

LESSON 9 *May 22-28

To Serve and to Save



SABBATH AFTERNOON

In northern Iraq, near an old Christian monastery, lie small holes in the ground where hermits stayed for decades without coming out, in order to better focus on God.

In the steamy slums of Calcutta, Mother Teresa had a different approach to focusing on God. “Jesus comes to meet us,” she said. “To welcome him, let us go to meet him.

“He comes to us in the hungry, the naked, the lonely, the alcoholic, the drug addict, the prostitute, the street beggars. . . .

“If we reject them, if we do not go out to meet them, we reject Jesus himself.”—*Mother Teresa: In My Own Words*, compiled by José Luis González-Balado (New York: Gramercy Books, 1996), p. 29.

Isaiah spoke of a servant of the Lord with a similar mission of mercy: “a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; . . . to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness” (*Isa. 42:3, 7, NRSV*). Who is this Servant, and what does He accomplish?

The Week at a Glance: How is Christ prefigured in Isaiah? Why is Cyrus deemed a “Messiah”? How are the first and second comings of Jesus meshed in some of these prophecies? What does Isaiah teach us about God’s power to predict the future?

Memory Text: “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations” (*Isaiah 42:1, NRSV*).

**Study this lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 29.*

SUNDAY May 23

Servant Nation *(Isaiah 41)*.

In Isaiah 41:8 God speaks of “Israel, my servant,” and in 42:1 he introduces “my servant.” Who is this servant?

Is it Israel/Jacob, the ancestor of the Israelites? The nation of Israel? The Messiah/Christ, identified in the New Testament as Jesus?

There are two kinds of references to servants of God woven through Isaiah 41–53. One servant is named “Israel” or “Jacob,” as in 41:8; 44:1, 2, 21; 45:4; 48:20. Because God addresses Israel/Jacob in the present, it is clear he represents the nation descended from him. This is confirmed by the fact that redemption for the Lord’s “servant Jacob” is accomplished at the time when he is to go out from Babylon (*Isa. 48:20*).

In other instances, such as Isaiah 42:1, 50:10, 52:13, 53:11, God’s servant is not named. When he is first mentioned in Isaiah 42:1, his identity is not immediately apparent. However, as Isaiah develops his profile in later passages, it becomes clear that he is an individual who restores the tribes of Jacob (Israel) to God (*Isa. 49:5, 6*) and dies sacrificially on behalf of sinners (*Isa. 52:13–53:12*; see also 49:5, 6). Therefore he cannot be the same as the nation. So it is clear that Isaiah speaks of two servants of God. One is corporate (the nation) and the other is individual.

What is the role of the servant nation? *Isa. 41:8-20*.

God assures Israel that the nation is still the servant of the Lord: “I have chosen you and not cast you off” (*Isa. 41:9, NRSV*). Then God gives to Israel one of the most magnificent promises in the Bible: “Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand” (*vs. 10, NRSV*). Here and in the following verses one of the basic roles of Israel is to trust the true God to save them (as King Ahaz did not) rather than to trust in other gods and their images as other nations do (*Isa. 41:7, 21-24, 28, 29*).

Notice how in Isaiah 41:14, the Lord calls the nation a worm. What point is He making? Look at the whole text to get a better answer. What should this teach us, as well, about our need to depend totally upon the Lord?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: *Isaiah 44, 45, 49.*

Teachers Aim:

1. To explore the role of prophecy in building hope and faith.
2. To apply Isaiah's messages of service to Christian ministry today.

Lesson Outline:

I. Prophecy as a Source of Hope and Faith.

- A. The use of Cyrus, a foreign king, to act on Israel's behalf demonstrates God's control and ability to use anyone to fulfill His purposes.
- B. God contrasts self and idols, who can neither predict the future nor tell the past.
- C. How God led His people in the past provides reason to believe He will again deliver His people according to His promises.

II. Ministry of Service.

- A. Christ, as depicted in the *suffering-servant* songs, is our model for a ministry of service.
- B. Christ won the victory, so we could point others to Him through Christian service.

Summary: We can look forward with hope to Christ's return because of how God has led His people in the past. In the time we are given on earth, however, we are to follow Christ's example of humble service to those in physical and spiritual need.

COMMENTARY

Introduction: To Serve and to Save.

Jesus "came to this world as the unwearied servant of man's necessity. He 'took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses,' that He might minister to every need of humanity. Matthew 8:17. The burden of disease and wretchedness and sin He came to remove. It was His mission to bring to men complete restoration; He came to give them health and peace and perfection of character.

