and foundations of Earth to hear the charges against His people in Micah 6:2.

In chapter 1, Isaiah condemned Judah for its rebellion. The sin of the people was egregious because even animals like the ox and the donkey listened to their master while Judah would not hear the word of the Lord.

Isaiah also rebuked the northern kingdom of Israel. (See Isaiah 9:8–10:4.) That kingdom served as a powerful image of what happens when God's people break His covenant. Israel fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC. The destruction of the land and the deportation of the people served as a warning to Judah.

In spite of their might, the Assyrians failed to escape the judgment of God. Their plan to attack Jerusalem angered the Lord, and He assured their destruction. They eventually fell to the Babylonians.

Isaiah 24 began what is known as the "Isaiah Apocalypse." The prophet spoke about natural disasters and devastation. In agreement with the prophet Amos (5:18–20), Isaiah prophesied of the powerlessness to escape the coming judgment.

Promises. In the midst of all the prophesied calamities, God gave some promises to the remnant. If God had not left this remnant, the people would have been utterly annihilated. Paul quoted Isaiah 1:9 in Romans 9:27–30 to show that the Lord's work would need to be short on the earth, or not even a remnant would be saved.

In Isaiah 2:1–5, Isaiah envisioned an era of peace that we in the modern world still hope for today. Both Isaiah and Micah (4:1–3) prophesied of a time when armies and their soldiers would "beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks." Today we might pray that our missile silos be used to store grain instead of weapons of mass destruction.

Such peace will not come without the Branch, the Messiah. The Messiah will save Jerusalem and wash away its filth. The people will find refuge in the shade provided by the Tabernacle. They will be safe from the heat and the rain.

B. Book of Comfort (Isaiah 40–66)

Although God's promises are mixed with punishment, chapters 40–66 are known as the Book of Comfort. These passages speak of the refuge and restoration for the people of God. They would need this respite because they would have to face the Exile. Even though the kingdom of Judah survived the Assyrian onslaught, their sins would ultimately lead to Babylonian captivity.

But God refused to give up on His people. In fact, Isaiah told of the Lord's plan to repopulate Zion, comfort His people, and restore true worship. Besieged Zion will become a place of peace, prosperity, and glory. The Lord's favor will once again shine down on His people.

Deliverance. The salvation of the people would come when Babylon lost its position as the major world power. The fear brought by the Assyrians and the Exile implemented by the Babylonians would be replaced with the hope for a glorious future as the Persians rose to power. The Persian victory would end not only the Babylonian domination but also the Exile. God's people would have the opportunity to return home.

Although the people might lose faith during the Exile, Isaiah advised them to realize that God controls everything. Even though their situation would not make sense from a human perspective, the Lord promised to provide strength to those who felt faint. Isaiah had encouraging words for them:

"Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall:

but they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" (Isaiah 40:28–31).

The Babylonians would not partake of God's mercy; God would pour out His judgment upon them. Although God used them to punish Judah, they exceeded the mandates of the Lord by refusing to be merciful to the people of God.

In spite of the strength for the exiles and the assured fall of Babylon, the people of God needed to turn away from false worship and have the right motivations for their spiritual activities. Isaiah warned them to fast for the right reasons.

Restoration. The blessings of God would result in a complete reversal of fortune for Judah. Desolation would turn to fullness. Fear and anxiety would be replaced with comfort. The people would realize God was powerful enough to take them to the brink of destruction, lead them into Exile, and then miraculously restore them.

Jerusalem would once again teem with life. The Lord would call on the heavens to sing and the earth to be joyful. Even the mountains were to join the song.

Those whose lives God preserved through many trials would no longer worry or be afflicted. In fact, the Lord planned to make Zion like Eden. The people would be confident in the knowledge they could always rely on the Lord because God's salvation is everlasting. (See Isaiah 51:6.)

