

God Offers Deliverance

Bible Background • Isaiah 51

Printed Text • Isaiah 51:1-8 | Devotional Reading • 2 Thessalonians 3:1-4

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXAMINE Isaiah's example of God's rich faithfulness in Israel's spiritual history, TRUST God even when others speak disparagingly about our faith, and SHARE the goodness and deliverance of God with others.

In Focus

Kaylynn had been incarcerated for a crime he did not commit. He believed the day would come when God would clear his name and he would be delivered from his bondage. He had held close to the words found in Isaiah, "The Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be put to shame, He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? It is the Sovereign Lord who helps me!" (Isaiah 50:7–9).

He trusted God. He had gotten into some situations in the past, being accused falsely and misjudged, and God delivered him out every time.

But, this time, the setup led to his imprisonment. His friends and associates felt sorry for him. But they didn't believe Kaylynn would get out of this one easily and they told him to plead guilty and he would get a lesser charge. Kaylynn stood his ground and said, "How can I confess to what I have not done? God has never failed me and neither will He this time."

Kaylynn was given the maximum sentence of 20 years without a chance of parole.

That was two years ago. Today he was preparing to leave prison. All charges had been dropped. He was exonerated. As he was singing and praising God, Paul and Silas's jail experience came to mind. After their release they told the brethren all about it. Kaylynn could hardly wait to meet up with his former friends and associates to share with them how God delivered him out of prison.

When we are in a jam and things don't look good, do we still keep the faith? Do we still believe and hope in God to deliver us?

Keep In Mind

"Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged." (Isaiah 51:1, KJV)

Words You Should Know

1. **Hearken** (Isaiah 51:1) qashab (Heb.)—To prick up the ears, to cause to hear, give heed
2. **Hewn** (v. 1) gazith (Heb.)—To cut or carve, to split or divide

Say It Correctly

Hearken. HAR-ken

KJV

Isaiah 51:1 Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged.

2 Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him.

3 For the Lord shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.

4 Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation: for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light of the people.

5 My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the people; the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust.

6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.

7 Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings.

8 For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation.

NLT

Isaiah 51:1 "Listen to me, all who hope for deliverance—all who seek the Lord!

Consider the rock from which you were cut, the quarry from which you were mined.

2 Yes, think about Abraham, your ancestor, and Sarah, who gave birth to your nation.

Abraham was only one man when I called him. But when I blessed him, he became a great nation."

3 The Lord will comfort Israel again and have pity on her ruins. Her desert will blossom like Eden, her barren wilderness like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness will be found there. Songs of thanksgiving will fill the air.

4 "Listen to me, my people. Hear me, Israel, for my law will be proclaimed, and my justice will become a light to the nations.

5 My mercy and justice are coming soon. My salvation is on the way. My strong arm will bring justice to the nations. All distant lands will look to me and wait in hope for my powerful arm.

6 Look up to the skies above, and gaze down on the earth below. For the skies will disappear like smoke, and the earth will wear out like a piece of clothing. The people of the earth will die like flies, but my salvation lasts forever. My righteous rule will never end!

7 "Listen to me, you who know right from wrong, you who cherish my law in your hearts. Do not be afraid of people's scorn, nor fear their insults.

8 For the moth will devour them as it devours clothing. The worm will eat at them as it eats wool. But my righteousness will last forever. My salvation will continue from generation to generation."

The People, Places, and Times

Abraham and Sarah. Abraham did not always follow God's plan as God had intended. On occasion, he and Sarah both seemed to have an urge to give God a helping hand. At other times, the two acted out of cowardice, not out of faith in the God who called them.

From the time of his call, Abraham had no knowledge of where he would be going. He stepped out on the word of God. He never stopped believing in God's purpose, even when it seemed that everything was working against him.

Eden. The name Eden is derived either from the Hebrew root word meaning "to be fruitful, plentiful" or from a Sumerian word meaning "steppe, flatland." After creating the entire universe, God consecrated the particular garden called Eden as a place of paradise and worship. He placed His newly created human beings to care for it, and communed with them there. There was still work to do to care for Eden, but no weeds or thorns to make the work especially hard. Many prophecies of the end times pull on images of Eden to indicate that God will heal the world so completely as to restore the paradise we knew before the Fall.

Background

Even though the Israelites are worried that foreign countries will conquer them, God reassures His people He is willing, able, and capable of providing for their release from their captives. In Isaiah 50, the one who is responsible for delivering this message of hope shows he has been commissioned by God and he is ready to carry out his mission, God's message, out to the fullest (Isaiah 50:4–5).