"Varied were the circumstances and needs of those who besought His aid, and none who came to Him went away unhelped. From Him flowed a stream of healing power, and in body and mind and soul men were made whole.

"[Jesus] knew that unless there was a decided change in the principles and purposes of the human race, all would be lost. This was the burden of His soul, and none could appreciate the weight that rested upon Him. . . .

"He came to live in our behalf the life of the poorest and to walk and work among the needy and the suffering. Unrecognized and

MONDAY May 24

Unnamed Individual Servant (*Isa. 42:1-7*).

What is the role and character of God's unnamed servant, whom God chooses and on whom He puts His spirit? *Isa. 42:1-7*.

Choose the best answer or combination of answers:

1. He provides justice for the nations.
2. He accomplishes his goals quietly and gently, but successfully.
3. He is a teacher.
4. He serves as a covenant between God and the people.
5. He gives light/hope by healing blindness and liberating prisoners.
6. All of the above.

How does the role and character of this servant compare with that of the *shoot from the stump of Jesse*, on whom the spirit of the Lord also rests (*Isaiah 11*)?

As in Isaiah 42, the Davidic ruler of chapter 11 acts in harmony with God, providing justice and deliverance for the oppressed, as well as wisdom and knowledge of God. We found that this *shoot* and *root* of Jesse is the Messiah, the divine child of Isaiah 9:6, 7, who also brings "peace for the throne of David and his kingdom" with "justice and with righteousness" (*vs. 7, NRSV*). The servant in Isaiah 42 is, obviously, the Messiah.

How does the New Testament identify the servant of Isaiah 42:1-7, who provides justice? *Matt. 12:15-21*.

Matthew 12 quotes from Isaiah 42 and applies it to the quiet healing ministry of Jesus, God's beloved Son, in whom He delights (*Isa. 42:1; Matt. 3:16, 17; 17:5*). It is He whose ministry reestablishes God's covenant connection with His people (*Isa. 42:6, Dan. 9:27*).

Jesus and His disciples gained justice for people by delivering them from suffering, ignorance of God, and bondage to evil spirits, caused by Satan's oppression (*Luke 10:19*). Then Jesus died to ratify the "new covenant" (*Matt. 26:28*) and to gain justice for the world by casting out Satan, the foreigner who had usurped the position of "ruler of this world" (*John 12:31-33*).

Look at Isaiah 42:1-4, the depiction of Christ. Spend some time dwelling on the life of Jesus. What specific characteristics of His ministry so aptly fulfilled this prophecy? What lessons can we learn about how we should be ministering to others, as well?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

unhonored, He walked in and out among the people for whom He had done so much.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 17–19.

I. Israel My Servant.

God made it clear in His covenant with Israel that they were to be examples of His character and share the plan of redemption with the world (*see Gen. 12:1-3, 17:1-9, Deut. 4:1-9, 5:29-33*). He would teach them His statutes, laws, and judgments, which they were to practice diligently and faithfully (*see Neh. 9:13-16, 23-31*). He also gave Israel a system of worship that reflected the truths of salvation. He unfolded these truths in prophecy, poetry, song, practical precepts, and ceremonial laws (*see Pss. 63:1-3, 77:13-15*). This plan included salvation for every believer, the extermination of evil, and the establishment of His righteousness on a secure basis.

Israel’s distinctiveness was rooted in their fidelity to God’s covenant with them, instead of in any superiority they themselves possessed. All who adopted the covenant’s purposes, conditions, and provisions were numbered with His people (*see Lev. 19:33, 34; Isa. 56:1-8*).

II. A Merciful and Just Servant.

In Isaiah 42:1-7, God outlines His purposes for sending the Messiah. Filled with God’s Spirit, the Messiah will bring justice and judgment to all humanity. In a world of crime, cruelty, injustice, and oppression, this goal is crucial (*see Isa. 59:14, 15*). He will right all wrongs and acquit all righteousness, which, in many cases, will involve the reversal of human judgment (*see Psalms 35 and 37*).

This Messiah will go about His work without fanfare or political gimmicks, but He will be aware of His divine calling and authority (*see Matt. 12:14-30*). He will reach out in love and mercy to the weakest, most brokenhearted people whom the world views as unimportant. Review Christ’s treatment of such people in Mark 10:46-52; Luke 8:26-36, 43-48; and John 8:1-12. He came as the Liberator and Redeemer of all who would open their hearts to Him (*see Isa. 42:6, 7; Matt. 11:28-30; Luke 4:18; John 6:37; 7:37, 38*).

