

Adult Teaching Resources

January 15, 2023



January 1, 2023—Ecclesiastes 3:1-13—“It’s Always Time”

Season of Epiphany: What Does God Expect?

January 8, 2023—Isaiah 42:1-9—“Bringing Justice”

January 15, 2023—Isaiah 49:1-7—“Bearing Light”

January 22, 2023—Isaiah 9:1-7—“Multiplying Joy”

January 29, 2023—Micah 6:1-8—“Defining Expectations”

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Bearing Light

Isaiah 49:1-7

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline 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.

Key Verse

It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth. (Isa. 49:6)

Opening

After everyone arrives, form small groups of 3-4 in a group. Once everyone is settled, ask each group to discuss these questions.

What is “grace?”

When have you received grace? How has that made a difference in your life?

Is grace something only people of God receive? Why do you say that?

How often do you extend grace? Why do you extend grace?

Can you think of someone who doesn’t deserve grace? Why do you say that?

Give the small groups time to talk amongst themselves, then open the floor for large group conversation and discussion.

Reading the Bible

What does Isaiah want others to do? (listen to him, pay attention)

When did the Lord call Isaiah? (before he was born; while he was in his mother’s womb he named him)

How did God make him? (he made his mouth like a sharp sword; he made him a polished arrow)

What did God say to Isaiah? (“You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.”)

What did Isaiah say? (“I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the Lord and my reward with my God.”)

What does God want Isaiah to do? (to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him)

What promise did God make to Isaiah? (“It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as

Reading the Bible *continued*

a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”)

What does God say to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers? (“Kings shall see and stand up; princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.”)

Making Connections

Our Lesson Writer says this about the overall message of Second Isaiah, “The overall message of Second Isaiah assumes that the descendants of Jacob, the people of Israel, are called to be God’s servants, living in faithful obedience and serving as an exemplary light to other nations (recall Gen. 12:3).” What is your assumption about what we are to do and how we are to live as God’s people?

Who, or what, do you listen to so that you stay “on track” with your faith and calling as a servant of Christ? Share a time when the message led you in the exact, right way.

Are you more persuaded by a message to the masses or a message to the individual? Why do you say that?

What does “servant” mean to you? What is your experience with servants? What does it mean to be a servant of God? When have you served in that manner?

How can a church or a large group of people be God’s servant? What does that look like? What examples of corporate servanthood can you share?

Our Lesson Writer reminds us, “the servant is like a polished arrow, an archer’s favorite and most accurate shaft. Again, the servant has been hidden away in Yahweh’s quiver, to be withdrawn and unleashed with the message of salvation when the time was right.” How do you know when to remain hidden and when to be seen as a servant? What is the wisdom in being hidden? What is the wisdom in being seen?

God challenged the servant’s lament by telling him to be a light to the nations, all nations. What do you think God is challenging you to do? How have you responded to that challenge?

How can you, as an individual, proclaim God’s salvation to the nations? How can your class, as a small group, proclaim God’s salvation to the nations? How can your church, as a large body, proclaim God’s salvation to the nations?

So What?

Ask everyone to gather back in their small groups from the beginning of class. Ask each group to spend time in conversation and discussion over these questions.

What do you think is the salvation that needs to be proclaimed to the nations?

How can we proclaim it?

How does this proclamation benefit the nations?

How does this proclamation benefit God?

So What? *continued*

Give each group some time to talk, then open the floor for large group conversation and discussion.

The Challenge

This week, be the light and proclaim salvation to the nations.

Prayer

Loving God, thank you for the gift of salvation and the message of salvation we have received. Help us to be your servants to share the message to all. Amen.

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.

Coastlands—While I have taken “coastlands” and “peoples far away” as a reference to nations beyond Palestine, some argue that they refer to Israel’s immediate neighbors along the coast, such as Phoenicia to the north. John D. W. Watts’ position is that both the “coastlands” and “peoples far away” should be regarded as other populations within Palestine. “They were also addressed as a part of the great assembly in 41:1,” he writes. “They were competitors with Jews for rights in the land and favors from the Persians, as were the Philistines of old, but now the coastlands are simply observers in YHWH’s great hall of justice.” (*Isaiah 34–66*, vol. 25 of Word Biblical Commentary [Zondervan, 2005], 729.)