Jesus also fulfilled this prophecy when He was commissioned by God and carried out His duties in securing salvation for mankind to the fullest. Some Jews rejected Jesus as Christ on their own accord. We make a choice to accept what God offers. In Isaiah's message, the people of God are encouraged to trust in Him, while sinners are discouraged not to trust in themselves (Isaiah 50:11).

At-A-Glance

1. The Offer of Deliverance (Isaiah 51:1–3)
2. The Way to Deliverance (vv. 4–6)
3. An Everlasting Deliverance (vv. 7–8)

In Depth

1. The Offer of Deliverance (Isaiah 51:1–3)

This conversation is to those who follow after righteousness, seriously yearning to practically obey God's law. They are told, "Listen to Me!" God is making them an offer of deliverance.

God's people are seeking Him because they want His favor brought back to them. They are told to look back to Abraham and Sarah. You are Sarah's daughters, if you strive for righteousness. To encourage the captives in Babylon, God calls them to remember when He called Abraham and how by His Word He blessed and increased him. They, too, were very small in number, but the Lord has promised to increase them also (Isaiah 49:19).

The Lord shall comfort Zion: God will restore it from despair. He will make them happy— giving them hearts that are glad. Their gladness will lead to their satisfaction making them thankful to God. They will sing from their hearts songs of joy and thanksgiving unto their God.

What role models of righteousness do you identify in your life?

2. The Way to Deliverance (vv. 4–6)

God is speaking to a specific group, His people. This isn't for everyone. This is for the people of God. The ones who have the law of God within them. In addition to knowing what is right, God's people do what is right. God wants His people to listen and be attentive. He wants His people to adhere to what He is saying and take notes on their hearts.

God's righteousness is near; He will soon come to their rescue. Those that He has made promises to will see the fulfillment of those promises. God's arms will judge the people, because He has the power to judge all. He has the ability to draw them together, and He has the ability to scatter them. They should put their trust in Him.

Heaven and earth are going to pass away (Matthew 24:35). The description here is the heavens will disappear like a vapor, or smoke, into thin air. The earth will fall off like an old piece of clothing no one wants to wear. Just as the earth and the heavens will no longer exist, this will be true of people. In contrast, the way to deliverance, salvation and righteousness will remain.

How do you remind yourself to chase after eternal things, rather than passing earthly things?

3. An Everlasting Deliverance (vv. 7–8)

Isaiah is requesting the attention of the righteous, God's people, the keepers of the Law. God's people are told to not fear the rebuke and criticism of men. We have the assurance of God's promises. Others might say anything to attempt to destroy our faith in God, but God has given His promise. He will not turn back on His Word. God is faithful.

People will become food for the insects and animals when they die. As time goes on, those same people won't be around to express disapproval. In contrast, the salvation and righteous of God will always be. Salvation and righteousness will continue to exist, from generation to generation, forever.

What would you be able to do for God if you weren't afraid of others' scorn?

Search the Scriptures

1. Is God offering deliverance to all (Isaiah 51:1)?
2. Who shall comfort the people of Zion (v. 3)?
3. Who are they that know righteousness (v. 6)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. God shows He is willing and able to deliver us from our captivity, which is sin. But He does not force us to accept His offer. Should He or should He not? Why?
2. God tells His people, "hearken unto me" three times. When something is told to us repeatedly should we consider it? Should we pay more attention to what's being said or should we find the person to be a nuisance trying to force us to accept what they are saying?

Liberating Lesson

In spite of what we see, we must remember God is faithful and He will deliver us, just as He did the remnant of Israel. He encourages us to listen to Him and to look back at what He did for Abraham and Sarah. Abraham believed God and became a great nation, we too must believe

God and trust Him. God comforts and consoles us as we fear Him. If we are faithful, God will deliver us. We must be willing to tell others that God's Word will last forever. We should encourage others to trust Jesus for deliverance and salvation.

Application for Activation

This week, pray and trust God daily to deliver you from any situation that will cause you not to demonstrate your faith in God. Do not let anyone discourage you from believing that God can deliver you from those that speak negatively. You can ask God to speak to your heart so the Holy Spirit will remind you that God is faithful and He will deliver you. Ask God to help you encourage others because Jesus loves you and wants everyone to be saved. Tell others that those who reject the Lord will be judged by God, not man.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Isaiah 51:1-8

Isaiah 51 seems to be addressed to the people of Israel who lived more than a century after the time of Isaiah—the nation suffering through the Babylonian Exile. Much of Isaiah 40–66 looks beyond the time of the prophet to the Exile and the returning exiles. The background of this passage is that the people are exiled away from Judea and are being held captive by the Babylonians. They are desperate. They are heart-broken and struggling to make sense of their predicament. Yet they still remember Yahweh. But does Yahweh remember them?