III. A Gentile Deliverer Foreshadows the Messiah.

God chose Cyrus (*Korush*, in Old Persian, meaning “sun”), the founder of the Persian Empire, to destroy Babylon and pave the way for captive Jews to return to Jerusalem. Cyrus’s strategy to break Babylon’s hold was to divert the Euphrates, which ran through the city. He marched his army through the dry riverbed into the unguarded capital. (See Revelation 16:12, which refers symbolically to the drying up of the Euphrates in mystic Babylon just before Jesus comes.)

TUESDAY May 25

Persian “Messiah” (*Isa. 44:26–45:6*).

What stunning prediction appears in Isaiah 44:26–45:6?

Isaiah’s ministry lasted from about 745 B.C. to about 685 B.C. After mentioning a conqueror from the east and from the north (*Isa. 41:2, 3, 25*) and implying that this was to be good news for Jerusalem (*vs. 27*), Isaiah accurately predicted Cyrus by name and described his activities. He did come from north and east of Babylon to conquer it in 539 B.C.; he did serve God by releasing the Jews from their Babylonian exile; and he did authorize the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem (*compare Ezra 1*).

Put this prediction into perspective. Since there are about 146 years from the time of Isaiah’s death to the fall of Babylon, his prophecy was a century and a half ahead of its time. Because the actions of Cyrus are well attested from a variety of ancient sources, including Babylonian chronicles, his own report in the “Cyrus Cylinder,” and the Bible (*2 Chron. 36:22, 23; Ezra 1; Daniel 5; 6:28; 10:1*), the accuracy of Isaiah’s prophecy is beyond dispute. This confirms the faith of people who believe that true prophets receive accurate predictions from God, who knows the future far in advance.

Why does God call Cyrus His “anointed” (*Isa. 45:1*)?

The Hebrew word for “anointed” here is the word from which we get the word “Messiah.” Elsewhere in the Old Testament, this word could refer to an anointed high priest (*Lev. 4:3, 5, 16; 6:22*), an anointed Israelite king (*1 Sam. 16:6; 24:6, 10; 2 Sam. 22:51*), or the Messiah, a future ideal Davidic king and deliverer (*Ps. 2:2; Dan. 9:25, 26*). From Isaiah’s perspective, Cyrus was a future king, sent by God to deliver His people. But he was an unusual messiah, because he was non-Israelite. He would do some things the Messiah would do, such as defeat God’s enemies and release His captive people, but he could not be the same as the Messiah, because he was not descended from David.

By predicting Cyrus, God proved His unique divinity by demonstrating that He alone knows the future (*Isa. 41:4, 21-23, 26-28; 44:26*). He also reached out to Cyrus: “I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places, so that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who call you by your name” (*Isa. 45:3, NRSV*).

Think about some other Bible prophecies that have come to pass as predicted (such as all the kingdoms of Daniel 2 except the last, Daniel 7, or regarding the time of Christ in Daniel 9:24-27). What kind of hope do these prophecies offer us as individuals?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Isaiah 41:9-11, Galatians 4:7.*

❶ Define the word *servant*. How does being a servant of God take away the negative connotation that is associated with this word? How is God as Master different from earthly masters? What does He offer His servants? *Reexamine Isaiah 41:9-11. Read also Galatians 4:7.*

❷ In Isaiah 45:3, God proves Himself to Cyrus by giving Cyrus things that could come only from Him. Ask the class to give examples of how God has blessed them in ways that made them know it could have come only from Him, particularly those things that first brought them into a relationship with Him.

❸ Analyze Isaiah 42:1-4. In many ways, God wants us to follow the example of Christ and His ministry. Verse 2 points out that He did not make a big fuss or work to be noticed or heard “in the street.” Yet, His ministry was strong and powerful. Neither did He seek to discourage those who were hurting and barely holding on to their faith. With this in mind, discuss specific ways we can witness to, and care for, the spiritually weak.

❹ A servant does the bidding of his or her master. So we are to aid in the work of saving souls. People who want to be ministers “should not take upon themselves the responsibility of teaching the truth unless they are qualified for the work. Before engaging in, or devoting themselves to, the work they should become Bible students. If they have not an education so that they can speak in public with acceptance, and do justice to the truth, and honor the Lord whom they profess to serve, they should wait till they are fitted for the position.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 556. How can we prepare to serve in any capacity that has influence over souls for Christ?

❺ The lesson points out that the servant of God was a collective body—(His chosen people) and an individual (His only Son). How does this compare to the work of the church as a whole and to our individual duty to minister to others and serve God? What can we learn from Christ’s example?

