

God's Restored People Shall Prosper

Bible Background • Isaiah 49:18–26

Printed Text • Isaiah 49:18–23 | Devotional Reading • Proverbs 25:21–26

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will IDENTIFY relationships in which individuals or congregations have experienced God's restoration, FIND comfort in the plans God has for their lives, and PROCLAIM God's justice and mercy for His people.

In Focus

Jakiesha, an accountant, was going through a difficult time in her life. She was angry with God and the church. No one was doing things the way they should, so she thought. She became so angry she refused to pray anymore. She even made the decision to no longer attend church. Lastly, she gave Pastor Fred a piece of her mind.

Concerned, Jakiesha's Gran-gran, persuaded her to come over for dinner one evening. They talked about all God had provided in Jakiesha's life: her safe home, her scholarship to an HBCU, her first job. "What are you even mad about, baby?" Gran-gran asked.

Jakiesha felt ashamed now even mentioning it to her grandmother. "There's just a certain way I know they can be done. The church doesn't want to take the shortcuts I show them, even though—trust me—EVERYONE else saves themselves money that way." "Baby," Gran-gran said, "I love you, but that sounds like some shady dealings in my book."

Jakiesha couldn't keep up her excuses to her grandmother. God changed her heart. She and her grandmother prayed for forgiveness.

After prayer, Jakiesha told her grandmother, "God has forgiven me and restored me in right relationship with Him. He is a God of justice and mercy and I am a recipient. I'm going to apologize to Pastor Fred and to the entire congregation."

After speaking with Pastor Fred, he told her, "We thank God for answering our prayers. Now that we know you have repented, Jakiesha, we do need an accountant again."

After experiencing difficult challenges, being restored back to God, are you a witness to God's indescribable faithfulness?

Keep In Mind

"And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me." (Isaiah 49:23, KJV)

Words You Should Know

A. Standard (Isaiah 49:22) nasa's (Heb.) — Sort, kind

B. Nursing (v. 23) yanaq (Heb.) — Tending, nourishing at the breast, education, maintaining

Say It Correctly

Nebuchadnezzar. neh-buh-kad-NEZZ-zer

Zedekiah. zeh-deh-KIE-uh

KJV

Isaiah 49:18 Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to thee. As I live, saith the Lord, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee, as a bride doeth.

19 For thy waste and thy desolate places, and the land of thy destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants, and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away.

20 The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell.

21 Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been?

22 Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders.

23 And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.

NLT

Isaiah 49:18 Look around you and see,
for all your children will come back to you.

As surely as I live," says the Lord,

"they will be like jewels or bridal ornaments for you to display.

19 "Even the most desolate parts of your abandoned land
will soon be crowded with your people.

Your enemies who enslaved you
will be far away.

20 The generations born in exile will return and say,
'We need more room! It's crowded here!'

21 Then you will think to yourself,
'Who has given me all these descendants?

For most of my children were killed,
and the rest were carried away into exile.

I was left here all alone.

Where did all these people come from?

Who bore these children?

Who raised them for me?"

22 This is what the Sovereign Lord says:

"See, I will give a signal to the godless nations.

They will carry your little sons back to you in their arms;
they will bring your daughters on their shoulders.

23 Kings and queens will serve you
and care for all your needs.

They will bow to the earth before you

and lick the dust from your feet.
Then you will know that I am the Lord.
Those who trust in me will never be put to shame.”

The People, Places, and Times

The Progeny Blessing. Having children as heirs to continue the covenant people of God has always been a major theme of God’s story with humanity. Scholars call this aspect of God’s promise to His people the “progeny blessing.” When Abram first arrived in Canaan, God promised to give the land to his descendants, even though at the time, he was 75 years old and had no heir. Later, God again promises Abram an heir of his own flesh and blood, and as many descendants as stars in the sky (Genesis 15:4–5). By the time Abram is 99 years old, he has fathered a son who will indeed become a great nation, but God makes a further promise. Abram will be the father of many nations, and is renamed Abraham. Sarai is renamed Sarah, and named as the one who will mother the child of God’s covenant with Abraham. Isaac fulfills this promise. Isaac and Rebekah struggle for many years to have children before God blesses them with twins. The elder son, Esau, fathers his own nation, and the younger son, Jacob, ends up with four wives. For a time, the favored wife Rachel is concerned that she will not bear, and though she does give birth to two sons, she dies in bearing the second. This gives Jacob a total of 12 sons, who each have multiple children themselves. The nation of Israel blossoms from this point.

