

Session 2: The Forerunner Message in Isaiah 51-52

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Isaiah 49-55 is one unified section in which God promises to establish His rule over the whole world. These prophecies have their ultimate fulfillment in end-time events and the Millennium.

B. Outline for Isaiah 51-52

51:1-23 God will deliver and save Zion

51:1-8 God will comfort Zion

51:9-16 The Lord's strong arm will save Israel

51:17-23 God's judgment on Israel comes to an end

52:1-15 God's salvation will come to Israel and all the earth

52:1-6 Zion is to awaken to salvation

52:7-10 Proclaim the coming King and salvation

52:11-12 A call to obedience and trust

52:13-15 The exaltation of God's Servant—Jesus

II. THE CONTEXT OF ISAIAH 50

A. The Lord answered Zion's complaint that He had forgotten them (by allowing them to be overcome by the Antichrist; 49:14-26). He continued to answer this complaint by saying the real problem was that "they forgot God" and continued to be unresponsive to Him and His leadership (50:1-3).

¹"...Which of My creditors is it to whom I have sold you? For your iniquities you have sold yourselves...²Why, when I came, was there no man? Why, when I called, was there none to answer? Is My hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem?" (Isa. 50:1-3)

B. The Lord corrected Israel for being unresponsive to Him (50:1-3) and called them to follow the example of His Servant, Jesus, who modeled obedience (50:4-9). Jesus is the "model disciple" who obeyed God, endured great mistreatment, yet trusted the Father to vindicate Him (50:8).

⁴"The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary. He awakens Me morning by morning...to hear as the learned...

⁶I gave My back to those who struck Me...I did not hide My face from shame and spitting...

⁸He [the Father] is near who justifies Me; who will contend with Me?" (Isa. 50:4-8)

C. God's people are to trust God as Jesus did in mistreatment and difficulty, even when they do not have all the details of how God will help them (50:10-11). They are to trust the Lord in the "dark" moments of their life when they do not know how their circumstances will turn out.

¹⁰"Who among you fears the LORD? Who obeys the voice of His Servant [Jesus]? Who walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the LORD [like Jesus did in 50:8] ...

¹¹Look, all you who kindle a fire, who...walk in the light of your fire—this you shall have from My hand: you shall lie down in torment." (Isa. 50:10-11)

III. GOD WILL COMFORT ZION (51:1-8)

- A. This passage continues the exhortation in 50:10-11 to listen to and obey Jesus, God’s Servant. God comforted Jerusalem by telling them what He will do in the future (50:3-6). He will make Jerusalem like the garden of Eden (51:3) and cause His Word and justice to fill the earth (51:4). Isaiah addressed fear—many will be overwhelmed with fear in the end-times (49:14; 51:7, 12-13).
- ¹“Listen to Me, you who follow after righteousness, you who seek the LORD: look to the rock from which you were hewn...²Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bore you; for I called him alone, and blessed him and increased him.”³For the LORD will comfort Zion; He will comfort all her waste places; He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in it...and the voice of melody...⁷“Listen to Me, you who know righteousness...do not fear the reproach of men, nor be afraid of their insults.” (Isa. 51:1-3, 7)*
- B. The Lord called those who follow after righteousness to listen to and follow Jesus’ example of how to process the delay of God’s promises, being rejected and mistreated, and defining success (49:4-7; 50:6-8). He told them to look back at Abraham (50:2) and up at the heavens (50:6) to help them remember God’s ways and promises and not be afraid (50:7-8).
1. **Follow righteousness:** Those who pursued a life of righteousness and sought the Lord in 51:1 are the same people who were described as fearing the Lord in 50:10.
 2. **Look to the rock:** They were to remember what God did through Abraham and Sarah. Abraham was “the rock” from which his descendants were hewn. The rock speaks of Abraham’s faith. Abraham, like Israel, also had to walk by faith in God’s promises.
¹⁶...that the promise might be sure...to those who are of the faith of Abraham...¹⁸who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations ...¹⁹And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah’s womb. ²⁰He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, ²¹and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. (Rom. 4:16-21)
 3. **I called him alone:** Abraham was just one man who did not have any children—he was in a similar position to Zion who will be “bereaved and barren” (49:21). God promised to multiply Abraham’s descendants (Gen 15:5) and will do this most in context to Zion in the end times.
 4. **Comfort Zion:** The Lord will transform Jerusalem into Eden-like conditions. The glory of the Lord will be there. Water, rivers, springs, and pools will transform the land (35:6; 41:17-18).
¹...the desert shall...blossom as the rose; ²...with joy and singing...they shall see the glory of the LORD...⁴Say to those who are fearful-hearted, “Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come...”⁶For waters shall burst forth...and streams in the desert. (Isa. 35:1-6)
 5. **Singing:** Singing is a very important part of God’s end-time plans (51:3, 11; 52:8-9; 54:1).

