

Youth Teaching Resources

August 16, 2020



What the World Needs Now...

Genesis 32:22-32—"The World Needs Engagement"

1 Kings 19:9-18—"The World Needs Faith"

Isaiah 56:1-8 (RCL 1, 6-8)—"The World Needs Justice"

Isaiah 51:1-8 (RCL 51:1-6)—"The World Needs to Remember"

Jeremiah 15:15-21—"The World Needs Mercy"

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Find links and videos related to this lesson.

The World Needs Justice

Isaiah 56:1-8 (RCL 1, 6-8)

YOUTH Teaching Guide

by Jeremy Colliver

This youth teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

SOCIAL MEDIA CHALLENGE

This week, give your social media platforms to someone who has been cast out by society. Don't post original content but repost what other who have been cast out of society have posted.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Fellowship

Begin your session by showing the clip "Acceptance Letter" from *X+Y*. If you unable to show the clip, summarize it to the best of your ability, and then facilitate a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) Why was he excited to bring the letter over?
- 2) Why did he not want to open the letter himself?
- 3) What was his response after finding out he got in?
- 4) What news have you anticipated? What did you do when you finally go the news?
- 5) How does it feel to be accepted?
- 6) How does your faith help you accept those around you?

Information

Transition to the next section of the session by reading Isaiah 56:1-8. Allow the students to ask any initial questions they have about the text. As you answer their questions, you may want to provide some of the information found in Tony's commentary to answer their questions. When the students have had an opportunity to share their initial thoughts, continue the discussion by facilitating a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) What is the setting for the passage that we read today? What is going on with the people of Israel?
- 2) Why were eunuchs and foreigners not allowed in the Temple?
- 3) What does this passage have to say about the exclusivity that the priests of the time were preaching?
- 4) How did Isaiah want acceptance into the Temple to be "determined"?
- 5) What promise is given to the first hearers of this passage that is still true for us today?

Information *continued*

If your group would like to dig deeper in their discussion, share some of the insights that Tony provides in the “Digging Deeper” portion of his commentary. You may want to use some questions like the following to facilitate your discussion:

- 1) How was purity a pedigree to be allowed into the Temple?
- 2) Why was there no intermarriage allowed within the people of Israel?
- 3) What does it mean to maintain justice and do what is right?
- 4) How are we to keep the Sabbath?
- 5) What are eunuchs?

You may also want your group to discuss “The Hardest Question” if they would like to continue their discussion on this passage. Tony poses the following question to consider as “The Hardest Question”: How many Isaiahs were there?

Transformation

Conclude the session by sharing the Social Media Challenge for the week:

This week, give your social media platforms to someone who has been cast out by society. Don't post original content but repost what others who have been cast out of society have posted.

After answering questions the students may have about the challenge, facilitate a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) How will you decide who you will repost?
- 2) What do you think your followers will think of your reposts?
- 3) How does social media silence some people even though it is supposed to be an open platform?
- 4) How can you give voice to those people that are voiceless?
- 5) Who are the groups that need to be gathered together so that God's promise can be fulfilled; “I will gather others to them besides those already gathered.”

Close with a prayer asking for patience and peace as groups work together to be unified.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

The text—As is often the case, the Revised Common Lectionary text skips over part of the passage. The lectionary text goes from Isaiah 56:1 straight to the inclusion of foreigners in vv. 6-8, bypassing the inclusion of eunuchs in vv. 2-5. This may be so a liturgical reading of the text would line up better with the New Testament readings, which speak to the inclusion of Gentiles. Even so, it neglects an integral part of the prophet’s argument, so we will not ignore it.

Purity and pedigree—Census lists found in Ezra 2:1-70 and Neh. 7:6-73 purport to indicate the families who returned from Babylonian exile, indicating those Jews who were considered to be of pure blood—as opposed to Jews left behind in Judah, who might have intermarried with non-Jews.

The total number of returnees is given as 42,360, which is about 12,000 more than the sum of the people on the list. The same total is given in Ezra 7:64, Nehemiah 7:66 and 1 Esdras 5:41, even though the numbers within the three lists differ at several points. None of them add up to 42,360. Some have suggested that only men were included on the list, but women were included in the total. If so, the number of returning women would have been surprisingly small, less than a third of the total.

The number of additional servants (7,337) and singers (245) suggests that many returnees were quite prosperous. Servants, perhaps the singers among them, were considered as personal property and thus included with the other property—such as the 736 horses, 245 mules, 435 camels, and 6,720 donkeys that reportedly made the trip, pack animals essential to a successful journey.

No intermarriage—Both Ezra (9:1-15) and Nehemiah (10:30, 13:23-27) were insistent that Jews not intermarry with other ethnic groups. The intention was valid, as they feared that the worship of Yahweh would then be mixed with that of other gods. The problem is that those who remained faithful to Yahweh were also excluded, causing serious tension. The prophet behind Isaiah 56:1-8 believed God’s grace was wider than the postexilic leaders believed it to be.