God promised to restore true worship by the people fasting with the proper motives. (See Isaiah 58.) The Lord called on them to turn their attention to those who need food and clothing because the Lord wanted to help the poor and the oppressed. When the people started worshiping appropriately, the Lord promised to give them light and sustenance. Most importantly, they would be completely restored.

Chapters 60 and 62 prophesy of Zion's peace, prosperity, and glory. Everything in Jerusalem would be wonderful. The Gentiles who once attacked them, exiled them, and

attempted to destroy them would see the light of salvation.

Isaiah 61 speaks of the Lord's favor. Mourning, ashes, and the spirit of heaviness would be replaced with beauty, joy, and the garment of praise. Everything would be restored, and the strangers in the land would serve the Lord's people. Because the people of God suffered so greatly, the Lord promised they would receive double the reward.

II. THE TWO KINGS

A. Sennacherib

Before God gave this reward, Judah came face to face with the destructive power of the Assyrians. Isaiah 36–39, which is nearly identical to II Kings 18:13–20:10, records the Assyrian attack on Jerusalem and the victory God brought. Although Sennacherib, king of the Assyrians, felt certain he would capture Jerusalem, God miraculously saved King Hezekiah and Judah.

The Assyrians had destroyed cities in Judah such as Lachish, a site that provides archeological evidence of the utter destruction brought by the Assyrians. After this victory, they set their sights on Jerusalem, hoping to obliterate it. (See Isaiah 36.)

Just as he had counseled King Ahaz to rely on the Lord, Isaiah advised Hezekiah to put his trust in God. Although Jerusalem seemingly faced certain doom, the Lord would be the salvation of Israel. (See Isaiah 37:5–7.)

B. Hezekiah

Hezekiah is regarded as one of the good kings in the Bible. However, the king had rebelled against the Assyrians. Such an act was foolish, and many of the cities in his kingdom, such as Lachish, paid the price. However, the blame for his alliance with Assyria may be placed on King Ahaz's original alliance with the Assyrians—a pact Isaiah told him not to make.

Nevertheless Hezekiah humbled himself and sought the Lord. (See Isaiah 37:14–20.) He prayed that the Lord would hear his desperate plea for help. He did not want glory for himself. Instead, he prayed “that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the LORD, even thou only” (Isaiah 37:20).

God responded to Hezekiah's prayer. (See Isaiah 37.) The Assyrians had a massive, powerful army, but God defended the city. The angel of the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. Sennacherib returned home, only to be assassinated by his sons. Meanwhile, thanks to the salvation of the Lord, Hezekiah lived and continued to reign.

III. THE TWO SERVANTS

A. Cyrus

Some have seen Hezekiah as a messianic figure because he sat on the throne of Judah and appeared in Jesus' family tree. Oddly enough, the Bible shows that a king did not need such a pedigree to be referred to as a messiah. Isaiah prophesied that Cyrus, the Persian king, would deliver the people of God as a messiah. Isaiah 45:1 refers to Cyrus as anointed. *Messiah* means “the anointed one.”

Isaiah's prophecies concerning Cyrus (Isaiah 44:24–45:3; 48:14). Isaiah prophesied King Cyrus would arise, defeat the Babylonians, and allow the exiles to return to Jerusalem. Isaiah 45 speaks of the Lord revealing himself to Cyrus and giving the king victory over his enemies. As a result, this messianic figure would have a huge role in rebuilding Israel.

Cyrus's acts in the restoration of Israel (II Chronicles 36:22–23; Ezra 1:1–4). Cyrus had a policy that showed respect to the religions of his empire. Therefore he allowed Solomon's Temple to be rebuilt. He permitted the exiles to return home to restore their lands. Jewish versions of Scripture place II Chronicles as the last book because the text features Cyrus's command for the Jews to return home—a call that the nation of Israel still makes to Jews scattered throughout the world.

