

To Serve and To Save



SABBATH—MAY 22

HOLES AND HOLINESS. In northern Iraq, there is an old Christian monastery.¹ Near the monastery are small holes in the ground. Hermits² stayed in these holes for many years without coming out. They stayed in these holes so they could better focus on God.

In the poor districts of Calcutta, India, Mother Teresa had a different method of focusing on God. She said, “Jesus comes to meet us. To welcome Him, let us go to meet Him. He comes to us in hungry people, naked people, lonely people, the alcoholic person, the person addicted to drugs, the prostitute,³ the street beggars. . . . If we refuse to accept any of these people, if we do not go out to meet them, we refuse to accept Jesus Himself.”—Adapted from Mother Teresa: *In My Own Words*, compiled by Jose Luis Gonzalez-Balado (New York: Gramercy Books, 1996), p. 29.

Isaiah spoke of a servant of the Lord with almost the same mission as Mother Teresa: “A bruised reed⁴ he will not break, and a smoldering wick⁵ he will not snuff out . . . to open eyes that are blind, to free captives [prisoners] from prison and to release from the dungeon [prison] those [people] who sit in darkness” (Isaiah 42:3, 7, NIV).

This week we will learn about who this Servant is and what He does.

A LOOK AT THIS WEEK’S LESSON: Where do we see Jesus in Isaiah’s prophecies? Why is Cyrus called a “Messiah”? How are the first and second comings of Jesus connected in some of these prophecies? What does Isaiah teach us about God’s power to predict⁶ the future?

¹monastery—a place where monks live.

²hermits—monks who stay alone to think all the time about God.

³prostitute—a person who earns a living by taking money for sex.

⁴a bruised reed—a symbol for a person who is weak and tired.

⁵a smoldering wick—a symbol for a person who is weak and tired.

⁶predict—say what will happen in the future.

MEMORY VERSE: “Here is my [God’s] servant, whom I [God] strengthen, the one I have chosen, with whom I am pleased. I have filled him with my spirit, and he will bring justice to every nation” (Isaiah 42:1, TEV).

SUNDAY—MAY 23

SERVANT NATION (Isaiah 41).

In Isaiah 41:8, God speaks of “Israel, my servant,” and in Isaiah 42:1, He introduces “my [God’s] servant.” Who is this servant?

Is this servant Israel/Jacob, the ancestor of the Israelites? Is this servant the nation of Israel? Or is he the Messiah named in the New Testament as Jesus?

There are two servants of God throughout Isaiah 41–53. One servant is named “Israel” or “Jacob” (Isaiah 41:1, 2, 21; Isaiah 45:4; Isaiah 48:20). Because God addresses Israel/Jacob in the present, it is clear that Israel/Jacob represents the nation that came down from Jacob. This fact is supported when the Lord’s “servant Jacob” is freed at the time when the servant leaves Babylon (Isaiah 48:20).

In other examples such as Isaiah 42:1, Isaiah 50:10, Isaiah 52:13, and Isaiah 53:11, God’s servant is not named. When he is first named in Isaiah 42:1, he is not known at first. But Isaiah tells more about him later. Later, it becomes clear that this servant is a person who restores⁷ the people of Jacob/Israel to God (Isaiah 49:5, 6) and dies as a sacrifice for sinners (Isaiah 52:13–53:12;

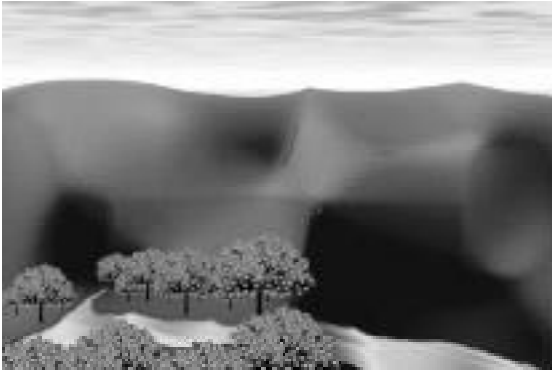
Isaiah 49:5, 6). Therefore, this servant cannot be the same as the nation of Israel. So it is clear that Isaiah speaks of two servants of God. One servant is the nation and the other servant is a person.