- C. God's Word, justice, and salvation will fill the earth forever (51:4-6). Jesus will succeed in God's time in spite of the rejection, opposition, and divine delays that He endured (49:7; 50:6).
- ⁴“Listen to Me, My people; and give ear to Me, O My nation: for law will proceed from Me, and I will make My justice rest as a light of the peoples [nations]...⁵My arms will judge the peoples...⁶Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look on the earth...For the heavens will vanish away like smoke...those who dwell in it will die in like manner; but My salvation will be forever...” (Isa. 51:4-6)***
1. ***Listen***: In the Great Tribulation, it may seem like this will not happen, but it will surely come to pass in God's timing. God's people are to listen and not be overcome by fear (51:7). This is a call to watch and pray so that fear does not gain a stronghold in the hearts of God's people.
 2. ***Law***: God's instruction (tôrâ) will go forth to the whole world (2:2-3).
 3. ***Justice***: Jesus' mission is to establish justice throughout the earth (51:4; cf. 42:4; Lk. 18:7-8). In contrast to this world and their insults, God's salvation and justice will last forever (51:6).
⁷Now will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night ⁸He will bring about justice for them quickly...when the Son of Man comes... (Lk. 18:7-8; NAS)
 4. ***My salvation***: This speaks of Jesus' power to transform lives, lands, cities, nations, etc.
 5. ***Lift up your eyes to the heavens***: They were to pay close attention to what will happen in the sky and on the earth. This includes Jesus' call to His people to watch and pray. The primary exhortation that Jesus gave in context to His teaching on the end times was to be watchful. (Mt. 24:42-43; 25:13; 26:38-41; 27:36; Mk. 13:33-38; Lk. 12:38-39; 21:36; Rev. 3:3; 16:15).
²⁵“And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations...²⁶men's hearts failing them from fear...²⁸When these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.” (Lk. 21:25-28)
- D. God's people must listen and look (51:2, 6) to avoid being overcome with fear (51:7-8). God's messengers are not to be preoccupied with avoiding reproach and insults (49:7; 52:7).
- ⁷“Listen to Me, you who know righteousness, you people in whose heart is My law: do not fear the reproach of men, nor be afraid of their insults. ⁸For the moth will eat them up like a garment, and the worm will eat them like wool; but My righteousness will be forever...” (Isa. 51:7-8)***
1. God's messengers will be rejected and mistreated even as Jesus was (49:7; 50:6).
³...knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days... (2 Pet. 3:3)
 2. A moth eats a garment over time. Isaiah assured them of the demise of those who bring reproach on God's servants. However, it will not usually be a sudden event, but a gradual process with deterioration occurring over time—not obvious, but as a moth eats a garment.
 3. ***Forever***: God's righteous purpose and salvation will outlast all enemies and critics (51:6).

