

# Youth Teaching Resources

January 8, 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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# Bringing Justice

Isaiah 42:1-9

## YOUTH Teaching Guide

by Robert Tackett-Evans

This youth 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.

### Gathering

As the group begins to gather, take a few moments to reflect on last week's challenge. After everyone has been able to share, continue with today's lesson.

### Opening Activity

As you begin today's lesson, show "What is Justice?" found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H0CTHVCKm90>. Note: The clip is just over 10 minutes, but for the sake of time, you could just watch the first 1:33 of the clip, which is where the theme music begins.

- "What justice means to you personally, pretty much defines how you think society should work." Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
- How would you define justice? (*Explain your answer.*)

### Listening to the Scripture

Read Isaiah 42:1-9 aloud.

- What do you think the Servant Song tell us about God?
- Do you think justice as we define it, is the same as God's understanding of justice? Why or why not?
- Who are the "bruised reeds" and "dimly burning wicks" in our day? (*See Tony's notes for a description on this reference.*)
- God declares in verse 6: "I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations...." What role do you think we play in God's vision of justice for our world?
- What might our world would look like if we truly lived into the promised future of God's justice that Isaiah speaks of?

If the group would like to continue the discussion, see *Digging Deeper*.

- What do you imagine life in exile was like for the people of Israel?
- Evidence shows the people were able to participate in all the normal activities of daily life while in exile. Despite that, why do you think the people would have felt like "bruised reeds" or "dimly burning wicks?"

## Listening to the Scripture *continued*

If the group is up for a challenge, consider discussing what Tony poses as *The Hardest Question*:

- Who was the “servant” in the Servant Songs?

## Application

Before closing, introduce this week’s challenge.

*Pay attention to the many ways you hear people talking about justice this week. (At school, at home, on the news, on social media etc.) In what ways do you think those conversations align with God’s sense of justice? In what ways do they differ? Come back next week with one example to share.*

Close with prayer.

## 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.

**Multiple Isaiahs?**—Many readers 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, wrote the sections that would address issues that would not arise for more than 150 years. The most likely explanation, however, is that there were at least two, if not three prophets who 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. Isaiah 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 carried into captivity. As the prophet predicted, Judah also fell under the power of Assyria, living as a vassal state. For the most part, Isaiah 1-39 describes this period in Israel’s life.

With chapter 40, however, the scene 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 later, as the people languished in captivity, God raised up another prophet who spoke comfort to the afflicted. We often speak of him as “Second Isaiah.” This prophet spoke words of comfort 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 Hebrews and continued to speak in that context. It is more likely, however, that yet a third prophet arose to preach in the spirit of Isaiah. He is typically known as “Third Isaiah.”

## Digging Deeper *continued*

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.

**Servant songs**—The “Servant Songs” are often identified as Isa. 42:1-4, 49:1-6, 50:1-11, and 52:13-53:12, but scholars disagree on their precise limits. Some, for example, consider the first song to be comprised of Isa. 42:1-4 only, while others see it as 42:1-7 and others stretch it to 42:1-9. The second song is often delimited as 49:1-6, but some scholars see it continuing through v. 13. Some identify the third song as 50:1-11, but others include only 50:4-11. There is little question about the limits of the fourth song, marked as 52:13-53:12. Some scholars interpret Isaiah 55 as a fifth servant song.

**Life in exile**—While we often think of the exiles as facing great suffering, their most serious loss was their homeland. A variety of cuneiform texts from ancient Babylon attests that the Babylonians provided regular rations for the Hebrews, assigned them places to live, and allowed them to participate in regular commerce. For an interesting recap of these, see Laurie E. Pearce, “How Bad Was the Babylonian Exile?” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 43:5 (Sept.-Oct. 2016), 48-64.



A collection of cuneiform tablets describing commercial activities of Jews living in various places in Babylon, including a settlement known as “Judah-town.” The tablets were on display at the Bible Lands Museum in Jerusalem in 2015. They include tablets recording business deals made by the Jewish family of Samak-Yama, including his son, grandson, and

## Digging Deeper *continued*

his grandson's five sons. A brief video of the exhibit can be found at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-archaeology-babylon-idUSKBN0L71EK20150203>.

**The God**—Isaiah 42:5 is unusual in that it refers to God (here called 'El) with the direct article attached: *ha'el yhwh* means “the God, Yahweh,” an apparent affirmation of the monotheistic belief that there is only one God, Israel's God, whose name was revealed as Yahweh. This is one of the earliest clear statements of monotheism: while statements such as the first commandment insist that Israel should have no other gods before Yahweh, and earlier prophets and priests pleaded for the people to worship Yahweh rather than the Baals or other gods, the eighth century prophets were among the first to insist that Yahweh was not just the mightiest God and the one Israel should worship, but the only true god.

## 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.

### Who was the “servant” in the Servant Songs?

Who did Isaiah have in mind when speaking of this servant? The answer is not as obvious as one would like, for the various songs do not always refer to the servant in the same way, and may not always have the same concept in mind.

Early on, Israel’s rabbis interpreted the texts as predictions of the hoped-for Davidic messiah, tending to discount the aspects of suffering. After Jesus’ life and ministry, New Testament writers described Jesus as a new and different kind of messiah (“Christ,” like “Messiah,” means “anointed one”). They saw the prophecies as looking toward the coming of Jesus, who would suffer on behalf of the people, and thus win their redemption.

The servant sometimes seems to be Jacob-Israel in a corporate sense. Second Isaiah often uses language similar to the Servant Songs to describe Israel as a whole: “But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen” (41:8), “But now hear, O Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have chosen” (44:1; see also 44:21; 45:4; 49:3, 5-6). Today, many Jewish and some Christian scholars also think of the servant as describing the corporate personality of the nation, which suffered on the way to becoming a cleansed and better people. Some have argued that the prophet saw himself as the servant, standing in for the nation.

It is possible to see Isaiah’s prophecy as multivalent: God’s challenge to Jacob-Israel might be fulfilled in different ways by corporate Israel, or by a single servant playing a particular role. Some scholars even see the servant in 42:1-9 as Cyrus, the Persian king who would conquer Babylon and set the Israelites free. Isaiah calls Cyrus by name and calls him God’s shepherd who will carry out his purpose (44:28), and even God’s “anointed” or *meshiah* (45:1), the same word that became “Messiah.”

For the most part, Isaiah seems to portray Jacob-Israel as God’s intended servant, though the people are disinclined or unable to fulfill their calling. Thus, another must stand in for them and carry out the mission the people have failed to accomplish.

New Testament writers saw Jesus as the ultimate “servant of Yahweh” who fulfilled the purpose Isaiah described. Matthew 12:18-21 connects the ministry of Jesus with the fulfillment of Isa. 42:1-4, and Philip explained to an Ethiopian seeker that Jesus was the suffering servant described in Isa. 53:7-8 (Acts 8:26-35). It is likely that Jesus, who introduced his ministry with a quotation from Isa. 61:1-2 (Luke 4:16-20), saw Isaiah’s “Suffering Servant” as a model for his life and ministry. The disciples might never have understood Jesus if not for Isaiah’s servant imagery. Even with that scriptural testimony, they struggled long and hard to understand a God who suffered.

## The Hardest Question *continued*

In sum, from Isaiah's perspective, God had chosen the Hebrews to live in covenant as God's representative in the world, living obediently as a light to the nations, calling others to trust in Yahweh, too. Through the centuries, it became apparent that Jacob-Israel (indicating the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel) was either incapable or unwilling to live out that calling. The servant in Isaiah, then, can be seen both as Jacob-Israel and as the one who would ultimately accomplish what the Hebrews could not.