What is the work of the servant nation? Israel 41:8-20.

God promises Israel that the nation is still the servant of the Lord: “I [God] did not reject [refuse] you [the nation], but chose you” (Isaiah 41:9, TEV). Then God gives to Israel one of the most wonderful promises in the Bible: “Do not be afraid—I [God] am with you [Israel]! I am your God—let nothing terrify [scare] you! I will make you strong and help you; I will protect you and save you” (Isaiah 41:10). Here and in the following verses one of the basic things Israel must do is trust God to save them. (King Ahaz failed to do this!) Israel was not to trust in other gods and their images (idols) as other nations around them did (Isaiah 41:7, 21-24, 28, 29).

Read Isaiah 41:14. Here, God calls Israel a worm (KJV). What point was He making? What should this teach us about our need to depend totally upon God?

⁷restores—making something as it was in the beginning.

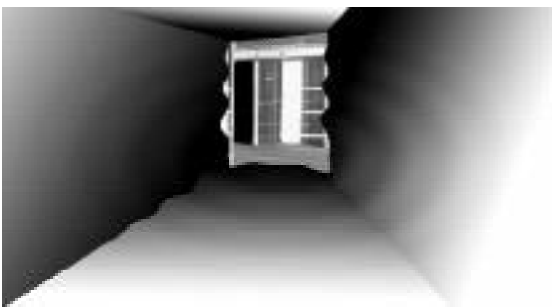


“I will make rivers flow among the barren hills and springs of water run in the valleys” (Isaiah 40:12,TEV).

MONDAY—MAY 24

**THE UNNAMED SERVANT
(Isaiah 42:1-7).**

What is the work and character of God’s unnamed servant, whom God chooses and on whom He puts His Holy Spirit? Isaiah 42:1-7.



God’s servant sets free those people “who sit in dark prisons” (Isaiah 42:7,TEV).

Choose the best answer or combination of answers:

1. This servant provides justice for the nations.
2. He finishes his goals quietly and gently, but successfully.
3. This servant is a teacher.
4. He serves as a covenant⁸ between God and the people.
5. This servant gives light (understanding) and hope by healing blindness and freeing prisoners.
6. This servant does all of the above.

How is the work and character of this servant the same as the work of the “shoot from the stump of Jesse” (Isaiah 11)?

As in Isaiah 42, the ruler from David’s family works with God. The ruler gives justice and salvation for suffering people. He is also wise and knows about God. We learned that this “shoot” and “root” of Jesse is the Messiah, the Child of Isaiah 9:6, 7. He is the One who also brings “peace for the throne of David and his kingdom” with “justice and with righteousness [holiness]” (Isaiah 9:7). The Servant in Isaiah 42 is the Messiah Jesus.

How does the New Testament recognize the Servant of Isaiah 42:1-7? Matthew 12:15-21.

Matthew 12 quotes from Isaiah 42 and points to the quiet healing ministry (work) of Jesus, God’s beloved Son (Matthew 3:16, 17; Matthew 17:5; Isaiah

⁸covenant—an agreement between God and His people.

42:1). His ministry reestablishes God's covenant connection with His people (Isaiah 42:6; Daniel 9:27).

Jesus and His disciples gained justice for people by (1) freeing them from suffering, (2) teaching them about God, and (3) saving them from evil spirits (Luke 10:19). Then Jesus died to make the "new covenant" legal (Matthew 26:28). He also did this to gain justice for the world by throwing out Satan, who had stolen the position of "ruler of this world" (John 12:31-33).

As you read Isaiah 42:1-4 again, think about the life of Jesus. What special parts of His character and work fulfilled these verses? What lessons can we learn about how we should be ministering to (helping) other people?

TUESDAY—MAY 25

PERSIAN⁹ "MESSIAH" (Isaiah 44:26–45:6).

What shocking prophecy appears in Isaiah 44:26–45:6?

Isaiah's ministry (work) lasted from about 745 B.C. to about 685 B.C. Isaiah pointed to a conqueror from the east and from the north (Isaiah 41:2, 3, 25). He also suggested that this conqueror was to be good news for Jerusalem (Isaiah 41:27). Then he correctly prophesied Cyrus by name and described

Cyrus's activities (work). Cyrus did come from north and east of Babylon and conquered it in 539 B.C. Cyrus did serve God by freeing the Jews from Babylon. And Cyrus did authorize¹⁰ the Jews to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem (read Ezra 1).

