

Isaiah's Book of Consolation (Isaiah 40-55)
(#20) "God Promises to Redeem Zion, His people" (Isaiah 52:1-12)

(The outline of Isaiah 40-55 is placed at the end of these notes.)

Let us turn to Isaiah 52. We will read the first 12 verses of this chapter. Here the prophet Isiah alerts the elect of God that their redemption by God was about to be realized.

¹Awake, awake!
Put on your strength, O Zion;
Put on your beautiful garments,
O Jerusalem, the holy city!
For the uncircumcised and the unclean
Shall no longer come to you.
²Shake yourself from the dust, arise;
Sit down, O Jerusalem!
Loose yourself from the bonds of your neck,
O captive daughter of Zion!

³For thus says the LORD:

"You have sold yourselves for nothing,
And you shall be redeemed without money."

⁴For thus says the Lord GOD:

"My people went down at first
Into Egypt to dwell there;
Then the Assyrian oppressed them without cause.
⁵Now therefore, what have I here," says the LORD,
"That My people are taken away for nothing?
Those who rule over them
Make them wail," says the LORD,
"And My name is blasphemed continually every day.
⁶Therefore My people shall know My name;
Therefore they shall know in that day
That I am He who speaks:
'Behold, it is I.'"

⁷How beautiful upon the mountains
Are the feet of him who brings good news,
Who proclaims peace,
Who brings glad tidings of good things,
Who proclaims salvation,
Who says to Zion,
"Your God reigns!"

⁸Your watchmen shall lift up their voices,
With their voices they shall sing together;
For they shall see eye to eye
When the LORD brings back Zion.

⁹Break forth into joy, sing together,
You waste places of Jerusalem!
For the LORD has comforted His people,
He 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.

¹¹Depart! Depart! Go out from there,
Touch no unclean thing;
Go out from the midst of her,
Be clean,
You who bear the vessels of the LORD.

¹²For you shall not go out with haste,
Nor go by flight;
For the LORD will go before you,
And the God of Israel will be your rear guard.

These verses comprise the third of the three divisions of the prophetic oracle that began with Isaiah 51:1 and concludes with Isaiah 52:12. The oracle has been described as an “Encouragement to the Godly¹.” Those who see their need of salvation through God’s grace may receive encouragement and hope through the study of these verses.

The verses before us today, 52:1-12, set forth the theme, “God Promises to Redeem Zion, His people.” This section of Isaiah’s oracle contains God’s promise that He would bring salvation to His people, restoring them unto Himself. God promised that He would be their God and that they would be His people. Immediately following this oracle is the glorious Fourth Servant Song of Isaiah (52:13-53:12), in which the sufferings of our Saviour are so clearly and graphically prophesied. What God said He would do for His people in this present oracle, He would accomplish through His Suffering Servant, who would die, whereby He would atone for the sins of His people.

The second section of the oracle that we addressed last Lord’s Day (51:17-23) recorded God’s promise that He would remove His wrath from His people. The “cup” of His wrath that they had encountered, He would cause to be given to their tormentors. It is their turn to drink God’s judgment. Formerly, Israel’s enemies said, “Get down so we can walk all over you.” But God revealed to His people that their enemies would never again oppress them. But now in the passage before us we read that God would not only remove His wrath from them, but that He would restore them fully unto Himself. He would re-establish them in a covenant relationship with Himself.

Now, as we stressed last week, although we read of God’s historical deliverance of His people from the Babylonian captivity and their return to their homeland and Jerusalem, which historically occurred in the 6th century BC, we should look beyond that event to the great deliverance that God is bringing to pass for His people in this gospel age. This is a prophecy of the salvation that we possess and what we presently enjoy through Jesus Christ. But we also stated last Lord’s Day, there are many who do not interpret this oracle in this manner. They understand this not to be a prophecy of this gospel age, but they interpret these prophecies of Isaiah to be fulfilled in a future end time tribulation and a 1,000 year Jewish millennial kingdom that

¹ The appellation provided in *The Reformation Study Bible*.

follows, in which Jesus Christ will rule on a throne in Jerusalem over the nations of the world.² This is not correct, in my opinion.