The rollercoaster drama of the difficulty of conceiving, bearing, and raising one (let alone many) children is a constant narrative thread from Genesis 12 through chapter 30. It continues to play a large role in later sacred stories of Samson’s family, Hannah, Bathsheba, and others. Even in less drastic stories, children are always seen as a blessing from God. Throughout Scripture, Israel can judge if it is being blessed or not by how many children they are having.

In the pre-industrial age, more children meant more workers to help bring in food or trade to help the family survive. Children were their parents’ only financial safety net in old age. In an economic system like this, losing one’s children was financially devastating, in addition to being heartbreaking. This is why it is a major theme in the prophecies of returning from exile that they will have many children.

Background

God’s people were in captivity because they were obstinate and stubborn (Isaiah 48:4). He told Israel if they disobeyed, He would scatter them. Then He would restore them back (Deuteronomy 30:1–3). God placed His people in a place of affliction (Isaiah 48:10). Through Isaiah, God is speaking to His people with comfort and mercy (Isaiah 48:20; 49:13). He says, “All things begin and end with me” (Isaiah 48:12).

God declares to His people they should flee from the Chaldeans (Isaiah 48:20). This was similar to the charge given their ancestors who had fled from Egypt while depending on God to sustain them (Isaiah 48:21). God’s people are given the promise to be released, restored, and prosperous once again. God’s people are promised a temporary freedom from their earthly captivity and a permanent freedom through Jesus Christ from captivity of sin. Restoration will be given on the day of salvation. This is in reference to Christ’s kingdom when God’s people will be restored and prosper (Isaiah 48:8–9).

At-A-Glance

1. Promise of Restoration (Isaiah 49:18-20)
2. Questioning Restoration (v. 21)
3. Confirming Restoration and Prosperity (vv. 22-23))

In Depth

1. Promise of Restoration (Isaiah 49:18–20)

Look all around and see all the people gathering back to the Lord. They are the children of the people of captivity. Coming from many different places to meet in one place, they will make one body and join themselves to glorify God. These words spoken during the exile were intended to encourage God's people. He implies that the land of Judea was lying in waste during the Babylonian captivity. "Thy land of destruction" contrasts with what was to come. The increase of people will be so great in number. This will come after many have been killed in wars and died in captivity in a faraway land. There will be a great increase as if these children had been given to a widowed mother. The added people would be a blessing and strength as an ornament to God's people. The Lord wanted to assure them of His commitment to what He was saying. "As I live, saith the LORD" was a solemn promise between God and His people. The bride, wearing fancy jewelry, indicated these children will portray beauty and glorify the Lord. Likewise, when the people of God were in a wasted, desolate, and unproductive state, there manifested the Savior of the world, the introduction of the Gospel, and the transformation of the Gentiles.

How do we see God fulfilling this kind of restoration throughout salvation history?

2. Questioning Restoration (v. 21)

This describes the great increase of the true people of God. The image given is of a mother who had been robbed of her children and made a widow. She had seen the devastation of ruin that was spread all around her. She felt alone. Then all of sudden the mother sees herself completely surrounded with more children than she lost. She is home and blessed by the happy family that surrounds her. Then the mother asks, "Who hath begotten me these?" She wants to know where they had been. God's restoration would be beyond what we could hope for.

Why does God choose the image of children to illustrate the overflowing blessing of restoration He has in store?