IV. THE LORD'S STRONG ARM WILL SAVE ISRAEL (ISA. 51:9-16)

- A. The saints will pray for the Lord to “awake” to action in showing His supernatural power to save them from their enemies by judging them as He did with Moses in the Exodus (51:9-11).

⁹Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD! Awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old...¹⁰Are You not the One who dried up the sea [Red Sea]... made the depths of the sea a road for the redeemed to cross over? ¹¹So the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. (Isa. 51:9-11)

1. ***Arm of the Lord:*** Isaiah described God’s saving power as God’s arm. It will be openly seen as His judgments that remove all obstacles to His people and purposes (50:2; 51:9; 52:10; 53:1).
2. ***Put on strength:*** This is the image of a soldier girding his arm with gear before battle.
3. ***Ransomed of the Lord:*** The remnant of Israel that survived the Great Tribulation will go to Jerusalem on a new highway (51:11).

- B. God promises to help His people, and He exhorts them not to fear their oppressors (51:12-16). The Lord’s answer to the prayer in 51:9 is given here. He assures them that, as the Creator (51:13) and the one who controls the seas (51:15), He is able to deliver them from mere men (51:12).

¹²“...I am He who comforts you. Who are you that you should be afraid of a man who will die...¹³And you forget the LORD your Maker, Who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth; you have feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor [Antichrist] ...And where is the fury of the oppressor? ¹⁴The captive exile hastens, that he may be loosed, that he should not die in the pit, and...his bread should not fail. ¹⁵But I am the LORD...Who divided the sea... ¹⁶I have put My words in your mouth; I have covered you with the shadow of My hand, that I may plant the heavens, lay the foundations of the earth, and say to Zion, ‘You are My people.’” (Isa. 51:12-16)

1. ***Have you forgotten your Maker?:*** This is the opposite of the problem in 49:14 when Israel asked if God has forgotten them. God remembers His people, but will they remember Him?
2. ***Who stretched out the heavens:*** The Lord called them to trust His power as Creator.
3. ***Afraid of a man:*** To live overcome with fear of men’s reproaches and insults (51:7) or even their power to harm us (51:13) is, in essence, to have forgotten the Lord.
4. ***Captive:*** Jesus understands the peril and urgency of the prisoner who is without food (51:14).
¹⁸This will be written for the generation to come, that a people yet to be created may praise the LORD. ¹⁹For He looked down from the height of His sanctuary; from heaven the LORD viewed the earth, ²⁰to hear the groaning of the prisoner, to release those appointed to death, ²¹to declare the name of the LORD in Zion, and His praise in Jerusalem, ²²when the peoples [nations] are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the LORD. (Ps. 102:18-22)

5. **My words in your mouth:** God puts words in the mouth of believers to release His purposes.

¹⁶I have put My words in your mouth; I have covered you with the shadow of My hand, that I may plant the heavens, lay the foundations of the earth, and say to Zion, ‘You are My people.’” (Isa. 51:16)

¹⁹...when the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD will lift up a standard against him. ²⁰“The Redeemer will come to Zion... ²¹“As for Me,” says the LORD, “this is My covenant with them: My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants’ descendants...from this time and forevermore.”” (Isa. 59:19-21)

V. GOD’S JUDGMENT ON ISRAEL COMES TO AN END (ISA. 51:17-23)

- A. The Lord calls the saints to “awake” to His salvation/restoration purposes (51:17- 23).

¹⁷Awake, awake! Stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk at the hand of the LORD the cup of His fury; you have drunk the dregs of the cup of trembling, and drained it out. ¹⁸There is no one to guide her among all the sons she has brought forth...¹⁹These two things have come to you... desolation and destruction, famine and sword...²⁰Your sons have fainted...they are full of the fury of the LORD...²¹Therefore please hear this...²²“See, I have taken out of your hand the cup of trembling, the dregs of the cup of My fury; you shall no longer drink it. ²³But I will put it into the hand of those who afflict you, who have said to you, ‘Lie down, that we may walk over you...’” (Isa. 51:17-23)

- B. **Awake, stand up:** The leaders in Jerusalem are called to stand up and not faint with despair (51:20). There will be a leadership crisis in Jerusalem during the Great Tribulation (51:18-19).
- C. **Please hear this:** At this point, God’s wrath on Israel has ended forever (51:22; 52:1).
- D. **Those who afflict you:** The Lord will destroy their enemies—the Antichrist’s armies (51:23).

