

A Rebel's Servant

Isaiah 48-49

Main Idea

The Lord redirects His attention to the Israelites and He exposes their hypocrisy and yet also affirms that He will work amongst them for His glory by the use of the “true Israel.”

Overview

Brass Headed Rebels, as Expected (Isaiah 48.1-11)

- Israel took the name of God but it wasn't real (1-2)
- God knew that the House of Jacob would be obstinate like this (3-5)
 - It was declared that they would be obstinate beforehand (Deut. 21.21-29)(5)
 - So that it would be clear that God was in control not idols (5b)
- The Lord was doing a new thing they didn't know about yet (6-8)
- He was going to do this for His namesake (9-11)

Delivered to be Delivered (48.12-22)

- God is above all things and is therefore able to bring about all good things (12-13)
- Gods people are assembled to hear about this new thing that is the destruction of Babylon by Cyrus (14-16)
 - The “him” or “he” of these verses refers to Cyrus, the one that would engineer the destruction of Babylon (see Isaiah 44.28, etc.)
 - The Lord loves Cyrus (14)
 - The Lord allows him to prosper in his task in taking down the Babylonians (15)
- The Lord teaches His people so that they would profit (17-19)
- The people are to leave Babylon w/ a shout of joy to the earth (20-22)
 - The Lord is the Redeemer of these events (22)
 - He makes provision for them (21)
 - For those that do not exult in the Redeemer, they have no peace (22)
 - This deliverance points to the greater deliverance consummated in the Gospel (Ezra/Nehemiah write to document the disappointment of the initial return so as to anticipate a greater deliverance)

The Servant of Servants (49.1-13)

- Israel, the true Servant was being formed to bring back Jacob and succeed in the mission of glory (1-7)
 - This Servant points to Christ who fulfilled the Law and therein glorified the Lord unlike the nation of Israel
 - The modifiers in vs. 3 are in the Singular form, therefore indicating that this “Israel” is not a people, but a person
 - It would make no sense that the nation of Israel would bring the nation of Israel back, especially when the Lord has rehearsed their hypocrisy and disobedience (5, 6a)
- This Servant is “honored” and strengthened by God (5)
 - Simeon (Luke 2.32, echoing Is. 42.6) along with Paul and company seem to read verse 6 to point to Christ and the fruit of His people (Acts 13.47)
- Christ (Second Servant) will reconcile rebels to the Lord (5-6)
- Christ will be and enable rebels to light to the nations (6)
 - Cited Acts 13.47
- Though despised yet He will be exalted (7)
 - This is due to the Lord who is faithful (7)

- He chose “you” the Second Servant, Christ (7)
- This suffering Servant will both be a Covenant & enable a covenant people (servants) to come w/ ease from all over the world in order to sing for joy in the Lord’s comfort & compassion (8-13)
 - Vs. 8: Cited 2 Cor. 6.2
 - Vs. 10: Cited Rev. 7.16
- God will not forget the nation of Israel as He moves to work amongst the nations for His glory (14-26)
 - Note vs. 23, along with the entire book, as the modifier of those He intends to care for
 - There is not a cart blanch care for the nation of Israel

Questions

Discussion Starter: What is the setting/purpose of Isaiah? Broadly speaking, what have we seen so far in the first 47 chapters?

1. Read 48.1-11. Use the language of Scripture to describe how the Lord sees the people of Israel. Go to the New Testament and pull from some verses that describe us before Christ (Romans 3.10-18, Ephesians 2.1-3, etc.). Why would the Lord want us to understand what we are like without Him?
2. How does this truth level any pride of self-righteousness in us? How does it free us up and cause joy in us? How does the Lord’s glory play into this (vss. 9-11)?

Take time to draw out the depravity of the Israelites AND our own depravity. Get the group to think about how this both levels pride (e.g. we can’t earn salvation; apart from Christ, we’re not as holy as we think, etc.) and how it encourages us (e.g. we are not defined by our failures in Christ; in Christ we can obey the Father, etc.).