3. Confirming Restoration and Prosperity (vv. 22–23)

God will call His people to Himself, like a general calling the troops together. He will set the standard for His people. Those that God has adopted as His own and those that claim Him for their Father will be in His arms. Those He adopts will be given great care, devotion, and loving-kindness, as a nurse would care for babies. The daughters will be carried as a sick and weak person might be carried. Non Believers will give to the increase, protection, and maintenance of these children. Even those in high positions such as kings and queens will have a heartfelt love and caring concern toward God's people.

How does God use non-Christians to aid His Church today?

Search the Scriptures

1. What shall cause the desolate places to become too small (Isaiah 49:19)?
2. Who can ask for another place to dwell (v. 20)?
3. When kings and queens become nursing fathers and mothers to God’s people, what shall they know (v. 23)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. God restores and prospers His people. Should His people do anything to help secure their prosperity?
2. When God grants restoration, what is our responsibility? How do we show our gratitude? How do we maintain our blessings?

Liberating Lesson

Today, there are many people who need to be restored to God because of sin. Who can restore us? Jesus will lift us up when we feel neglected, abandoned, and bereaved. God restored Israel; He will also restore us. He will give us freedom when we’re enslaved by our own choices and disobedience. Jesus is waiting to restore us so that we can have a relationship with God. We must repent, pray, and wait on the restoration of the Lord! We must depend on God’s promises to bring the Gentiles and His people together into one people of God through Jesus Christ.

Application for Activation

This week, think of how you can overcome discouragement from the enemy who creeps into your peace. Ask God to restore you to Himself when you have allowed the enemy to take your joy. Remember that Jesus Christ has come to redeem you and wants you to have the right relationship with Him and others. He’s coming back!

Think of what you can do to restore a broken friendship with a family member or a friend who you consider to be your enemy. Ask yourself, “Am I the enemy?” What should you do to become a better Christian?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Isaiah 49:18-23

Reading the prior lesson is necessary to fully grasp the beauty of what the Lord is expressing in this week's verses. Let us begin with an overall picture for context: this lesson is ultimately about God's deliverance and grace as He liberates His people—the people who were once the ancient kingdom of Judah—who have been both held in captivity and exiled from Jerusalem by the Babylonians after Nebuchadnezzar prevailed against the King Zedekiah and the Judeans. After King Zedekiah, the last wicked king was defeated, the Babylonians destroyed Solomon's Temple. In our lesson, the Lord not only vows to liberate them, but He promises to restore what they have lost in terms of the Temple and community. Not only will God restore what they have lost, but He will give them more than they ever asked for. This restoration will also include enlisting new people into the family of God. Even Gentiles will come to know God and worship Him unashamedly.

18 Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to thee. As I live, saith the LORD, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee, as a bride doeth.

Zion (also known as Jerusalem)—personified as a woman, as the restored bride of God—is coping with her feelings of loss, desertion, and abandonment. Zion recognizes that her position of captivity was the result of her own choices but still bemoans the pain of not being in the presence of the Lord any longer. We imagine that she is filled with regret, coping with the guilt of knowing that she broke God's heart with her unfaithfulness. Picture her crying every day while reflecting about her previous life with God. Her tears are dried, however, when she learns that the Lord has not left her permanently. Through the Lord's grace and forgiveness, He plans on restoring all that was taken from her and destroyed. Zion, in shock and glee, is comforted by not only the Lord's presence but the Lord's explicit declaration of commitment to His covenant in spite of what she has done historically by breaking her vows to Him.

In verse 18, the Lord says to Zion, to the broken-hearted exiles, look around, look up, open your eyes and behold the process of your own restoration. When the text says "As I live, saith the LORD," the Lord is in many ways renewing the vows, breathing fresh air into the ancient Abrahamic covenant and declares once again that Zion is His bride—in spite of what she has done—and she will be adorned with the children who are returning to her. John alludes to this text when he describes the New Jerusalem "as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:2). In the New Testament, the church of Jesus Christ is the extension of the Lord's covenant with the kingdom of Judah. Isn't it wonderful to be bound with God in the name of Jesus? The Hebrew word for "bind" in this text is qashar (kaw-SHAR), which means to "league together" or "conspire." It means to politically form a group or plot together. This means the Lord and His children will conspire together and be freed from the oppressors that God used to punish them. This is the beginning of the Lord renewing the relationship between Himself and Zion, and restoring them with more children and more blessings than they lost.