He does. The Lord calls upon the people to trust and believe in Him once again like their ancestor Abraham. The Lord employs the Abrahamic story in Genesis—a story they never forgot about—to remind the Jews what He is capable of. The Lord tells them that He is about to move. He is about to bring salvation once again for those who are pursuing His righteousness and glory. Cyrus, the king of the Persians, defeated the Babylonians in 539 BC and subsequently freed the Israelites from bondage. This passage tells the story of God revealing His plans to them.

1 Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged.

In verse 1 the Lord bids the people exiled out of Jerusalem to listen and listen closely to what He has to say. He is preparing to share important news. Note that those who listen to the Lord are also the same people who “follow after righteousness.” A person cannot do one without the other. The Hebrew word for righteousness in this text is *tsedek* (TSEH-dek), which means ethical fairness or governmental justice. Many people turned from God before the Babylonian captivity and many others turned from God because of Babylonian captivity. Those who turned during captivity may have felt that God was unjust. They may have felt that God was unfair. Those who still had faith in the Lord are the ones the Lord was speaking to particularly. Listening to and seeking the Lord are the preconditions for following after righteousness. One cannot follow after righteousness without listening to and seeking the Lord in spite of their predicament in life. Moreover, following after God does not necessarily mean following behind Him in the sense of committing to religious rituals without much dedication. It means pursuing Him. It means chasing after His ways. It means actively trying to please Him according to His desires.

When those who are both exiled and still pursuing God hear God’s voice in spirit, Isaiah says to “look unto the rock whence ye are hewn.” When Isaiah says “look” the Hebrew word is *nabat* (naw-BOT) which means to look in more than just a literal fashion. It means to behold or to look in high regard. Isaiah is saying to look at the rock (Heb. *tsur*, TSOOR) from which you were hewn (Heb. *chatsab*, khaw-TSOB). In proper context, the Lord is saying to behold the tradition upon which your people have historically relied or stood. The Lord is saying to honor the tradition, hold it in high regard. It is as solid as a rock. The Lord beckons the people to remember their culture, their past, their tradition. Look backwards and remember what God has done is important because it is a sheer reminder of what God is fully capable of. In other words, that which God was capable of in the past is what God is still capable of in the present.

2 Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him.

When the people look at their tradition and remember their culture, they will remember the patriarch Abraham who is the father of their faith. The Lord directed Abraham’s path by telling him to depart from his country and people to a land that God selected (Genesis 12:1). In this history, Abraham was alone with his wife Sarah who could not conceive children, and the Lord blessed them more than they could ever have imagined. The blessing of Abraham did not cease with Abraham but extended to Isaac and Jacob and all his sons. The Lord’s covenant with Abraham did not stop with Abraham but continued regardless of circumstance or situation through all of his descendants who continued to have faith in the Lord. This great story of Abraham in the Torah that the people knew so well says to them that if the Lord can take one man, Abraham, and separate him from his people, and still make a great nation out of his descendants, then the Lord can do it again.

These words were encouraging for those who struggled with wondering not if God was willing to deliver them but if the Lord was capable of doing it. These people had experienced military defeat at the hands of countless enemies. They knew in their heart of hearts that they were guilty of not keeping the covenant. They remembered the times that they worshiped other gods and didn’t care for the God who freed them from Egypt and protected their ancestors. Some even scoffed at their tradition. Some ignored their heritage. So, they thought, why would God save us? Why would God return to us? Why would God rescue us in light of everything we have done against Him? It is a wonderful blessing to know that God is a forgiving God. And not only is He forgiving, He is able to forgive and restore when He pleases.

3 For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.

After mentioning what was done for Abraham, the Lord invokes Zion (Jerusalem), the conquered land. Although, at the moment, Jerusalem as they understand it is no more, God promises to comfort her and recreate her once again. God promises with figurative hyperbole to turn their wilderness, their deserted wasteland, into something as beautiful and plentiful as the historic Garden of Eden. All the corners of their former land that have been ruined and desecrated will be comforted and taken care of once more. The Garden of Eden represents a paradise filled with delightful resources, splendor, food, and a host of unimaginable goods. By using the Garden in this context, Isaiah invokes the image of not just Israel returning to Canaan, but of all humanity returning to a Garden modeled on the first Eden, but even more glorious. Isaiah is implying that the Lord will redeem all of humanity through His power. That is to say, God has the power to take what has been destroyed and renew it into something wonderful.

The Lord will take their desert arabah (aw-raw-BAW), a steep or desert plain of uninhabited land, and make it like the garden of the Lord. The Lord also says that this garden will be filled with joy and music. There will be thanksgiving, gratitude as opposed to shame and defeat. There will be melody as opposed to wails.

