

Bi235 Old Testament 2

Lesson Bi235-33 Isaiah's Visions of Yahweh's Servant

Israel's prophets spoke for Yahweh. Sometimes God's message through them resulted in preaching, or writing, or actions, or miracles. With Elijah and Elisha, God worked miracles. Beginning with Hosea and Amos, most of the prophets wrote their messages on scrolls. Some of what God wanted them to write was aimed at later generations of God's people. Later generations could listen to God's messages or read them and could understand.

Isaiah began prophesying in Judah during the years of King Ahaz and King Hezekiah. During his ministry, the Northern Kingdom was destroyed and Assyria threatened to destroy Judah, as well. God was using Assyria, a godless nation, to punish his people for their idolatry and injustice.

Isaiah seems to have been related to the royal family. He had close ties to these kings and counseled them. He was married and had three children. God told him to give the children symbolic names. The eldest son had a Hebrew name that meant 'a remnant will come back.' The second son's name meant 'destruction is coming quickly.' Later a third son was born and was named 'Immanuel,' meaning 'God is with us.' These names were both good news and bad news. They predicted that war and destruction were coming to Judah because of its sinfulness. But they also predicted that God still loved Judah. He would see to it that part of Judah's people—a 'remnant'—would remain faithful to him. They would survive God's judgment.

Throughout Isaiah's life, God revealed more and more about his plans for Judah. The four elements of God's design for Israel were repeated to the people through Isaiah.

- 1. Deliverance:** "In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the surviving remnant of his people.... He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; he will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth" (Isa 11:11-12). Many centuries after the Exodus from Egypt, God would bring about a new exodus—a new deliverance—of his people.
- 2. Knowledge of the LORD:** "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (11:9). "You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he" (43:10).
- 3. The people of God:** "Remember these things, Jacob, for you, Israel, are my servant. I have made you, you are my servant; Israel, I will not forget you" (44:21). "All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the LORD has blessed" (61:9).
- 4. The promise of a homeland:** "The LORD will have compassion on Jacob; once again he will choose Israel and will settle them in their own land" (14:1). "Then all your people will be righteous and they will possess the land forever" (60:21).

Not only did God repeat the promises made to Moses, but he also revealed more about how he would accomplish his plans. He revealed details about someone called 'the Servant of the LORD.' In five amazing visions, God showed Isaiah how he planned to redeem Israel and the nations.

In Isa. 42:1-4. God reveals that he has a servant, and he delights in his servant. He puts his spirit on this man. The servant will bring justice to the nations, like a king, but his manner will be quite humble, unlike most kings. “He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.”

In Isa. 49, the servant speaks, “Before I was born the LORD called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name.... He said to me, ‘You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.’” The LORD went on to reveal that his servant would not only restore Israel. He would also be a light for the Gentiles—all non-Israelites—that God’s “salvation may reach to the ends of the earth” (49:6).

In Isa. 50:4-9, the servant speaks again. “The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary.... He has opened my ears to listen.... I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced.” It was becoming clear to Isaiah that God’s servant would be made to suffer.

Isa. 52:13-53:12 God revealed to Isaiah surprising details about the Servant. This poem is the clearest passage in the Old Testament about the coming of the Anointed One—Jesus himself. Isaiah asked, “Who would have thought God’s saving power would look like this?” (53:1, MSG) Isaiah pictures the servant as unattractive, looked down on, and passed over—a man who knew pain firsthand. “But the fact is, it was our pains he carried—our disfigurements, all the things wrong with us. He took the punishment, and that made us whole. Through his bruises we get healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (53:4-6, MSG/NIV).

“He was beaten, he was tortured, but he didn’t say a word.... He died without a thought for his own welfare.... They buried him with the wicked...even though he had never hurt a soul or said one word that wasn’t true” (53:7-9, MSG). Because of the servant’s obedience to God’s plan, God says, “I will reward him extravagantly—the best of everything, the highest honors” (53:12).

In a final vision about the servant, the servant speaks again: “The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor” (61:1-2). When Jesus began his public ministry in his hometown, he read these verses from Isaiah 61. Then he sat down and said, “This Scripture just came true, here and now” (Lk 4:21, MSG). Jesus echoed the words of Isaiah 53 when he said, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

Before Jesus was arrested, he talked to his disciples and quoted Isaiah: “It is written: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors,’ and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment” (Luke 22:37).

This story is **important** because it demonstrates some of the great prophecies of Isaiah. He wrote these verses about 700 years before Christ was even born. The Holy Spirit revealed the details to the prophet. Centuries later, Jesus, the man, read these writings and knew they referred to him.

The **main truths** of this lesson are that God was busy—several centuries after the time of Moses—fulfilling his four-fold promise to Moses: namely deliverance for Israel, the formation of a people for himself, the supply of the true knowledge of God, and the provision of a homeland.

Isaiah's great visions of the 'Servant of the LORD' are portraits of the greatest Israelite of all, namely, Jesus of Nazareth.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. Why did prophets in Israel begin to write down their prophecies? [Pause]
A. If you said, "Because some of their words applied to later times in Israel's history, and they wanted later generations to benefit from their words," you are correct.
2. What were the four elements of God's design, given first to Moses and repeated by Isaiah? [Pause]
A. If you said, "Deliverance, community, knowledge of God, and land," you are correct.
3. Who is the 'Servant of the LORD' in Isaiah's prophecies? [Pause]
A. If you said, "A man anointed by the Spirit of God who would bring justice to Israel and the nations through his teaching, suffering, death, and renewed life," you are right.
4. How do we know that Jesus saw himself as the 'Servant?' [Pause]
A. If you answered, "He applied the vision of Isaiah 61 to himself, and said that he would give his life as a ransom for many," you answered correctly.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to it at least three times. As you hear the story each time, imagine how it happened. See the events in your own mind. Then tell the story in your own words as you remember it. Then listen to the story again and re-tell it until you feel sure you are repeating the words and actions correctly. Share this story with a friend in your community who does not know Christ. Explain to them God's plan to reveal himself through Jesus. Tell them how the Holy Spirit revealed this plan to a prophet long ago and how Jesus fulfilled that prophecy. He came as a human being, and died for our sins. Ask your friend to believe on Jesus as Savior.

Memorize Isaiah 53:6—"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."