19 For thy waste and thy desolate places, and the land of thy destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants, and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away.

After stating God will regroup the people who were lost and separated because of the Babylonians, God then says through Isaiah that He will restore the land with people to the point where it will be overpopulated. In spite of the fact that Zion is at this moment wasted and desolated, it can be restored. The Hebrew word for "desolate" in this text is shamem (shaw-MEM), and it is used repeatedly in Jeremiah's writings when referring to the Exile (Jeremiah 10:25; 33:10; Lamentations

1:4; 5:18). Shemem simply means to be either desolated or appalled. Both words carry the logic and reason for the destruction of the Temple and the subsequent captivity of the people of Judea. Because of Judea's unfaithfulness to the Lord, because they were enamored with other gods and rituals that were not their own, the Lord allowed the destruction and enslavement of the Babylonians.

But the Lord recovers what was once lost; the Lord repairs that which was once broken; and the Lord restores whatever was once damaged. Through the Lord's redemption, Zion will be restored and even though she lost soldiers in battle, even though she lost children in captivity, the new inhabitants who will benefit from the Lord's redemption will grow in number exponentially, and the people will once again be free and far from the enemies who seek to destroy them and keep them captive. This highlights that even in God's anger, He has an irrevocable love for His people. God's anger does not last once there is repentance. God forgives. God forgives so much that the blessings that Israel imagines will make them happy is too narrow to God. Have you ever asked God for something and He not only provides you with it but He adds additional blessings? Have you experienced God's love in ways that exceeded even your own expectations and desires? Isn't it a blessing that the Lord's goodness exceeds our own imaginations of goodness? What God wants for us as His people is better and more than anything we can imagine for ourselves. Since we are God's bride, bound to God in the name of Jesus, God delights in giving blessings. God loves His people and wants nothing more than to maintain the relationships He has with those who seek to sustain a mutual relationship with Him.

20 The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell.

After the Lord promises to restore Zion and fill the land with people, the Lord then says that the number of people will have grown to the point that Zion declares she is out of room. What was once deserted and abandoned will eventually become overcrowded. This change will once again display God's ability to deliver and restore.

"Give place" is technically a rough translation of the Hebrew. The Hebrew word for "give place" is *nagash* (naw-GOSH) and means "to draw near" or "approach." In other words, it can also mean to come close or stand near. Therefore, the children born during bereavement and grief will say that it is crowded here, but provide me with space that is near you, that is not too far from you, that is close to you at all times. Zion will be filled with people once again, but the people will not want to be out of proximity from what they lost. They will remember what happened and cherish being in the land of their ancestors and their God.

21 Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been?

There will be so many people in Zion that the bereaved mother and bride will wonder where these people came from. How could they be her children if so many of her sons were lost in captivity? Zion will be astonished at the restoration happening in front of her eyes. This astonishment is also connected to imagery of the mothers of the Jewish people who were once incapable of conceiving children (Genesis 16:1; 30:1) and found themselves astonished at what the Lord did for them. Zion, like Sarah and Rachel, were at one point despondent about their condition until the Lord surprised them with a blessing they considered unfathomable. Isaiah invokes the mothers in Genesis to highlight what the Lord has done in the past in order to show what God is capable of doing in the present and future.

The blessings of restoration and redemption will also overwhelm Zion. Jerusalem will return and be plentiful. This blessing will overwhelm Judea to the point where she will ask questions in her heart that reveal the embarrassing abundance of God's blessings. As already stated, she has lost children in captivity, but the growth in new children arriving during bereavement will compel her to ask how this restoration is possible. While the land was emptied by the Babylonian Exile, Yahweh—through His servant—will not only restore the population but fill the land to overflowing with returning people. The fourth servant song is immediately followed with the command to a redeemed Israel to “enlarge the site of your tent” and to “spread out to the right and to the left” to “settle the desolate towns” (Isaiah 54:2–3).