4 Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation: for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light of the people.

Again, the Lord bids His people to listen to Him closely. His people, either Gentiles from other parts of the land or the Jews who have known him since Abraham, heed His words carefully and recognize Him as their God. Here the Lord is saying that He will make His judgment—His law—a light for the people who recognize Him as their Lord and seek to follow Him in the ways of righteousness. When God delivers them, it will include non-Jewish people who see His works in their redemption and can recognize His power and awesomeness. The Lord will make judgment to rest (Heb. raga, RAW-GAH), or to dwell in peace and quiet. In this latter portion of Isaiah, the prophet repeatedly states the promise that Yahweh's covenant and teaching that Israel itself will illuminate the entire world (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6; 51:4; 60:3). The apostle John sees these promises reach their ultimate fulfillment in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:24).

5 My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the people; the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust.

The Lord means a few things when He says His righteousness is near. On one hand, the Lord is saying that His righteousness is close in the sense that it is not far from people who once assumed it was distant and too far for them to grasp, because they were not members of the chosen people. Here the Lord is explicit as to the proximity to His glory, even for those living as far-flung as “the isles.” His salvation has gone forth, and it is there for any who desire to pursue it. The Lord is the Lord of all peoples. And He welcomes all peoples. What was once limited is now open; a covenant that was once particular is now open for anyone who is willing to accept and embrace.

On the other hand, however, when the Lord says His righteousness is near, He is also saying that Cyrus, king of the Persians, is on his way to battle the Babylonians. When the Persians and the Babylonians engage in war, the Lord has set it up for Cyrus and the Persians to emerge victorious.

After Cyrus defeats the Babylonians, he will then free the people of Judea who were held in Babylonian bondage. This defeat and subsequent liberation will be in the name of the Lord for the world to see. Those who will be delivered will rest in God's arms in whom they trust because they will know that only the Lord could have kept such a promise of commitment.

6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be forever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.

God, through the words of Isaiah, says to look: look up and see heaven, look around and see the soil beneath our feet and know that the cosmos that all living creatures inhabit is impermanent. The world, the universe, all that is visible to our sight—from the vast, innumerable star, to the deep stones supporting our homes—are, in fact, temporary. One day it will all be gone. The Lord also says that the earth ages, it is an object that exists within the space-time continuum, which means it is not eternal. It will not last forever. It will grow (KJV: "wax") old as clothing does, fraying and thinning until it is of no further use.

Yet what does last forever is God and His salvation. God's Word, salvation, and righteousness are eternal. They exist outside of the temporal motion of time. They last because they have always existed and will continue to exist even after everything else vanishes away.

7 Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings.

Again, the Lord calls to the people to listen to Him. And those people are people that know and recognize God's righteousness and not the righteousness of humanity. The Lord is speaking to the people who not only know the Torah and remember the covenant, but to the people who have inscribed God's righteousness in their hearts. He says to them to not fear men or enosh (EN-NOASH) which means "mere men" or "mere mortals." Do not fear people in power. Do not fear the Babylonians. Do not fear the Persians. Do not be afraid of what they have the power to do to you. You belong to the Lord.

8 For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation.

One should not be concerned about mere mortals or the power of human beings because evil will always lose in the end. Evil will eventually devour itself and destroy the world it infests. God's righteousness, that lasts for all time, will do away with it in the end. Isaiah is saying that no matter who emerges as an enemy of God and God's people, they will eventually fall. Connected to the Lord's salvation is the Lord's consistent and promised deliverance from His enemies. The Jewish idea of salvation is centered on physical protection and deliverance from one's enemies. Jesus, a Jew himself, re-imagines this understanding and expands the definition to include God's eternal protection and deliverance from Hell and evil. Remember that God restores, no matter what was lost, destroyed, or taken. The Lord has the power to redeem and deliver like He has done in the past. Always look to God's faithfulness in the past as assurance that God will continue to work on your behalf. God reminds His people that just as He did the unimaginable with Abraham, He can continue to do so with His people through the ages.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

God Will Vindicate His Servant
(Isaiah 50:4–9)

TUESDAY

Remember God's Mighty Deeds
(Isaiah 51:9–16)

WEDNESDAY

God Defends Israel's Cause
(Isaiah 51:17–23)

THURSDAY

God Rescues Us from Peril
(2 Corinthians 1:7–14)

FRIDAY

Jesus Rescues Us from Wrath
(1 Thessalonians 1:6–10)

SATURDAY

Deliverance Belongs to the Lord
(Psalm 3)

SUNDAY

God's Deliverance Is Coming
(Isaiah 51:1–8)