One hundred and forty six years had passed from the time of Isaiah's death to the fall of Babylon. This means that Isaiah told this prophecy 150 years before it was fulfilled. It would be the same as George Washington predicting¹¹ that a man named General Dwight Eisenhower would help free Europe in 1945 during World War II!

The work of Cyrus is well supported by different historical records, including Babylonian writings, Cyrus's own report in the "Cyrus Cylinder," and the Bible (2 Chronicles 36:22, 23; Daniel 5; Daniel 6:28; Daniel 10:1; Ezra 1). These historical records make it impossible to question (doubt) Isaiah's prophecy. These historical records support the faith of the people who believe that true prophets receive their messages from God. God Himself is the One who knows the future.

Why does God call Cyrus His "anointed [chosen]" (Isaiah 45:1)?

The Hebrew word for "anointed" here is the Hebrew word for "Messiah." In the Old Testament, this word could mean an anointed high priest (Leviticus 4:3, 5, 16; Leviticus 6:22), an anointed (blessed) Israelite king (1 Samuel 16:6;

⁹Persian—from the country of Persia.

¹⁰authorize—to give legal power to.

¹¹predicting—saying what will happen in the future.

1 Samuel 24:6, 10; 2 Samuel 22:51), or the Messiah, a future king and savior from David's family (Psalm 2:2; Daniel 9:25, 26). From Isaiah's way of thinking, Cyrus was a future king sent by God to deliver His people. But Cyrus was an unusual messiah because he was not from Israel. Cyrus would do some things that the real Messiah would do, such as defeat God's enemies and set His people free. But Cyrus could not be the same as the Messiah, because he was not from David's family.

God's prophesying about Cyrus proves He is God by showing that He alone knows the future (Isaiah 41:4, 21-23, 26-28; Isaiah 44:26). God also reached out to Cyrus: "I [God] will give you treasures from dark, secret places; then you will know that I am the Lord and that the God of Israel has called you by name" (Isaiah 45:3, TEV).

Think about some other Bible prophecies that have been fulfilled. How does the fulfillment of these prophecies give us hope?

WEDNESDAY—MAY 26

HOPE IN ADVANCE (Isaiah 39; Isaiah 40).

Isaiah's prophecy about Cyrus's name bothers people who do not believe that prophets receive messages from God. To deal with this, they believe there was a "second Isaiah." They think that

this "second Isaiah" lived during the time of Cyrus and wrote Isaiah 40–46.

But there is no historical proof for a "second Isaiah." If he did live, it would be strange for the Bible not to name him, because his message is very important and his writing style is beautiful. Not even the oldest of Bible writings, the Isaiah scroll from Qumran, has any break between Isaiah 39 and Isaiah 40 that shows a change in writing style.¹² A change in writing style could mean a different person was writing.

Isaiah's basic message is the same throughout his book: Trust the true God. Trust His Son, who is the Savior. Bible scholars¹³ are correct in pointing to the change of focus from the Assyrian period in Isaiah 1–39 to the Babylonian period after Isaiah 40. But we have found that Isaiah 13, 14, and Isaiah 39 already warn of Babylon. Isaiah 1–39 points to judgment and Isaiah 40–46 points to consolation (peace and comfort). But in the earlier chapters of Isaiah, we see many examples of God's comfort and hope. And later verses such as Isaiah 42:18-25, Isaiah 43:22-28, and Isaiah 48:1-11 speak of God's judgments on Judah for forgetting Him. In fact, Isaiah's prophecies of future comfort suggest suffering too.

Judah did face terrible trouble because of their sins. But some people among them did not give up hope. They held tightly to God's promises, such as the promises found in Leviticus 26:40-45. What hope can you find in these verses?

¹²writing style—how a person writes; the words she or he uses; the length of sentences she or he writes; et cetera.

¹³scholars—people who earn a living by studying one particular subject.

What spiritual principle¹⁴ do you see at work in these verses? How can the same principle work in our own lives?

