

"Shout for joy, O heavens! And rejoice, O earth! Break forth into joyful shouting, O mountains! For the Lord has comforted His people and will have compassion on His afflicted!" (Isaiah 49:13)

Last week we completed our study of the section of Isaiah 40-48 which focuses on God's "deliverance" of His people, Israel--highlighted by how God used "His servant," Cyrus, to deliver them from their captivity in Babylon--a captivity brought on (and allowed) by God Himself, because of Israel's sin and unfaithfulness to Him! Isaiah described the 70 years of captivity in Babylon as a time of "testing and refinement in the furnace of affliction," as recorded in Isaiah 48:10!

And yet the Lord did not forsake His people, Isaiah reminds us over and over! Remember how He had said, in Isaiah 43, that He "had formed them, and redeemed them, and called them by His name...and that when they passed through the waters, He would be with them...and when they walked through the fire, they would not be burned...!" (And remember the beautiful song with words taken from this passage!) For He would be with them, He promised, "for He was the Lord their God, the Holy One of Israel!"`

Remember how He promised (in Isaiah 46) how He would "bear them up, and carry them (in contrast to the false idols, which needed to be carried, but only after first having to be made by them!), and deliver them"--reminding them of the "former things" He had done for them, "from ancient times"! Then promising them "His righteousness...and salvation in Zion, and His glory for Israel," which He said "is not far off!"

And, finally, in Isaiah 48, after reprimanding Israel for its "obstinacy"--and being "a rebel from birth"--in what Motyer calls "the inevitable climax of a rising tide of awareness of Israel's sin and need," God, the Most High God of Israel, "delayed His wrath," and (amazingly) "did not cut them off" but, instead, proclaimed "new things" about the future! "Hidden things they did not know!" (MacArthur notes that "from this point forward, in the book of Isaiah, the prophecies of the first and second comings of the Messiah, as well as of the restoration of Israel, have a new distinction, with the Babylon of Isaiah becoming the Babylon of the Revelation, and God using Isaiah to communicate truth about the still-to-come Messianic kingdom on earth, and the new heaven and earth that will follow"! Wow!

And, as we noted last week--what a beautiful demonstration (and representation) of God's grace and mercy is displayed in this Old Testament passage, where He refuses to abandon His people, or renege on His eternal covenant, at a time, and amid circumstances, where it's clear that He would be totally justified in doing so!

All the above sets the scene for our study of Isaiah 49, and the next section of the book of Isaiah (chapters 49-55), and our lesson last night, where Isaiah records how God would deal with the more serious problem of sin--by sending a Savior, a "Deliverer"!

Motyer notes that the key to this "final movement" (in chapters 49-55) is "the contrast between the new beginning afforded to Israel by its deliverance from Babylon, and the unchanging relationship to the Lord, as expressed by the closing line of Isaiah 48--namely, that 'There is no peace for the wicked,' saith the Lord"! And that "this is the backdrop for the greater deliverance--a spiritual deliverance--that needs to be enacted, and that's prophesied to come about, not just for Israel, but for all the nations (and people!) of the world, through the 'redeeming work' of the Lord," speaking, of course, of the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ, the Son of God"!

"Listen to Me, O islands, and pay attention, you people from afar! The Lord called Me from the womb; from the body of My mother He named Me! He has made My mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me; and He has made me a sharpened arrow. He has hidden Me in His quiver. He said to Me, 'You are My Servant, Israel, in Whom I will show My glory!'"

Obviously it's Jesus, the Son of God, the Messiah, who's speaking! The same One that God, in Isaiah 42:1, refers to as "My Servant, whom I uphold, My Chosen, in whom My soul delight...and have put My Spirit...who will bring justice to the nations"! (Molyer notes that "it's a demand for all to listen and, in fact, as absolute as the command in Mark 9:7 where, at the Mount of Transfiguration, "a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My beloved Son! Listen to Him!)"