B. Christ

If a Persian king could be a messianic figure and bring restoration to Israel, then the true Messiah from the house of David could do so much more for the people of God. Many Jews thought Jesus would be a conquering king like Cyrus, but Jesus humbled Himself. This Messiah came to be a servant.

Isaiah's description of Christ as servant (Isaiah 49:50; 52:13–53:12). Isaiah is the most quoted writer in the New Testament, and for good reason. Isaiah foretold of Jesus' Advent (Isaiah 40:3–5) and the virgin birth (Isaiah 7:14). Isaiah prophesied of Jesus' Galilean ministry (Isaiah 9:1–2), His deity, and the eternity of His throne (Isaiah 9:6–7) as well as His sufferings (Isaiah 53).

The prophet spoke of the events surrounding His death, noting that Jesus died with the wicked (Isaiah 53:9) and was buried with the rich (Isaiah 53:9). Isaiah even saw His reign of might and gentleness (Isaiah 40:10–11), His reign of righteousness and blessings (Isaiah 32:1–8; 61:1–3), His justice and kindness (Isaiah 42:3–4, 7), His rule over Gentiles (Isaiah 2:2–3; 42:1, 6; 49:6; 55:4–5; 56:6; 60:3–5), and His vast influence (Isaiah 49:7, 23).

Christ the servant (Mark 10:44–45). Although Jesus humbled Himself to be a servant, He still had the goal of restoring Israel. He wanted to restore His people spiritually. He redeemed them—not by defeating the Romans, but by offering forgiveness of sin.

By choosing to be a servant, Jesus chose to suffer. Yet He was exalted far above His servant status (Isaiah 52:13). He justified many by bearing their iniquities (Isaiah 53:11). He was a model of supreme obedience by being obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:7–8).

Through obedience the suffering servant became the Savior of all humanity. Many did not recognize Jesus' deity (Isaiah 45:15). Soon, however, all flesh will know He is the Savior (Isaiah 49:26; 60:16; Luke 2:11; John 4:42; I Timothy 4:10).

The one who suffered and died for the sins of humanity stooped low by manifesting

Himself in flesh. Yet in doing so, the Lord elevated Himself in the eyes of His people. He was and is “the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God” (I Timothy 1:17).

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Every day Americans hold money that proclaims “In God We Trust.” We may even see bumper stickers and plaques that proclaim this message. Yet we must ask ourselves if we are relying on God. In the age of reason, are we trusting in the Lord with all our hearts or simply leaning to our own understanding?

When things are going well, we have no problem trusting in the Lord. However, when troubles are headed our way, we may begin strategizing ways to avoid our problems. We might call a friend, a banker, or even a lawyer to deal with our tribulations. These alliances may make sense, but have we demonstrated trust in the Lord if we have not first gone to Him with our needs?

The kings of Judah had every right to be afraid of the Assyrians. Logic was on their side when they considered joining the Syro-Ephraimite alliance or when they sought help from the Egyptians. Nevertheless God had other plans. Not only did He deliver the kingdom of Judah from the Assyrians, but later He took Judah through destruction and exile and restored it.

The next time we find ourselves looking for an escape hatch, an emergency exit, or a hero, we need to pause and put our trust in God. We need to pour out our hearts to God in prayer and explain the situation to the Lord just as Hezekiah did when he faced trouble. Soon our fears will be replaced with joy, and anxiety will turn to confidence. ■

REFLECTIONS

- Today's lesson talked about trusting in the Lord. If time allows, tell of a time when you trusted in the Lord and He met your needs.
- Discuss the fact that we often have many options and strategies to employ when we face difficulties. How can we learn to put our trust in God before seeking help elsewhere?
 - In today's lesson, Isaiah told two kings to trust in the Lord. Christians often tell each other to trust in the Lord. How do we keep the phrase “trust in God” from sounding like a cliché?
 - Discuss the fact that Jesus came to be a suffering servant. How did He fail to meet some people's expectations for being the Messiah, and how did He ultimately exceed them?