

# Youth 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

## 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, reflect on last week's challenge. After everyone has shared, continue with today's lesson.

### Opening Activity

As you begin show "Why Do We Fall?" found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i5lULJYQnI>.

- Up to this point, Bruce Wayne has failed in his mission to save Gotham. What do you think is going through his mind? What do you think he might be feeling in that moment?
- Have you ever known what it was like to strive for something, only to feel it was all for naught? Can you give an example?

### Listening to the Scripture

Read Isaiah 49:1-7 aloud.

- As you try to live a life in service for God, do you ever feel like it has been in vain? When was the last time you felt that way? What were the circumstances?
- What might this scripture speak to us in those moments when we do feel it has all been in vain?
- What do you think this scripture reveals to us about God?
- What do you think this scripture reveals about us in relation to God?
- What are some of the limits that we, as human beings, place on God's salvific work?
- What do you think this scripture might reveal about the limitations we impose on God?

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

- What do you think it means if someone expresses being both a "saint" and a "sinner?"
- In what ways does this scripture reflect being simultaneously a "sinner" and a "saint?"

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

- How do we explain verse 7?

## Application

Before closing, introduce this week's challenge.

*This week, pay attention to those moments when you feel your efforts to accomplish something have been in vain. Where do you see God at work in those moments?*

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.

**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.