EBS6 Isa 49:14-52:12

**Lesson 6: Isaiah 49:14-52:12**

**God and Zion—Q and A**

**Objectives:**

1. Students will understand the general nature of the dialogue between God and the returnees.
2. Students will understand the role of the servant as a teacher.
3. Students will see how God both challenges and encourages his people.

**Preparation:**

1. Review the two major divisions of Isaiah 40-55:
   1. In Isa 40-47 the prophet seeks to remove the idols of Babylon from Israelite thinking and theology.
   2. Since many resist, Isa 48 represents a turning point from a focus on all the Israelites in exile to the group called Zion that is willing to return.
   3. In Isa 49-55 the prophet centers on removing Israel from Babylon. The servant leader plays an increasingly important role.
2. Review the ways in which Isaiah packages his message.
   1. Trials are meant to challenge the status quo thinking. These trials of Isa 40-48 will give way to the complaints of Isa 49-55. Both are times of challenge.
   2. Salvation oracles (passages that center on not fearing and on salvation) are meant to reassure the people and to give them hope.
   3. These two trials and salvation oracles often appear back to back to counter discouragement with hope and used repeatedly to drive the point home.
3. Review what Isaiah has said about the nature of God.
   1. Isa 40 is a more formal presentation of God’s ability.
   2. Isa 40-45 stresses God’s role in history, in providing hope, as the creator, as the holy one, and as redeemer and savior.
   3. Be prepared to add to this list as the current study unfolds.
4. Read a Bible dictionary or encyclopedia article about the following topics:
   1. Laments or complaints
   2. Rahab and the dragon from the mythical world of the ancient Near East.
5. This lesson covers a great deal of material. Teachers may take one of two courses:
   1. Take two weeks to cover the lesson.
   2. If only one week is available, the consider hitting these high points:
      1. The first complaint of Zion in Isa 49
      2. The words of the teacher in Isa 50
      3. The first “Listen” in Isa 51
      4. The “beautiful feet” passage in Isa 52.

**Theme:** The God of hope and history sends a servant.

**Background:**

1. In Isa 49-55 Isaiah tends to alternate between addressing the servant and talking with Zion.
   1. 49:1-13—servant
   2. 49:14-50:3—Zion
   3. 50:4-9—servant
   4. 50:10-52:12—Zion
   5. 52:13-53:12—servant
   6. 54-55—Zion
2. In Isa 49:14 to 50:3 Zion speaks three times.
   1. Zion represents those who are returning from exile. Although they respond positively to God’s command to leave Babylon and return, they have doubts and questions.
   2. Zion complains to God three times and God responds to those complaints:
      1. Complaint 1
         1. Isa 49:14—God has forgotten and forsaken us.
         2. Isa 49:15-23—With 6 different images, God shows he has not forgotten or forsaken Zion.
      2. Complaint 2
         1. Isa 49:24—Babylon is too strong for God.
         2. Isa 49:25-26—God will deal with Babylon
      3. Complaint 3
         1. Isa 50:1—We are being punished for the sins of our predecessors.
         2. Isa 50:2-3—God is punishing the exiles for their own sins.
3. This section includes one of the four traditional servant songs. The four are:
   1. Isa 42:1-9
   2. Isa 49:1-12
   3. Isa 50:4-9
   4. Isa 52:13-53:12
4. The long dialogue between God and Zion in Isa 50:10-52:12 has many references to other parts of the Bible. Consider these passages:
   1. Isa 51:2—Abraham and Sarah (Gen 12-26)
   2. Isa 51:3—Garden of Eden (Gen 2-3)
   3. Isa 51:4—Law (Exodus 20-24)
   4. Isa 51:9—arm of the LORD (Ex 15:16; Dt 4:34; 7:19; 11:2; 26:8; 1 Kings 8:42; 2 Kings 17:36; 2 Chron 6:32; Jer 27:5; 32:17, 21; Ezek 20:33-34.
   5. Isa 51:9—Rahab and the dragon (Rahab: Isa 30:7; Job 9:13; 26:12; Psa 89:11; dragon: Ex 7:9-12; Dt 32:33; Psa 91:13)
   6. Isa 51:10, 15—God over the waters (Gen 1:1-31; 6-9; Ex 14)
   7. Isa 51:13, 16—creation (Gen 1-2)
   8. Isa 51:17, 22—cup of wrath (Jer 25:15-29)