❻ How can self-righteousness get in the way of our ministry and service? What dangers does complacency present? How can remembering that Christ served in order to save but that we were saved in order to serve help us to be more effective?

Hope in Advance

The fact that Isaiah accurately predicted Cyrus by name disturbs people who do not believe that prophets receive predictions from God. To cope, they accept the theory that a “second Isaiah,” another prophet living in the time of Cyrus, wrote Isaiah 40–66. Thus, the book of Isaiah is “sawn in two,” the same fate traditionally understood to have befallen the prophet himself (*compare Heb. 11:37*).

There is, however, no historical witness to the existence of a second “Isaiah.” If he did exist, it would be strange for the Bible not to mention him, because his message is profoundly important, and his literary artistry is phenomenal. Not even the oldest Bible manuscript, the Isaiah scroll from Qumran, has any break between Isaiah 39 and 40 that would indicate a transition to the work of a new author.

Isaiah’s basic message is consistent throughout his book: Trust the true God, including His messianic Deliverer, rather than other powers. Scholars rightly emphasize the shift in focus from the Assyrian period in Isaiah 1–39 to the Babylonian period in chapters 40 and following. But we have found that Isaiah 13–14 and 39 already envisage a Babylonian captivity. It is true Isaiah 1–39 emphasizes judgment and 40–66 emphasizes consolation. But in the earlier chapters, divine comfort and assurance is abundant also, and later passages, such as Isaiah 42:18–25, 43:22–28, 48:1–11, speak of God’s judgments on Judah for forsaking Him. In fact, Isaiah’s predictions of future comfort imply suffering in the meantime.

Though the nation did face terrible calamity because of their sins, some people among them did not give up hope. They clung to God’s promises, such as found in **Leviticus 26:40–45**. Read the texts carefully. Put yourself in the place of those Hebrews who are alive after the nation’s defeat by Babylon. What hope could you find in these words?

Read once more through Leviticus 26:40–45. What spiritual principle do you see at work in those verses? What is the Lord saying to them there? How does the same principle work in our own lives?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Cyrus was a broad-minded and religious man, who accepted his prophetic role as a deliverer of God's people (*see Isa. 44:28, 45:1-3*). God declared of Cyrus, "I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward" (*Isa. 45:13; compare Ezra 1:1-5*).

Witnessing

Job descriptions outline the role and function of a particular position and help supervisors search for the best candidate to fill that position. The search for finding the best individual for a job is often difficult. Such a person must not only possess certain skills but also must be willing to take the job.

Have you ever wondered about Jesus' job description? Perhaps it looked like the one below.

JOB DESCRIPTION

NAME: Jesus, Son of God

SUPERVISOR'S NAME: God the Father

JOB STATUS: Full time

POSITION TITLE: Savior of humankind

Job Summary: Work consists of saving humankind, present and future, from sin. Must perform work under terrible conditions. At the end of the assignment, life will be sacrificed in a most cruel way for the good of others.

Essential Job Functions:

- Lead a group of 12 men.
- Heal the sick; raise the dead; feed the hungry.
- Preach, teach, and labor for others without ceasing.
- Bear the burdens and sins of humanity.
- Die so that humanity may live.

Education, Skills, Abilities:

- Carpentry required; fishing skills preferred.
- Never suppress the truth; always speak with love.
- Exhibit great dignity, tact, and compassion.
- Denounce hypocrisy, sin, and unbelief.
- Never be cruel or rude.
- Treat each person as if he or she were the only one you came to save.

Date Approved: A.D. 30

Clearly we see that the only possible candidate for this job is Jesus. What if He had not accepted this assignment? What if He had not fulfilled it? Such verses as Galatians 5:22, 23 and 1 Corinthians 13 call us to be like Christ. As guided by the Holy Spirit, which of the skills and abilities in the above job description can you exhibit to someone next week?

THURSDAY May 27

A Feeling and a Suffering Servant

(*Isa. 49:1-12*).

Who is God's servant in Isaiah 49:1-12?

God calls and names him before he is born, makes his mouth like a sword, and will be glorified in him. God uses the servant to bring the nation of Israel back to Himself, to be a light of salvation to all the world, to be a covenant, and to release prisoners. There is plenty of overlap between this description and that of Isaiah 42, where we identified the servant as the Messiah. The New Testament finds the servant's attributes in Jesus Christ, in both comings: *Matt. 1:21; John 8:12, 9:5, 17:1-5, Rev. 1:16, 2:16, 19:15*.

If this servant is the Messiah, why does God call Him "Israel" here (*Isa. 49:3*)?