As we look over these verses we may discern the following outline:

1. The city of Zion--the people of God--are exhorted to rise to anticipate their deliverance (52:1-2)
2. God reveals His intention to deliver His people (52:3-6)
3. The good news of God's salvation is widely proclaimed (52:7-10)
4. The prophet exhorts the Lord's people to be holy as they return to Zion (52:11-12)

Let us work our way through this passage which sets the stage for the glorious person and work of the Servant of God, our Lord Jesus Christ.

I. The city of Zion--the people of God--are exhorted to rise in anticipation of their deliverance (52:1-3)

¹Awake, awake!

Put on your strength, O Zion;

Put on your beautiful garments,

O Jerusalem, the holy city!

For the uncircumcised and the unclean

Shall no longer come to you.

The prophet addresses Zion, the city of Jerusalem, an emblem for the people of God. Zion is depicted as a woman who had been humiliated and in bondage. But she is told to awaken and rise to dress for the occasion of the glory that God would soon grant her. The city would no longer experience destroyers in her midst; in other words, the judgment of God for them had past. The city had been desolate, with few inhabitants, but she could anticipate restoration and habitation once again. From her state of humiliation she is to rise to a noble and dignified station. The clothing depicts her holy nature, for as a city she only has holy inhabitants.

Isaiah declared, "*For the uncircumcised and the unclean shall no longer come to you.*" In one sense the prophet was saying that restored Jerusalem would never again encounter defeat and destruction by the Gentiles. God had destroyed the city through the agency of the Babylonians. The prophet promised that would not occur again. But more fully the prophet was speaking of the Zion of God, the city in which only the redeemed "dwell." Only regenerate people, those circumcised of the heart, are allowed to live in this Holy City.

Verse 2 speaks of Zion rising and being seated. Perhaps what is suggested is a royal bride seated on her throne.

²Shake yourself from the dust, arise;

Sit down, O Jerusalem!

Loose yourself from the bonds of your neck,

O captive daughter of Zion!

Zion is depicted as a slave girl, who is released from her captivity. She is told to remove the shackle that was about her neck. She was to rise up and reassert herself in dignity.

II. God reveals His intention to deliver His people (52:3-6)

² For example, MacArthur applies these verses to a future Jewish millennium in his study Bible. See *The MacArthur Study Bible*, pp. 1036f.

We then read in verse 3 of God's intention to redeem her unto Himself.

³*For thus says the LORD:*

*“You have sold yourselves for nothing,
And you shall be redeemed without money.”*

God had not been “paid” the price of a slave when she was taken captive to Babylon. He need not pay Babylon to have her brought out of slavery. He had given her freely. God will cause her to return freely. The issue stressed is that God could justly bring this people back that He had formerly sent away.

God then briefly but concisely rehearsed the history of His people.

⁴*For thus says the Lord GOD:*

*“My people went down at first
Into Egypt to dwell there;
Then the Assyrian oppressed them without cause.*

God Himself now begins to speak. The Lord retraced the history of His people with the major empires that had afflicted her. There was first, Egypt, and then later Assyria. When Israel first went into Egypt, that is, Jacob and his sons, they went down as guests. But in time they were placed in slavery. Later on in her existence, Assyria afflicted her. Now it is true that God had brought Assyria into the land to judge His people, the earlier portions of Isaiah's prophesy spoke a great deal of this. But that had occurred not because Assyria had any just claim on her to do so. Nothing prohibited God from justly restoring Zion unto Himself.

⁵*Now therefore, what have I here,” says the LORD,
“That My people are taken away for nothing?
Those who rule over them
Make them wail,” says the LORD,
“And My name is blasphemed continually every day.*

God shows His people His resolve to deliver them from their oppressors and restore them unto Himself. The Babylonians had made His people suffer. God would not allow this to continue. They were His people and therefore His good name was at stake. Babylon had boasted that she was above the God of Israel. They were blasphemers, who had failed to render to God His just due. This would be reason enough for God to bring His people redemption.