**Learning Experiences:**

1. Isa 49:14-23—Complaint 1
   1. Isa 49:14—Zion complains that God has forgotten and forsaken those exiles who are returning home.
   2. Isa 49:15-23—God denies the charge with six different images.
      1. Mother-child image—Isa 49:15: Although it is possible to find a mother who will desert her child, God will not desert his people. Note that God repeats the same words from the complaint: forget, forsake.
      2. Tattoo image—Isa 49:16: Using the image of a tattoo, God indicates that since he has their names written on his hands, he has not forgotten them.
      3. Building image—Isa 49:17: Using a construction image, God reminds the people of the rebuilding of Jerusalem perhaps a reference to the work in Ezra and Nehemiah. The sound of construction is a reminder they have not been forgotten.
      4. Clothing image—Isa 49:18: God will take the materials the Babylonians used to clothe themselves and he will dress Israel, a further indication he has not forgotten them.
      5. Population image—Isa 49:19-21: Upon the return the population will expand so that the houses will be too small and women will have multiple children (even those who had been barren). God’s blessing in the OT often came through having children.
      6. Adoption image—Isa 49:22-24: God reveals that although exile was like being born an orphan, the return will be like being adopted by kings and queens. God has not forsaken or forgotten Zion.
2. Isa 49:24-26—Complaint 2
   1. Isa 49:24—Zion complains that just as it is impossible to take the prey from the mouth of a hungry lion or rescue a hostage from the most powerful king, God is helpless to free the Israelite captives from the mighty Babylonians.
   2. Isa 49:25-26—God alludes to Isa 44:24-45:7 (and other passages) where he has announced that he will use Cyrus to defeat the might Babylonians and furthermore the Babylonians will become prey in the mouth of their captors.
3. Isa 50:1-3—Complaint 3
   1. Isa 50:1—God responds to an unstated complaint. Apparently Zion’s complaint used two images:
      1. We are being punished because our mother was divorced. Should you not punish her for the divorce, not us?
      2. We are children being sold into slavery because our father could not pay his bills. Should you not punish him for defaulting, not us?
   2. Isa 50:1-3—God responds directly and indirectly.
      1. Directly
         1. God indicates if there had been a divorce, there would be paperwork. He knows there is none and uses that to show that they are not being punished because of a divorce.
         2. God asks them to name the creditor to which their father owed money. He knows there are no creditors and uses that image to indicate they are not being disciplined due to the default of another.
      2. Indirectly
         1. God then asks why they did not respond when he called. He refers to the preaching of Isaiah (and perhaps Ezekiel) to which most of the people turned a blind eye and deaf ear.
         2. God cites evidence of his power both on sea, in the desert, and in the heavens.
4. Isa 50:4-9—The servant speaks.
   1. The term servant appears several times in Isa 40-53 and seems to refer to God’s hope that Israel as a whole will serve him and when that does not occur it refers to a smaller group of Israelites, then a particular Israelite with the ultimate servant coming in the person of Jesus. The term servant does not appear here but there are several reasons to identify this passage as his voice.
      1. The speaker is the “me” in Isa 50:4 which is likely the same “me” as Isa 48:16.
      2. The speaker here refers to God giving him a tongue (Isa 50:4), i.e. he was a teacher, which was a key element of the servant’s description in Isa 49:2f.
      3. The descriptions of this teacher who suffers anticipate the suffering of the servant in Isa 53.
      4. Given that the passages in Isa 49-55 tend to alternate between complaining Zion and the obedient servant, this passage best fits the servant.
   2. There are at least 6 descriptions of the servant’s work. List them.
      1. Teacher.
      2. Sustains the weary.
      3. Listens to the weary.
      4. Endures hardship and persecution.
      5. Depends on God.
      6. Obeys constantly.
   3. This passage gives remarkable insight into the role of God’s prophets (and by implication all of God’s teachers and preachers)
      1. God calls the prophets.
      2. God gives the prophets the ability to speak.
      3. God preserves his prophets during hardship.
   4. The teacher/servant differs from Israel.
      1. Israel is deaf, the teacher hears.
      2. Israel is blind, the teacher sees (see references to face).
5. Isa 50:10-52:2—Dialogue between God and Zion
   1. Isa 50:10-11—Summary
      1. There are two groups in exile:
         1. Those who like the servant fear and rely on God.
         2. Those who continue to worship idols and resist God.
      2. The two verses summarize the chapter
         1. Isa 50:10 reflects the obedient servant of Isa 50:4-9.
         2. Isa 50:11 reflects the disobedient in Zion of Isa 50:1-3.
   2. Isa 51:1-8—Listen
      1. Listen #1—Isa 51:1-3
         1. The point of this call to listen is that God will comfort the faithful.
         2. The image is that of a quarry. A wall built out of rocks taken from one quarry will all reflect that kind of stone.
         3. Zion is a wall quarried from the rock of Abraham and Sarah. God started with two and made a nation. God will take the small number of returnees and make a nation.
         4. The wilderness will look like Eden.
      2. Listen #2—Isa 51:4-6
         1. The point of this call to listen is that God’s deliverance is durable.
         2. Just as God will not let his law or justice fade, neither will he forget his people.
         3. There are three similes (a comparison using the word “like”). God’s deliverance is more enduring than:
            1. The heavens which will vanish like smoke.
            2. The earth which will wear out like a garment.
            3. The people who will die like gnats.