Earlier we found that in this section of Isaiah, God's servant "Israel/Jacob" refers to the nation. But here the name "Israel" (without a parallel reference to "Jacob") clearly applies to the individual servant, who restores the nation to God (*Isa. 49:5*). The individual servant has become the ideal embodiment or representative of the nation, whose failure has compromised its use of the name "Israel" (*Isa. 48:1*).

What new element appears here? *Isa. 49:4, 7*.

Here is the first intimation of the difficulty involved in the servant's task. He laments, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity" (*vs. 4, NRSV*), an idea echoed in Daniel 9:26: "an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing" (*NRSV*). But he clings to faith: "Yet surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward with my God" (*Isa. 49:4, NRSV*). Isaiah 49:7 is startling. The servant is "deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers," but God says to him: "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" (*NRSV*).

Look back at Christ's ministry. Right up until the end, didn't He have reasons for discouragement? Yet, He stayed faithful, despite outward appearances. How are we to do the same—despite outward appearances?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

6:1-3). All this foreshadows the deliverance of Christ's people and their translation to the glorious New Jerusalem He has built.

IV. A Servant Triumphant Through Suffering.

Read Isaiah 49:1-12. The Messiah would be born of a woman (and thus be human, as well as divine). His words would be power to heal, to liberate, to unmask deception, and to declare truth (*vs. 2; compare John 7:46, Heb. 4:12, Rev. 1:16*). His mission, embodying the whole purpose of Israel's religion (*John 5:39-47*), would find a poor reception among His nation, making His work seem largely unsuccessful. Nevertheless, God would strengthen Him through His Spirit, so that He could make salvation accessible to all the world. His love and grace will overcome the ignorance and resistance of all who accept His truth. The slander and ridicule of His enemies will not discourage Him from bringing deliverance to those longing for release from sin. Mercifully and tenderly, He will guide those who receive Him as Lord and Savior.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: Of what value is a promise? Discuss whether one promise can be of greater value than another promise. For example, what value would you place on the following promises, and why? (1) "I'll love you forever." (2) "I'll be home on time tonight." (3) "I don't do drugs!" (4) Liberty and justice for all. (5) Eternal life is yours.

Thought Question:

More than five hundred years before Jesus' birth, Isaiah said Jesus would be reviled, despised, enslaved, and weighed down by the very creatures He had created. Knowing for all those centuries that He was the sacrificial Lamb, He still came to this earth to fulfill His promise. Discuss how it is possible to ever understand such love.

Application Question:

Mother Teresa commented, "I know God will not give me anything I can't handle. I just wish He didn't trust me so much!" God did trust her, however. He trusted her to feed His flock, to clothe them, to instruct them, to help them learn to help themselves, and when all else failed, to wrap them in loving Christian arms when they closed their eyes in death. Read Matthew 25:31-40. Discuss how the Adventist Development and Relief Agency and Adventist World Radio are fulfilling these verses. What are some creative ways you have applied these verses to your life?

FRIDAY *May 28*

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White's description of Jesus' healing and teaching ministry in "At Capernaum," *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 252–261.

"In the work of soul-winning, great tact and wisdom are needed. The Saviour never suppressed the truth, but He uttered it always in love. In His intercourse with others, He exercised the greatest tact, and He was always kind and thoughtful. He was never rude, never needlessly spoke a severe word, never gave unnecessary pain to a sensitive soul. He did not censure human weakness. He fearlessly denounced hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity, but tears were in His voice as He uttered His scathing rebukes. He never made truth cruel, but ever manifested a deep tenderness for humanity. Every soul was precious in His sight. He bore Himself with divine dignity; yet He bowed with the tenderest compassion and regard to every member of the family of God. He saw in all, souls whom it was His mission to save."—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 117.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 As a class, read over what Ellen White wrote above about how Christ ministered to others. Discuss the principles there and then as a class discuss how well your local church, corporately, reflects those principles.
- 2 Do you know a "bruised reed" or "dimly burning wick" (*Isa. 42:3*)? How can you help this person without "breaking" or "quenching" him or her? In what ways can you point this person to the Lord? What would you tell him or her, in a practical sense, to do, in order to receive healing and help?
- 3 The argument for different authors of Isaiah originated from the premise that people cannot tell the future the way Isaiah did. What is the fundamental problem with this argument, and why, as Christians, must we reject its premise outright?

Summary: Deliverance requires a Deliverer. God's servant nation would be delivered by two deliverers: Cyrus, who would set the captives free from Babylonian exile, and an unnamed Servant, whose identity as the Messiah is progressively revealed. This Servant would restore justice and bring back the community of survivors to God.