⁶*Therefore My people shall know My name;
Therefore they shall know in that day
That I am He who speaks:
‘Behold, it is I.’”*

God reveals Himself in His work of redeeming people. Israel will see their God manifested when He delivers them from her oppressor. They shall “know His name”, that is, they shall see Him for Who He is. The language suggests that they are once again the covenant people of God. God reveals Himself most fully to His people in working out their salvation.

III. The good news of God's salvation is widely proclaimed (52:7-10)

We read of messengers coming to Zion to announce that God's people had been released from captivity and that God was escorting them in their return to Zion.

*⁷How beautiful upon the mountains
Are the feet of him who brings good news,
Who proclaims peace,
Who brings glad tidings of good things,
Who proclaims salvation,
Who says to Zion,
“Your God reigns!”*

The physical location of the city of Zion is in view. She had been desolate, uninhabited. But God had told her that she would again be populated with His people. He would cause their release from their Babylonian oppressors. The people wait for word from the east of the people being released. The news would come by courier, running over the mountains, bringing the good news announcing that deliverance for the captives in Babylon had been secured. Since the good news would be brought by runners, the “feet” of them who brought this news are blessed. The announcement is that God reigns and manifests His power in the salvation of His people. God had asserted His sovereign rule over the nations in that He was bringing His people back to Zion, being brought from all the Gentile lands.

This verse is used by Paul to describe the blessedness of Gospel preachers in **Romans 10:12ff**. There we read:

¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. ¹³For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”

¹⁴How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? ¹⁵And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written:

*“How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace,
Who bring glad tidings of good things!”*

¹⁶But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “LORD, who has believed our report?” ¹⁷So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Through Paul’s use of this verse from Isaiah 52:7, we see clearly that the declaration of the prophet Isaiah of the deliverance of Israel from Babylon portended a greater deliverance of God’s people from their sin. God had used the historical event of delivering His people from slavery to Babylon to point to the greater deliverance of all of His people from the bondage of their sin and from the world that had bound them. The ones bearing good news, that is, the good news of God bringing deliverance to His people from Babylon, is applied by Paul to the proclaimers of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In addition to the quotation of Isaiah 52:7 being quoted here in Romans 10, we also read in **Romans 10:16** another phrase taken from the prophet. We read, “But they have not all obeyed the gospel. *“For Isaiah says, ‘LORD, who has believed our report?’”* Let us turn back to our passage in Isaiah. We read the opening words of the next chapter, Isaiah 53:1, “Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?” The apostle Paul applied the prophecies of Isaiah 52 and 53 to the telling forth of the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ.

We next read in **verse 8** of the watchmen of the city of Zion seeing the messengers of God bringing the good news of God saving His people. The Lord is coming to Zion leading His people after Him and before Him.

*⁸Your watchmen shall lift up their voices,
With their voices they shall sing together;
For they shall see eye to eye*

When the LORD brings back Zion.

God had promised that Zion would again be inhabited. This good news brought to the watchmen of the city is that of the people of God returning from “exile.” God Himself was bringing them. He was leading them back to Zion. He was also following behind them, protecting their rear guard. He will see to it that all of His redeemed ones arrive. When it says that they shall “see eye to eye”, it indicates that they see God Himself leading His people to Zion. He has purposed to cause Zion to be inhabited once again with His people.

The prophet then calls upon Zion to celebrate, for God had redeemed His people. God had restored “Jerusalem” by bringing His people to return to her from Babylon.

***⁹Break forth into joy, sing together,
You waste places of Jerusalem!
For the LORD has comforted His people,
He has redeemed Jerusalem.***

The time of rejoicing had come, for the time of salvation had come for His people. The city was going to be “rebuilt” and be “inhabited.” The people may rest securely in their relationship with Him. The people of God have no reason to fear that the blessing of salvation that God had wrought on their behalf would ever end. They would forever enjoy peace and security in the presence of their God in a city that God Himself (re)built, a city made “without hands.” This city “has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10)

We next read of the world-wide scope of this work of salvation.

