

Unit I: God Delivers and Restores

Back to Basics

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 34:1-7

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 51

PRINT PASSAGE: Isaiah 51:1-8

KEY VERSE

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)

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“Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn.” (Isaiah 51:1, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- Examine Isaiah’s example of God’s rich faithfulness in Israel’s spiritual history.
- Feel encouraged through personal trust in God even when others speak disparagingly about our faith.
- Share the goodness and deliverance of God with others.

*Key Terms

Arm (of God) (verse 5)—Hebrew: *zeroa* (zer-o’-ah): strength; “mine arm” (KJV); “my arm” (NIV).

Comfort (verse 3)—Hebrew: *nacham* (nakham’): console; have compassion toward.

Eden (verse 3)—Hebrew: *Eden* (ay’-den): reference to the garden home of Adam and Eve.

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)

Introduction

From the 1950s and into the decade of the 1970s, some scholars believed that a new approach to teaching mathematics was necessary. It was officially dubbed “New Mathematics.” This movement aimed to boost American students’ mathematical skills and science education to address the Soviet Union’s mathematicians and scientists’ reputedly advanced mathematical skills. The catalyst behind this effort was the launching of Sputnik in 1957. The emphasis was on symbolic logic and other “mathy” stuff that students would likely never need to know. Students wrestled with set theory and bases other than ten. By the early 1970s, the same scholars decided that new math was not working, and most schools returned to the basics of traditional arithmetic. The reality is that “new” does not always mean “better.” A return to basic foundational principles and ideas enhances the possibility of successfully resolving problems and achieving goals.



The Biblical Context

There are two identifiable themes in the book of Isaiah: judgment and comfort. These themes frame its structure and chapter divisions. The first thirty-nine chapters present God's case and pronouncement of judgment against Israel and other nations of the world for their sins against Him. Judgment was not God's final word for His people. After explaining justifiable reasons for their condemnation and punishment, God brought a message of comfort and redemption—the theme of chapters 40–66. Within this section are dialogues between God and the people. The exiles responded to God's announcements of comfort and future deliverance through the Servant-Messiah's ministry with dependent complaints and accusations of divine abandonment. God addressed their complaints through a series of four exhortations designed to encourage them to trust, listen, review their history, heed God's instructions, and fearlessly face the future (see Isaiah 50:10–51:8). Three of these exhortations are the focus of this week's lesson.

Going back to the basics is both beneficial and often necessary in a relationship with God. When we face adverse circumstances, remembering past history with God and recalling His faithfulness can prevent complaining and despair. The Jewish exiles in Babylon succumbed to complaining and doubted God's promise of deliverance. In order to bolster their confidence, God directed them to go back to the “basics,” their beginnings as a nation. They were challenged to trust Him as their ancestors Abraham and Sarah had done—trusting His promise to make them the progenitors of a great nation.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Look Back (*Isaiah 51:1-3*)

KJV

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.

NIV

“LISTEN TO me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn;

2 “look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth. When I called him he was only one man, and I blessed him and made him many.

3 “The LORD will surely *comfort* Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins; he will make her deserts like *Eden*, her wastelands like the garden of the LORD. Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing.”

Isaiah's words of comfort in chapters 40–66 were meant to encourage the exiled Jewish remnant in Babylon more than 150 years before they needed them. They had endured approximately 40 years of exile in Babylon without any sign of relief. Despite God's message of comfort and promises of deliverance and restoration, the people could not visualize it because of self-absorption with their adverse circumstances. “Where was God?” “Had He forsaken them?” “How could they escape their suffering and oppressive punishment?” They needed encouragement to elevate their spirits and urge them to remain faithful and trust God's promise during their period of captivity. God responded to them with a divine wake-up call to those who remained faithful among the exiles and continued to live righteously. The believing remnant among

them was encouraged to pay attention, look back to their beginning as a nation, and recall their ancestors' faith (**verses 1-2**). God's purpose for this historical reflection was to illustrate that their humble origin could repeat itself. Abraham and Sarah thought it was physically impossible for them to have children but believed God's promise and were blessed beyond measure; from one man came many because of this faith. Though few, if the exiles trusted God as had their ancestors, then God would begin anew with the faithful remnant and cause their population to swell and flourish. The message of hope also included a promise to transform their homeland's devastating condition due to the Babylonian siege. The exiles would return to an Eden-like physical environment filled with joy, gladness, thanksgiving, and singing (**verse 3**). God promised Abraham that his descendants would possess Canaan and ensure their deliverance and restoration.