VI. ZION IS TO AWAKEN TO SALVATION (ISA. 52:1-6)

- A. Zion is to arise and walk in strength in her new garments—godly activities (52:1-3; Rev. 19:8). Zion will just have been released from captivity related to the return of Jesus (52:2)

¹Awake, awake! Put on your strength, O Zion; put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city! For the...unclean shall no longer come to you. ²Shake yourself from the dust, arise...O Jerusalem! Loose yourself from the bonds...O captive daughter of Zion! (Isa. 52:1-2)

- B. Israel will be the first entire nation to walk holy before God in every area of life (Zech. 14:20-21). Israel will walk in holiness in their **public life** (bells of the horses; 14:20), in their **religious life** (cooking pots in the Lord’s house; 14:20), and in their **private life** (every pot in Judah; 14:21).

²⁰In that day “HOLINESS TO THE LORD” shall be engraved on the bells of the horses. The pots in the LORD’s house shall be like the bowls before the altar. ²¹Yes, every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holiness to the LORD of hosts... (Zech. 14:20-21)

VII. PROCLAIM THE COMING KING AND SALVATION (ISA. 52:7-10)

- A. The Lord will send messengers to Israel in the midst of the Great Tribulation crisis (52:7-10; 40:9). They will take great risks to boldly speak God’s message even from the mountain tops.

⁷How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace...who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns!” ⁸Your watchmen shall lift their voices...they shall sing together...⁹Break forth into joy, sing together, you waste places of Jerusalem! For the LORD...has redeemed Jerusalem. ¹⁰The LORD has made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. (Isa. 52:7-10)

- B. **Your God reigns:** The confession and message of God’s messengers now and then is “God reigns!”
- C. **Watchmen:** Intercessory worship fueled by faithful messengers will be essential (62:6-12).
- D. **All nations:** Jesus’ judgment and salvation will be seen by all the nations.

⁷Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. (Rev. 1:7)

VIII. THE EXALTATION OF GOD’S SERVANT—JESUS (ISA. 52:13-15)

- A. The Father will fully vindicate Jesus and fulfill all of His promises to Him (52:13-15).

¹³Behold, My Servant...shall be exalted and extolled and be very high...¹⁴His visage was marred more than any man...¹⁵so shall He sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; for what had not been told them they shall see, and what they had not heard they shall consider. (Isa. 52:13-15)

- B. **Exalted:** Jesus’ worldwide exaltation is predicted (52:13-15; 53:10-12) along with His suffering (53:1-9). This began with His resurrection, ascension, and enthronement at God’s right hand.
- C. **His visage was marred:** Jesus experienced great mistreatment and humiliation, so He is able to help Israel and the body of Christ to embrace them in the greatest measure in the Great Tribulation.
- D. **Shut their mouths:** Kings will shut their mouths in awe, being speechless as they understand who Jesus is and what He does. They will worship and bow before Him with affection and respect.
- E. **Sprinkle:** The priests in Israel sprinkled blood on the altar (Lev. 4:6; 5:9; 8:11, 30; 13:7; 16:14, 19). Here Jesus is depicted as cleansing nations (Zech. 13:1-3).

¹“In that day a fountain shall be opened for...the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness. ²It shall be in that day...that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land... I will also cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to depart from the land.” (Zech. 13:1-3)

- F. **Many nations:** Jesus will bring His salvation and cleansing to all the earth (49:6; 52:10).