As we read this passage as New Testament believers, we also see that even as much as God fulfilled the promise to the Israelites when they returned to the Promised Land from exile, He also brought another kind of fulfillment after Christ's resurrection. He again brought in a flood of believers to join the faithful by welcoming Gentiles into the family. Then again, we look forward to seeing the ultimate fulfillment of this promise in heaven as every nation, tribe, and tongue glorify God.

The church can also understand it has a part to play in bringing about this influx of people. God commanded Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply. In a way, Jesus' Great Commission is a similar command that when we go out into the world, we are to grow the number of faithful.

22 Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders.

Not only will the Lord bless the chosen people, but the Lord will also invite Gentiles to recognize the truth of God's existence. These Gentiles will then turn from worshiping false gods and start worshiping Yahweh in spirit and in truth. When God says, “Behold, I will lift up mine hand,” it is meant to bring the imagery of a sworn oath as in the military.

What Isaiah is saying here is that God will do two things. First, God will enlist other peoples to help free the captives. Secondly, God will also invite and accept them into His care and concern. In other words, in the process of delivering the captives from their oppressors, that deliverance will function as a type of witnessing. Non-Jewish people will see the glory of the Lord in the event of Zion's redemption. Historically, this shows that God has the power to not only use Cyrus and the Persians to free the people from captivity in Babylon, but also that God has the power to convince the world that He can do the same for them. The Gentiles across the world will be able to recognize God's grace and compassion and will ultimately want to serve Him, too.

After using military imagery, Isaiah then uses the imagery of children. The imagery of sons who are brought in arms and daughters carried on shoulders creates an imagery of God using Gentiles to carry the people of Zion back to their land. The event described by Isaiah is reminiscent of the Exodus. Just like children were carried out of Egypt, out of slavery, children will again be carried out of Babylonian bondage. The same God who freed the people once can free them again. What God has done and accomplished in the past is not frozen in history, but proof of what God can always do in a moment of His choosing.

23 And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.

When Isaiah says “kings shall be thy nursing fathers” the text uses the word aman (Heb. aw-MON) or guardian. God will use Gentiles to free Israel, protect them, and provide for them. For sure, it is easy to misinterpret the text here; but we must remember the socio-politics of the relationship between Zion, the bride of God, and God in general. We must also remember the allegorical nature of the text. When the text says kings and queens will nurse them, he is saying that the Gentiles will also be a source of sustenance for them. Moreover, the Lord is also saying that the kings and queens will also bow to them, what Isaiah is saying is that they will bow to Zion as a way of bowing directly to God. Zion, as the bride of God, is the representative of God. God exists in and through Zion. Thus, when the kings and queens of other people “lick up the dust of [Zion’s] feet,” they are acknowledging the supreme power and grandeur of Yahweh. God’s enlisting of Gentiles, and subsequent invitation into the true religion of Yahweh, will also mean that God will welcome these non-Jewish people into the family. They will not only worship the Lord, but they will do so unashamedly.

This lesson sheds light on God’s ability to restore what was lost. He renews His vows with the chosen people, exhibits unfathomable grace and forgiveness and then promises to restore them to the point that will run out of room. This oncoming event will be so glorious that Gentiles will eventually make Yahweh their God and worship Him in spirit and in truth. This lesson highlights the notion that God will never abandon you, and even when it seems like it, take heart and know that God is faithful and committed. God will never leave you nor forsake you.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

God Puts Down and Lifts Up
(Psalm 75)

TUESDAY

God Protects a Restored, Holy People
(Leviticus 26:3-13)

WEDNESDAY

Blessings upon God's People
(Luke 6:20-26)

THURSDAY

God Has Turned Mourning into Dancing
(Psalm 30)

FRIDAY

God Gives Good Gifts
(James 1:13-18)

SATURDAY

Blessings for Obedience
(Deuteronomy 28:9-14)

SUNDAY

Wait for the Lord
(Isaiah 49:18-23)