THURSDAY—MAY 27

**A FEELING AND SUFFERING
SERVANT (Isaiah 49:1-12).**

Who is God's Servant in Isaiah 49:1-12?

God calls and names this Servant before He is born. God makes His mouth like a sword. And God will be glorified in Him. God uses this Servant to bring the nation of Israel back to Himself. The Servant is to be a light of salvation to all the world. He is to be a covenant. And He is to free prisoners. There is plenty of connection between Isaiah 49:1-12 and Isaiah 42. Isaiah 42 points to the Servant as the Messiah. The New Testament finds the Servant's character traits in both Jesus' first and second comings: Matthew 1:21; Revelation 1:16; Revelation 2:16; Revelation 19:15; John 17:1-5; John 8:12; John 9:5.

If this Servant is the Messiah, why does God call Him "Israel" in Isaiah 49:3?

Earlier this week we learned that in this part of Isaiah, God's servant "Israel/Jacob" points to the nation of Israel. But in Isaiah 49:1-12, the name

"Israel" clearly points to *one* Servant who brings the nation back to God (Isaiah 49:5). This Servant has become the perfect example of the nation.

What new important information appears in Isaiah 49:4, 7?

Here is the first look at the difficulty of the servant's work. He cries, "I have worked, but how hopeless it [my work] is! I have used up my strength, but have accomplished [done] nothing" (Isaiah 49:4, TEV). This repeats an idea in Daniel 9:26: "An anointed [chosen] one shall be cut off [killed] and have nothing." But the servant holds tightly to faith: "Yet I can trust the Lord to defend my cause; he will reward me for what I do" (Isaiah 49:4, TEV). J. Alec Motyer writes: "Thus, Isaiah foresaw a Servant with a real human nature. The Servant was tested as we are. He proved Himself to be the Author and Perfecter of faith. It is a real, personal faith that can still say, 'my God' when everything seems hopeless."—Adapted from *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 387.

Isaiah 49:7 is surprising. The servant is "deeply despised [hated]." He is hated by the nations and is the servant of rulers." But the Lord says to him: "Kings will see you released and will rise to show their respect; princes also will see it, and they will bow low to honor you. This will happen because the Lord has chosen his servant; the holy God of Israel keeps his promises" (TEV).

¹⁴principle—a basic rule that guides the making of other rules and that helps us decide what to do.



Think about Jesus' ministry (work). Right up until the Cross, He had reasons to be discouraged. But He stayed faithful, no matter what happened. What is the lesson we can learn from Jesus' faith?

FRIDAY—MAY 28

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White's description of Jesus' healing and teaching ministry (work) in "At Capernaum," *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 252–261.

"In the work of soul-winning, we need to use careful words and wisdom. The Savior never tried to hide the truth. But He always spoke the truth in love. In talking with people, He spoke carefully. He was always kind and thoughtful. He was never rude. He never spoke a cruel word. He never gave unnecessary pain to a sensitive person. He did not criticize human weakness. He fearlessly criticized

lying, unbelief, and sins. But tears were in His voice as He spoke His strong criticisms. He never made truth cruel. He always showed a deep tenderness for people. Every soul was very important to Him. He carried Himself with the dignity of God. But He showed the tenderest mercy¹⁵ to every member of the family of God. He saw that all people were souls He had come to save."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 117.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Read over what Ellen White wrote above about how Jesus worked with other people. How well does your own church work with other people?
2. Do you know a "bruised reed" or "smoldering wick" (Isaiah 42:3)? How can you help this person without "breaking" or "quenching" (drowning) him or her? In what ways can you point this person to the Lord? What would you tell this person to do for healing and help?
3. The argument for a "second Isaiah" (Wednesday's lesson) started with the idea that people cannot tell the future the way Isaiah did. What is the basis for this idea? Why must Christians refuse to accept this basis?

SUMMARY: Deliverance (freedom) requires a Deliverer (Savior). God's servant nation Israel would be delivered (freed) by two deliverers. Cyrus would free Israel from Babylon and an unnamed Servant, recognized as the Messiah (Jesus) would restore justice and bring the people back to God.

¹⁵mercy—kindness we do not deserve.