         4. God’s salvation (used multiple times in the Listen texts) and deliverance (multiple times) will endure.
      3. Listen #3—Isa 51:7-8
         1. The point of this third call to listen is that the faithful will outlast the opposition.
         2. Those who oppose them are either the Babylonians, the unfaithful Israelites who refuse to leave exile, or the opponents in Jerusalem (cf. Isa 57, 66; Ezra and Nehemiah).
      4. In these three “Listen” points there are many qualities of those “who pursue deliverance” (51:1) and who “know righteousness” (51:7). List them.
         1. Seek the LORD.
         2. Like Abraham and Sarah.
         3. Comforted by the LORD.
         4. Filled with joy and gladness.
         5. Thankful.
         6. Sing.
         7. Give ear to God.
         8. Hopeful.
         9. Lift their eyes to heaven.
         10. God’s law is in their heart.
         11. They do not fear reproach.
         12. They are not dismayed at reviling
   3. Isa 51:9-11—Zion complains.
      1. Complaint—Isa 51:9-10.
         1. Zion thinks God is asleep and then tries to awaken him.
         2. They complain that God is not acting now as he did in the past when he dealt with Rahab, the dragon and the sea.
      2. Response—Isa 51:11.
         1. God assures Zion that he will act shortly just as he did in the past.
         2. He makes at least six promises. List them.
   4. Isa 51:12-16—Salvation Oracle
      1. In the midst of the long dialogue, God sends a “Hallmark Card” offering reassurance to Zion.
      2. Part of the assurance is detailed description of who God is. List the qualities of God (there are at least 10)
      3. There are numerous words and pronouns that must be identified here. Here is one suggested key. It may help to write the antecedent over the uncertain words for clarity of reading.
         1. V 12, 15, 16—“I” and “my” are God.
         2. V 12—“you” is Zion.
         3. V 12—“man who dies” is Babylon.
         4. V 12—“son of man” is a way of saying humanity.
         5. V 12—“oppressor” and “he” is either the Babylonians or the non-returning Israelites or the ones who oppress the servant.
         6. V 14—“he” refers to Zion.
         7. V 15—“waves roar” is the Red Sea in Ex 14.
         8. V 16—“your” is Zion or perhaps the servant.
      4. Isaiah writes verses that summarize his thoughts. Isa 51:12 is an apt summary of Isa 40-55.
   5. Isa 51:17-20—God complains.
      1. Just as God used the trial images in Isa 41-45 to point out Israel’s shortcomings, so here he uses the complaint to counter their constant complaints.
      2. In a bit of humor, God uses the same language as Israel. Israel called God to wake up (double form in Isa 51:9) so now God uses the same language to tell Israel to wake up (double form in Isa 51:17).
      3. The “cup of wrath” is a metaphor for exile. Just as drunkenness produces a helpless state, so God’s punishment left Israel in a drunken state of helplessness.
      4. God’s complaint is twofold:
         1. The people are sleeping (formerly deaf and blind) and not listening. After 70 years they should have sobered up from the cup of wrath.
         2. There are no leaders to guide the people.
      5. Israel’s situation is twofold:
         1. Devastation refers to the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC.
         2. Destruction refers to the occupation of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and the exile of the people to Babylon in 586-539 BC.
   6. Isa 51:21-52:2—Salvation Oracle
      1. After the rebuke of the complaint, as is Isaiah’s pattern, God reassures the people of his help.
      2. Four images express God’s intent to transform the people.
         1. Drunkenness—The cup of wrath described their punishment in exile, but now they are sobered up and God will transfer the cup to their tormentors.
         2. Sleep—The exiles, not God, are asleep. They are to shake off the dust and return home.
         3. Clothing—The old clothing is to be discarded (exile) and they are to put on the new garments (restored Jerusalem).
         4. Chains—They were chained in exile, but they are to remove the chains because they have been set free.
      3. The reference to the unclean and uncircumcised does not appear to refer to the material in Leviticus and Numbers, but uses it as an image to suggest that no more foreign conquerors will invade Jerusalem in God’s new community.
6. Isa 52:3-12—Beautiful feet and Good News
   1. Isa 52:3-6—It’s not about the money
      1. Three exiles are compared
         1. The sons of Jacob who are exiled into Egypt in Gen 46-50.
         2. The Israelites taken by Assyria into captivity after the fall of North Israel in 721 BC.
         3. The Babylonian captivity after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC.
      2. God did not profit from the exiles nor will money be a factor in the return.
   2. Isa 52:7-10—Return announced
      1. In the ancient world, news traveled by messenger, and watchmen stood on the walls to look for arriving messengers. This passage imagines the joy of the Jerusalem watchman who sees a messenger whose movement implies positive news. Upon his arrival the city knows that the exile is over and the captives are returning.
      2. This passage is similar to Isa 40:
         1. God is viewed as a shepherd (Isa 40) and king (Isa 52).
         2. High mountains are involved (40:9; 52:7).
         3. Both passages involve good news (40:9; 52:7).
         4. In 40:9 the word is “get you up” while in 52:7 the word involves “beautiful feet.”
         5. Both involve an announcement: “behold your God” and “your God is king.”
         6. God announces his return in both.
         7. God comes with might in both.
   3. Isa 52:11-12—Depart!
      1. The double announcement (see the doubles in Isa 40:1; 51:9, 12; 52:1, 11) indicates the return begins.
      2. The temple vessels taken to Babylon are now returned (2 Chron 36:7-18).
      3. The Exodus out of Egypt was in haste (Ex 12:6) but this return is deliberate.