Speaking a message, in Isaiah 49, not just for Israel but for the whole world about His redemption plan! And how His Servant, Jesus, would be "a light to the nations"--to all the people of the world--so that His salvation would reach to the end of the earth"! (How significant that God Himself would say that "it was too small a thing that His message and His plan of redemption would be limited to Israel, but that He would make Jesus a light to all the nations"!)

What a fitting reminder of John 3:16, of "how God so loved the world" that He would give His only Son..."! And a fitting reminder for us too of the "Christmas story"!

But also of the apostle Paul's reminder to the Gentile believers in Ephesians 2:11-22, who were once "separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenant of promise, having no hope and without God in the world! But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ...!"

Constable notes that just as Cyrus was the key person in the first part of this section in the book of Isaiah, "having to do with the near-distant future of Israel, Jesus, the Messiah, is the key person in this second section (and will be in the third section!), both of which have to do with the distant future of Israel" (and of the rest of the world)!

Nelson writes that the One who answers God's call (again speaking of Christ, the Messiah) seems to emerge gradually, starting in Isaiah 48:16 (where He says that "He was there from the beginning, and that the Lord God has sent Him, and His Spirit"! ) But recall also Isaiah 11:1-2 where Isaiah speaks of "a shoot coming forth from the stump of Jesse," and of Isaiah 42:1 where God says "to behold His Servant, whom He upholds, My Chosen, in whom My soul delight"!

And with Christmas upon us, the amazing prophecies of Isaiah 7:14, and 9:2-6:

- That the Lord Himself would give us a sign! "Behold, a virgin shall be with child and bear a Son...and call His name Immanuel"!
- And that "the people who walked in darkness would see a great light...For a child would be born and a Son given to us...And His name would be called Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Eternal Father, the Prince of Peace...!"

The Passion translation of Isaiah 49 says that "Yahweh called Him as His own before He was born and named Him "Isaiah" (which means "empowered by God"! ) while He was still in His mother's womb...and giving Him words that pierce and penetrate...!"

And we're reminded of Psalm 139:13-16, where it tells us of a God who also "formed our inward parts and wove us in our mother's womb...and how we were "fearfully and wonderfully made"... and how "His eyes have seen our unformed substance; and in His book were written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them"! (Wow! How that should speak to us, and our world, of the "sanctity of life"!)

And of John 1:14 where it says that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, as of the glory of the only begotten, full of grace and truth"! And, finally, of Hebrews 4:12, where it says that "the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart"!

Isaiah 49 has so much to say that applies to us today! When the people of Zion (in verse 14) accused God of forsaking them, during their time of suffering (in Babylon), the Lord assured them that He had not--asking "whether a mother could forget her nursing child"! And then telling them that He had "engraved them on the palm of His hands..."! Giving a sense of permanence, and a great verse that we can turn to today in support of the doctrine of the "security of the believer"!

Well, there lots more we could say about Isaiah 49! And particularly about God's plan for Israel, in verses 17-26, and how they will be regathered in their promised land and be the means of the conversion of the nations in the last days!

Hebrews 8:8-12 says, "Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when I will effect a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah...(and quoting from Jeremiah 31:33), and "I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people...And I will remember their sins no more!" Wow!

MacArthur notes that the Servant's goal is the salvation and restoration of Israel for the fulfillment of the covenant promise, but that this is not limited to Israel! Israel is to function as a light bringing salvation to the Gentiles! Israel's mission has always been to bring the nations to God (see 19:24 and 42:6). This she will finally do very effectively in the tribulation after the conversion of the 144,000 witnesses (Revelation 7:1-10 and 14:1-5), and when she is restored to her land at the Servant's return to earth (9:2, 11:10, 42:6, 45:22, and Luke 2:32). (Interestingly, Paul applied this verse to his ministry to the Gentiles on his first missionary journey, in Acts 13:47!)

Isaiah 49 ends with the words: "And all flesh will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior, and your Redeemer, the mighty one of Jacob!"

Merry Christmas, men! "Shout for joy, O heavens! And rejoice, O earth!"

See you next on January 2, 2024!

Lowell