***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.***

The Lord had revealed His power in bringing deliverance to His captives. It was such a deliverance that all the nations could see that it was God working to redeem His people unto Himself. God did it in such a way that all had to recognize and acknowledge it was due to Him working.

One commentator wrote this regarding the salvation work depicted here:

Jehovah has wrought out salvation through judgment in the sight of the world... As a warrior is accustomed to make bare his right arm up to the shoulder, that he may fight without encumbrance, so has Jehovah made bare His holy arm, that arm in which holiness dwells, which shines with holiness, and which acts in holiness, that arm which hitherto concealed and therefore has appeared to be powerless, and that in the sight of the whole world of nations; so that all of the ends of the earth come to see the reality of the work, which this arm has already accomplished by showing itself in its unveiled glory—in other words, “the salvation of God.”³

Matthew Henry wrote of salvation as set forth in this verse:

All the world will have the benefit of it. In the great salvation wrought out by our Lord Jesus the *arm of the Lord was revealed and all the ends of the earth were made to see the great salvation*, not as spectators of it only, as they saw the deliverance of the Jews out of Babylon, but as sharers in it; some of

³ C. F. Keil & F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, vol. VII (William B. Eerdmans, 1978), p. 300.

all nations, the most remote, shall partake of the benefits of the redemption. This is applied to our salvation by Christ. Luke 3:6, “*All flesh shall see the salvation of God, that great salvation.*”⁴

And then **John Calvin** had written of this verse:

The extension of this magnificent spectacle to the very ends of the earth makes it evident that the Prophet does not speak of the return of the people, which would take place a few years afterwards, but of the restoration of the whole Church. This prophecy is maliciously restricted by the Jews to the deliverance from Babylon, and is improperly restricted by Christians to the spiritual redemption which we obtain through Christ; for we must begin with the deliverance which was wrought under Cyrus (2 Chron. 36:22, 23) and bring it down to our own time. Thus the Lord began to display his power among the Medes and Persians, but afterwards made it visible to all the nations.⁵

Calvin was arguing the position that we have taken. The context of the passage is the promise of God of temporal deliverance of a remnant from Babylon to return to their homeland, but that it is prophetic of the greater work of God, saving people out of the fallen world in this gospel age.

IV. The prophet exhorts the Lord’s people to be holy as they return to Zion (52:11-12)

***¹¹Depart! Depart! Go out from there,
Touch no unclean thing;
Go out from the midst of her,
Be clean,
You who bear the vessels of the LORD.***

The command is given for His people to leave Babylon and take nothing with them that was defiling, that would lead them to continue the lifestyle of the Babylonians. There was to be a severing of all ties with their former existence. The things of Babylon were to be viewed as defiling things, as dead things that defile a person if he comes in contact. They would be carrying “vessels of the Lord”, which would be the articles of the former temple that Babylon had taken when it had destroyed the temple in Jerusalem. With these they would re-establish temple worship, which of course took place under the leadership of Ezra and others.

We read of these “vessels” having been in Babylon in several places of Scripture. We read in 2 Kings 25 of the final sack of the temple and the destruction of the city of Jerusalem by the Babylonian armies:

And in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month (which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. ⁹ He burned the house of the LORD and the king’s house; all the houses of Jerusalem, that is, all the houses of the great, he burned with fire. ¹⁰And all the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down the walls of Jerusalem all around.