Looking back and recalling God's faithful track record of fulfilling, those who maintain their faith during periods of adversity find that God's promises are not difficult. God was reminding the faithful exiles, "If I did it back then, I can do it now and in the future." Inevitably, all of us will have to endure forms of adversity. However, if we maintain a personal and intimate relationship with God, then we can look back confidently to His power and ability to deliver and restore. We must support and demonstrate our confidence by living righteously and remaining faithful to our calling as God's children.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Which promise or promises from God do you "look back" to during your periods of adversity?

Universal Salvation (*Isaiah 51:4-8*)

KJV

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.

NIV

4 "Listen to me, my people; hear me, my nation: Instruction will go out from me; my justice will become a light to the nations.

5 "My righteousness draws near speedily, my salvation is on the way, and my arm will bring justice to the nations. The islands will look to me and wait in hope for *my arm*.

6 "Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath; the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants die like flies. But my salvation will last forever, my righteousness will never fail.

7 "Hear me, you who know what is right, you people who have taken my instruction to heart: Do not fear the reproach of mere mortals or be terrified by their insults.

8 “For the moth will eat them up like a garment; the worm will devour them like wool. But my righteousness will last forever, my salvation through all generations.”

The promises of verses 1-3 focus on the restoration of Judah after the period of captivity. **Verses 4-6** look forward to the glorious future when the Lord sends light to the nations. The discouraged remnant was again encouraged to be attentive to the Lord's instructions. These instructions are for them and all of humanity (**verse 4**). This announcement was part of God's original promise to make Abraham a blessing to all people (see Genesis 12:2-3). The time for the inclusivity of God's great purpose for salvation had arrived to be executed by His Servant, the Messiah (**verse 5**). The nations of the world are pictured as longing for the arrival of God's salvation. From God's perspective, salvation was already at work, but its fruition would come centuries ahead for Israel and humanity (**verse 6**). After the heavens, the earth, and all its inhabitants pass away, God's salvation will last forever (see 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 21:1). **Verses 7-8** are a final call to the remnant to remain faithful and refuse to become intimidated by their enemy's reproach. They were assured that all who revile God's people would perish, but His salvation endures forever. God did orchestrate Israel's return to their physical homeland as promised. God's promise of universal salvation for humanity was fulfilled with the Servant-Messiah's first Advent. Now, all who come to Him by faith enjoy the blessings of everlasting life (see John 10:28-29). Believers can confidently endure rejection, ridicule, and adversity by looking back to His redemptive work on Calvary.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How does your reviewing what God has done in your past change your perspective about suffering and hard times?

A Closing Thought

A fundamental principle this lesson illustrates is the spiritual benefit of reviewing our experiences with God's faithfulness in the past. When we do this, it helps strengthen the assurance that we can trust Him to see us through inevitable life circumstances. Extended periods of adversity will test any believer's endurance, but recalling the multiple "Red Seas" He has brought us through can encourage us to trust Him to deliver His way again and in His time.

Your Life

Unless you live in isolation, you have experienced and will experience criticism and adversity. The test is how to deal with them as a believer. The solution is for you to strive to live righteously by remaining faithful to His teachings. You will also find it helpful to review your "spiritual history" with Him and recall His faithfulness to you in the past. Your acknowledging His past faithfulness will encourage you to rely on Him as the ultimate source of deliverance.

Your World!

There is more darkness in the world than light from the spiritual perspective. Consequently, despair and feelings of loneliness and rejection are present in people's lives. This week, commit to sharing with others God's goodness and faithfulness to deliver. If you approach the unsaved, share God's offer of salvation and encourage them to accept Him by faith. If you communicate with believers, urge them to recall His past faithfulness in their lives and to remain faithful to His Word.