3. Read 48.12-22. Noting the success of the Babylonian take down (vs. 15) by Cyrus (Isaiah 44.28) there will be a delivery/redemption of the Israelites (vss. 20-22). What does the Lord want them to understand as a result of these events? (see vs. 20-22) What might we learn in terms of how we should respond in the greater Redemption?
4. In verses 18-19, how does the Lord understand His commandments to us? What does this do for you? Why is it important to remember God’s commands bring peace?

Get the group to think about all we can learn about the Lord in this passage. We see God’s sovereignty in using a pagan ruler to accomplish his purposes. Yet we see the grace of the Lord in redeeming Israelites. Clearly, Isaiah wants us to know “The Lord is the Redeemer – and not anything/anybody else!”

When it comes to the commands of God it’s always good to think about why they are for our good. To that end, get the group to think about how God’s commands bring peace and joy.

5. Read Chapter 49:1-13. How does Christ fulfill vss. 1-7? What is the benefit for us?
6. What does it mean to be a Light for the nations? How are we that light?

Walk through this passage discussing how it points to Jesus Christ. See ESV Commentary below to help.

In Acts 13:47, Paul quotes Is 49/42 to say that the church is a light to the nations. This points to our union with Christ (cf. Gal 2:20). What’s true of Christ is true of his people. Christ shines through us as we take the message of Light (the gospel) to the nations.

ESV Study Bible Commentary:

Isa. 49:2 God alone prepared and equipped the servant. my mouth like a sharp sword. Unlike Cyrus, the servant conquers by the truth of his word (cf. 11:4; Rev. 1:16; 19:15, 21). The servant is a match for enemies both near and far (“sword,” arrow).

Isa. 49:4 The servant confesses his sense of failure due to Israel's poor response (cf. v. 7; 53:1). yet. The servant does not turn from God in cynical unbelief; he accepts emotional suffering and frustrating toil with confidence that God will reward him.

Isa. 49:5–6 It is too light a thing. It is too small a task to redeem only the tribes of Jacob (ethnic Israel). It is clear here that the servant, though he embodies Israel (v. 3), is nevertheless distinct from Israel, and has a calling to serve Israel and beyond. Far from failing, the servant is declared by God to be the only hope of the world. a light for the nations. See note on 42:6–7. that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth. A clear statement of salvation's worldwide scope, a theme that Acts develops by quoting this text (see Acts 1:8; 13:47).

Isa. 49:7 Unlike the kings of this world, the servant of the Lord conquers by his sufferings (cf. 50:6; 52:14–15). because of the Lord. The triumph of the servant's mission is not due to any facile human idealism but to the purpose of God alone (cf. 9:7).

Isa. 49:8–12 The servant's faith is vindicated at the time of God's choosing. The day of salvation is now, as the gospel is being offered (as cited in 2 Cor. 6:2). a covenant to the people. See note on Isa. 42:6–7

Isa. 42:6–7 The servant is a covenant for the people (cf. 49:8), i.e., he represents the people in God's covenant. He will become a light for the nations (cf. 49:6), bringing the knowledge of God to them; this probably lies behind Jesus' saying in John 8:12. to open the eyes ... to bring out. This is the purpose of God's grace for his people, using liberation from Babylonian exile as an image for spiritual liberation.

7. In 49:14 the Israelites are concerned the Lord will forget them. How does the Lord respond? What does he promise Israel? What does this tell us about the character of the Lord? How does this comfort and/or encourage you?

While these promises are made especially to the Jews, they show us the compassionate character of God. He will not forget Israelites who wait upon him. And the same is true for us. In Christ, there is nothing we can do to make God forget us. Get the group to think about the lavish nature of God's grace.

Accountability: Are there areas that your faith is “not in truth or right”? How are you encouraged by Christ, the Servant of Servants?