We don’t want your help—Ezra 4:1-24 recounts how local Jews who had not been in exile, along with people from other nations who had been imported by the Assyrians but had chosen to worship Yahweh, offered to help rebuild the temple, but the religious leaders refused their aid because their ethnic pedigree was mixed. The people, who still worshiped Yahweh and considered themselves Jews, became known as “Samaritans.” Understandably offended, the Samaritans then sought to undermine and frustrate the work of the “pure” Israelites who had returned to take over. Later, they adapted the Pentateuch to support their worship at a temple they built atop Mt. Gerizim. This schism was at the root of the deep animosity between Jews and Samaritans that maintained even during the time of Jesus.

Digging Deeper *continued*

Doing justice—What does it mean to “maintain justice and do what is right?” (v. 1). Isaiah 58:6-9 offers a fuller definition and also ties the practice of justice with God’s favorable response to the people:

Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator shall go before you,
the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.
Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

Keeping Sabbath—Keeping the Sabbath was one of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:8-11 and Deut. 5:12-15), a central pillar in Israel’s religious life. Violations of the Sabbath were a subject of criticism both during the exile (Ezek. 22:8, 23:38, 46:1) and after the exile (Neh. 9:14, 13:15–21). Isaiah 58 also speaks to the notion of what it means to keep the Sabbath, again connecting it with a divine response:

If you refrain from trampling the sabbath,
from pursuing your own interests on my holy day;
if you call the sabbath a delight
and the holy day of the LORD honorable;
if you honor it, not going your own ways,
serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs;
then you shall take delight in the LORD,
and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth;
I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Eunuchs—In the ancient Near East, eunuchs were typically made that way by castration, but in some cases, the penis was cut off as well.

Who’s in and who’s out—Deuteronomy 23:3-6 pointedly excludes Ammonites and Moabites from being accepted as people of Israel, the rationale being that they did not provide assistance to the ancestors who journeyed through their lands after the exodus from Egypt. Surprisingly, despite Israel’s deep-seated animosity toward Edomites (who also failed to help) and the Egyptians who had enslaved them, they were allowed to convert after the third generation (Deut. 23:7).

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

How many Isaiahs were there?

Many readers, especially those who hold to an inerrant, literal interpretation of the Bible, assume that a single author was responsible for the entire content of a biblical book attributed to him. One might argue that the first Isaiah simply had God-given foresight, and during times of meditation, he wrote prophecies concerning specific situations that would not arise for more than 150-200 years. The most likely explanation, however, is that multiple prophets contributed to the compilation of prophecies that became known by the name of its primary author, Isaiah of Jerusalem.

During the eighth century, the Israelites lived in two separate kingdoms: a northern realm called “Israel,” and a southern one known as “Judah.” The first Isaiah, often called “Isaiah of Jerusalem,” spent most of his life in Judah’s capital city, but spoke to the people of both nations. He lived in an age of relative peace and prosperity for the Israelites as a whole, but a time of oppression for the poor as wealthier Hebrews bought up property, often leaving the poor homeless and forced to work as indentured servants. The false security of peaceful times led many to think of religion as a system of required rituals, with no demand for personal righteousness and justice. In various parts of Isaiah 1-39, Isaiah of Jerusalem excoriated the powerful priesthood. He joined the prophets Micah, Amos, and Hosea in decrying injustice and launching verbal barbs designed to deflate Israel’s false sense of security.

Isaiah understood the political scene as well as the economic, social and religious aspects of life in Palestine. During Isaiah’s ministry, the northern kingdom was defeated and its people were scattered to other lands. As the prophet predicted, Judah also fell under the power of Assyria, living as a vassal state. Much of Isaiah 1-39 describes this period in Israel’s life.

With chapter 40, however, the scene clearly shifts from eighth-century Judah to sixth-century Babylon. Judah fell to the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar in 597 BCE. Many Judahites were marched to Babylon that year, and many more were forced into captivity following the destruction of Jerusalem 10 years later.

God used Isaiah of Jerusalem to afflict the comfortable and warn them of the coming captivity. More than 150 years after his time, as the people languished in exile, God raised up another prophet who spoke comfort to the afflicted. We often speak of him as “Second Isaiah.” This prophet spoke encouragement and hope to a defeated and downhearted people. His work appears in Isaiah 40-55. As he preached in God’s name, this Isaiah envisioned a coming “servant” who would suffer in behalf of his people.

Following the exile, the Hebrews who returned to Jerusalem faced different challenges, which are reflected in Isaiah 56-66. It is possible that Second Isaiah returned with the other

The Hardest Question *continued*

Hebrews and continued to speak in that context, so some of the prophecies there may be his. This section is not as unified as Second Isaiah, however, and it is likely that multiple prophets arose to preach in the spirit of Isaiah. The first Isaiah had threatened judgment if the people did not repent. Second Isaiah preached hope and deliverance to those who experienced the judgment of exile. The prophets of Third Isaiah sought to explain why Second Isaiah's hopeful promises did not all turn out as expected, and to call for truly faithful response to following God's way.

The possibility that multiple prophets contributed to the book called "Isaiah" does not take away from the Scripture's authority, but testifies to God's interest in providing the message people need to hear in the time they need to hear it.