**Continuities:**

1. What reactions do you have to Zion’s complaints? Are they justified or petty? Do God’s responses seem adequate? What complaints do people have against God today? How might God respond to our complaints?
2. Evaluate God’s responses to the complaints. Do you know any mothers who have deserted their children? Tattoos are more popular among younger generations. What do you think about God engraving the names of the exiles on his hands?
3. What response do you have to God’s reference to Rahab and the dragon? If they are part of the mythical world of Babylon, why does Isaiah cite them?
4. What can contemporary teachers and preachers learn from the teacher/servant in Isa 50?
5. Which one of the “listen” points in Isa 51 seems most powerful? Which image is most vivid in your mind?
6. Compare the salvation oracles in Isa 51 to the ones in Isa 41-44. Which are more comforting? What is there about these oracles that offer reassurance?
7. What is your response to the multiple use of the “wake up” image? Who do you know that oversleeps? Who might need to hear the “wake up call” today?
8. How does Paul’s use of “beautiful feet” in Rom 10:15 parallel the use in Isa 52? Why were the feet beautiful?

**Assignment: Read Isa 53**

**Additional Study:**

1. Isaiah uses many different packages in which to deliver his material. Scholars often call these packages “forms” or “genre.” The following material considers some of the forms that Isaiah uses.
2. Heavenly Council Scene—Isa 40:1-11
   1. Scholars identify a set of passages such as this one that take place in heaven where God consults with his advisors.
   2. Other heavenly council scenes.
      1. 1Kings 22:19-23. 19--And Micaiah said, "Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left..."
      2. Isa 6--God & seraphim.
      3. Job1:6-12--God & Satan arguing.
   3. 4 speakers in Isa40:1f.
      1. God--1-2: Jerusalem has suffered enough.
      2. a voice--3-5: prepare the way for the LORD who is about to send his people home.
      3. another voice--6-8: promise that while God is sure, humanity is undependable.
      4. prophet--9-11: the LORD is coming to lead his people home.
   4. Parallels with Isa 6--Isa listens to the LORD and his associates talk.
      1. Isa 6: Woe is me...how long O Lord.
      2. Isa 40: All flesh is grass...withered...for the wind of the LORD has blown over it.
3. Law Suits or trial speeches
   1. Found in other prophets
      1. Jer 2:4
      2. Mic 6:8
   2. God on trial before the people in Isa 40-55.
      1. 40:12-31--God points to creation as evidence that he is able and willing to save.
      2. 41:1-7--God defends himself.
      3. 41:21-29--God challenges the idols to make their case.
      4. 42:14-25--God chides Israel for not looking at evidence.
      5. 43:8-13--Call for witnesses to explain who predicted the things now happening.
      6. 43:22-28--The prosecution has asked the question, "How could you act this way, God?" God responds, "You never called on me with offerings, but only burdened me with your sins" in a clear reference to the texts in Isa 1-12 and 28-35.
      7. 44:6-8--God defends his record.
      8. 44:24-28--God discredits the thinking that he is not God.
      9. 45:9-13--God cites creation as evidence.
      10. 45:18-21--God states his case & calls witnesses.
      11. 46:5-11--God cites his record.
      12. 48:1-11--God cites his prophecy of captivity to show that the Babylonian idols could not have brought about Judean exile.
      13. 48:12-15--God cites his record.
      14. 50:1-3--The prosecution complains, "You have forsaken us like a mother who sells her children into slavery to pay her debts." God replies, "Show me the divorce decree. Let the creditors take the stand. They don't exist. I'm not powerless, look at the record in vv 2-3."
      15. 50:8-11 – God compares those who obey and disobey him.
      16. 55:8-13--God suggests that they cannot understand how he works.
   3. Witnesses summoned
      1. Israel--43:10
      2. Nations--41:1
4. Salvation Oracles
   1. The following salvation oracles are among those generally cited for Isa 40-55:
      1. 41:8-13
      2. 41:14-16
      3. 41:17-20
      4. 43:1-7
      5. 43:16-21
   2. There is no standard form.
   3. Common characteristic: do not fear.