¹¹Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive the rest of the people who remained in the city and the defectors who had deserted to the king of Babylon, with the rest of the multitude. ¹²But the captain of the guard left some of the poor of the land as vinedressers and farmers. ¹³The bronze pillars that were in the house of the LORD, and the carts and the bronze Sea that were in the house of the LORD, the Chaldeans broke in pieces, and carried their bronze to Babylon. ¹⁴They also took away the pots, the shovels, the trimmers, the spoons, and all the bronze utensils with which the priests ministered. ¹⁵The firepans and the basins, the things of solid gold and solid silver, the captain of the guard took away. ¹⁶The two pillars, one Sea, and the carts, which Solomon had made for the house of the LORD, the bronze of all these articles was beyond measure. ¹⁷The height of one pillar was

⁴ *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 4, p. 298.

⁵ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah* (Baker Book House, 1993), p. 103.

eighteen cubits, and the capital on it was of bronze. The height of the capital was three cubits, and the network and pomegranates all around the capital were all of bronze. The second pillar was the same, with a network. (2 Kings 25:8-17)

We also read of the presence of these “vessels” from the temple in Babylon the very night God overthrew the city by the Persians. We read in **Daniel 5:1-9:**

Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand. ²While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which had been in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. ³Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God which had been in Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. ⁴They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone.

⁵In the same hour the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. ⁶Then the king's countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other. ⁷The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. The king spoke, saying to the wise men of Babylon, “Whoever reads this writing, and tells me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck; and he shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.” ⁸Now all the king's wise men came, but they could not read the writing, or make known to the king its interpretation. ⁹Then King Belshazzar was greatly troubled, his countenance was changed, and his lords were astonished.

Paul used this verse, Isaiah 52:11, to encourage the Christians in the church at Corinth to separate themselves from unbelievers. If Christians failed to do this, God would not manifest His presence among them. We read in **2 Corinthians 6:14-18** these words:

¹⁴Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? ¹⁵And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? ¹⁶And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said:

“I will dwell in them
And walk among them.
I will be their God,
And they shall be My people.”

¹⁷Therefore

***“Come out from among them
And be separate, says the Lord.
Do not touch what is unclean,
And I will receive you.”***

¹⁸“I will be a Father to you,
And you shall be My sons and daughters,
Says the LORD Almighty.”

But the prophet shows God's people will go out fully and in safety from their former place of bondage and oppression to their glorious new home, the Zion of God. And it is not as though they could barely escape with their lives. God had surely wrought their salvation. The language is to contrast this deliverance from their past deliverance and exodus out of Egypt, when they left “in haste” because of the threat of

Pharaoh's armies pursuing them. But as the Lord led them once out of Egypt, so He will lead them out of "Babylon", but this time, the way will be sure and secure throughout. The language suggests a new beginning.

*¹²For you shall not go out with haste,
Nor go by flight;
For the LORD will go before you,
And the God of Israel will be your rear guard.*

Their deliverance from "Babylon" is compared and contrasted to the occasion when God delivered Israel from Egypt. Then the Shekenah glory of God, which was a manifestation of the presence of God among His people, went before them to lead them, but He also followed after them to protect them, so it would be with this return to Zion of these former captives.

And so, we may take heart in the many parallels and prophetic details that our Lord has set before us in this passage. As we have sought to emphasize in the past, we Christians are now following our Lord Jesus, even the "Author and Finisher of our faith, the one who has gone before us and the one who is guarding us at the end of our procession. As the gospel is proclaimed fully and widely through the world, God will call multitudes to come and follow Him in their journey of faith unto their eternal home, the heavenly Zion, the Jerusalem "which is above."

Next week, Lord willing, we will consider the Fourth Servant Song of Isaiah, in which we read of the Suffering Servant who atones for the sins of His people.

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,
And to present you faultless
Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,
To God our Savior,
Who alone is wise,
Be glory and majesty,
Dominion and power,
Both now and forever. Amen. (Jud 24f)

Outline of Isaiah 40-66 SECTION THREE: ORACLES OF REDEMPTION AND CONSUMMATION

I. The Book of the Consolation of Israel (Chs. 40-55)

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- L. Israel is Forgiven and Redeemed (44:21-23)
- M. God Commissions the Persian Emperor Cyrus to Deliver His People (44:24-45:13)
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