Israel as sinner and servant—Regarding the identity of the servant as Israel, Trent Butler suggests a distinction between Israel as sinner and Israel as servant. Israel as sinner would be the nation at large, guilty as charged and whining in failure (vv. 1-4), while Israel as servant would be a righteous remnant within the larger nation, committed to calling all Israel to live obediently before God (vv. 5-6). For more, see Butler’s *Isaiah*, Holman Old Testament Commentary (Holman Reference, 2002), 269-70.

Tension—Tension between the individual and corporate identity of the servant is inherent in the text, and there is no easy solution. While Christians may be prone to see Jesus in every mention of the servant, the fit is better in some places than in others. It is true, however, that Jesus sought ways to identify with the people of Israel as it should be. He sought baptism by John, for example, despite his lack of sin—perhaps as a means of showing solidarity with Israel while setting an example for other Hebrews to heed John’s call for repentance.

Jesus’ mission, like that of the servant in Isa. 49:1-6, is characterized by a movement from the Jews to the Gentiles (Matt 10:5-6, 28:19-20). Following Christ’s ascension, Paul also spoke of the gospel being given first to the Jews, and then to Gentiles (Rom 1:16).

Israel’s complaint—Speaking for corporate Israel, and with apparent sarcasm, the prophet responded to God’s challenge for the servant: “But I said, ‘I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity ...’” (v. 4a).

The word for “nothing” is *tōhû*, the same term used in Gen 1:2 to describe the pre-creation earth as “formless.” The word for “vanity” is *hevel*, a word that literally means “vapor” or “breath,” something that doesn’t last. The longsuffering prophet Jeremiah expressed similar feelings more than once, as in Jer. 20:18: “Why did I come forth from the womb to see toil and sorrow, and spend my days in shame?”

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

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How do we explain verse 7?

Astute readers may have noticed that the lesson title cites Isa. 49:1-7 as the text, but the Bible study deals only with 49:1-6. What about v. 7?

The lectionary is more inclined to leave out important verses than to include more than necessary. In these lessons, we often expand the lection to include needed context, but don't delete verses.

In this case, the lectionary calls for including Isa. 49:7 when the textual unit, the second Servant Song, ends with v. 6. The following verse appears to begin a new unit—or a shift in emphasis, at least. Some scholars do hold that vv. 7-13 should be considered part of the song, but few would break it after v. 7 alone.

We've limited the main Bible study to vv. 1-6, mainly because v. 7 begins a new theme, but we can briefly explore it here. This verse, spoken as divine speech, identifies Yahweh as “the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One.” But to whom does Yahweh speak?

John D. W. Watts has argued that the servant of 42:1-6 is the Persian ruler Cyrus, who conquered Babylon and granted freedom to the Israelites, while the “Holy One” of 49:7-13 is Darius I, who ruled a generation later after having overthrown Cyrus' successor in a *coup d'état*. Watts argues that Darius' rise from his position as a court functionary to emperor is reflected in the description of “one deeply despised; abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers.” (*Isaiah 34–66*, vol. 25 of Word Biblical Commentary [Zondervan, 2005], 738.)

Few others take this position. In vv. 1-6, Yahweh addressed corporate Israel, apparently through the prophet as the nation's representative. Israel's self-perception was one of utter defeat and captivity—a position aptly described by “one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers.” Isaiah's hearers would have recognized themselves. But, though dejected and oppressed as they were, Yahweh was not finished with them. “Kings shall see and stand up, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.”

This image suggests that lowly Israel will one day be king of the hill. Yahweh's faithfulness will overcome despite their unfaithfulness. The theme continues in vv. 8-13, with promises of divine deliverance, provision, and prosperity for God's people. This sounds more like a promise of hope than the commission of God's servant, and it is sufficiently different for us to recognize it as the beginning of a new oracle, rather than as a continuation of the servant song in 49:1-6.