      1. Isa 40:9; 41:10, 13, 14; 43:1, 5; 44:2, 8; 51:7; 54:4 (10xs).
      2. This is not fear of God, but fear that God has abandoned them.
      3. A merciful God may want them not to fear, but here a powerful God guarantees them they have no reason to fear.
5. Exodus language
   1. Scholars note that Isaiah regularly draws on the Exodus out of Egypt imagery and language as a point of comparison for the return from Babylonian captivity.
   2. 40:3-5 3 A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. 5 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."
   3. 41:17 17 When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the LORD will answer them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. 18 I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. 19 I will put in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive; I will set in the desert the cypress, the plane and the pine together; 20 that men may see and know, may consider and understand together, that the hand of the LORD has done this, the Holy One of Israel has created it.
   4. 42:14-16 14 For a long time I have held my peace, I have kept still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in travail, I will gasp and pant. 15 I will lay waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbage; I will turn the rivers into islands, and dry up the pools. 16 And I will lead the blind in a way that they know not, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I will do, and I will not forsake them.
   5. 43:1-3 But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. 2 When you pass through the waters I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. 3 For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.
   6. 43:14-21 14 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "For your sake I will send to Babylon and break down all the bars, and the shouting of the Chaldeans will be turned to lamentations. 15 I am the LORD, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King." 16 Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, 17 who brings forth chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: 18 "Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. 19 Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. 20 The wild beasts will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, 21 the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.
   7. 48:20-21 20 Go forth from Babylon, flee from Chaldea, declare this with a shout of joy, proclaim it, send it forth to the end of the earth; say, "The LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob!" 21 They thirsted not when he led them through the deserts; he made water flow for them from the rock; he cleft the rock and the water gushed out.
   8. 49:8-12 8 Thus says the LORD: "In a time of favor I have answered you, in a day of salvation I have helped you; I have kept you and given you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages; 9 saying to the prisoners, `Come forth,' to those who are in darkness, `Appear.' They shall feed along the ways, on all bare heights shall be their pasture; 10 they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall smite them, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them. 11 And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be raised up. 12 Lo, these shall come from afar, and lo, these from the north and from the west, and these from the land of Syene."
   9. 51:9-10 9 Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not thou that didst cut Rahab in pieces, that didst pierce the dragon? 10 Was it not thou that didst dry up the sea, the waters of the great deep; that didst make the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over?
   10. 52:11-12 11 Depart, depart, go out thence, touch no unclean thing; go out from the midst of her, purify yourselves, you who bear the vessels of the LORD. 12 For you shall not go out in haste, and you shall not go in flight, for the LORD will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard.
   11. 55:12-13 12 "For you shall go out in joy, and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. 13 Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall be to the LORD for a memorial, for an everlasting sign which shall not be cut off."