

ISAIAH: GOD DELIVERS AND RESTORES

As the Book of Isaiah approaches its final chapters, God grants the Israelites a prophetic glimpse into both the destruction of their current captors, Babylon, as well as the future deliverance and blessing of His people.

God was not vague as to why the Babylonians were headed into destruction. He stated the matter bluntly: the Babylonians trusted in their wickedness. They pridefully asserted that their existence was all that mattered, and God challenged their confidence in “magic spells” and “many sorceries” (Isa. 47:12). God also challenged their astrologers who “make predictions month by month” (vs. 13) to save the Babylonians from the destruction God will surely bring about. Ultimately, the Lord guaranteed that the Babylonians would continue in error and no one could ultimately save them.

Shortly after this devastating pronouncement on Babylon, however, the Lord spoke of a sent servant who promised a far more hopeful future for both Israel and all other nations. This servant, whom we see in the New Testament is Jesus (see Luke 2:32; Acts 13:47) beckons all “distant nations” to pay attention to Him since He is honored in the eyes of the Lord (49:1, 5). God also stated the servant will not only bring restoration to the “the tribes of Jacob,” but He will also be sent as a light to the Gentiles so that God’s salvation can reach the end of the earth (vs. 6)! God says He will give this servant as a

“covenant for the people” (vs. 8). Kings will bow to Him, and He will free captives and rescue those in darkness; indeed, God’s covenant people will be fully redeemed and will live in plenty and peace.

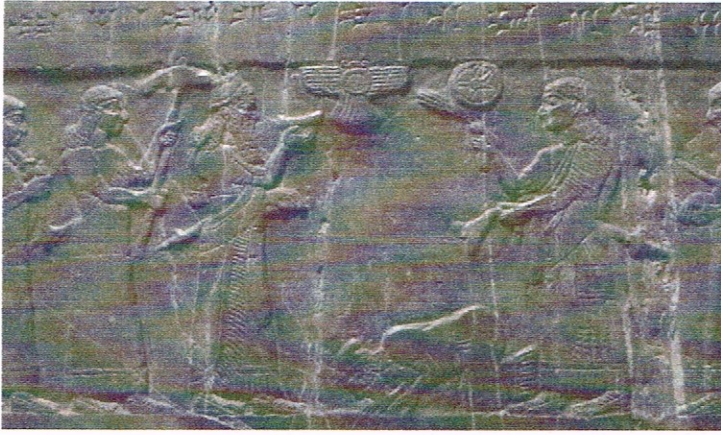
This future restoration of God’s people is revealed to be a worldwide family reunion. The exiled children of God’s people will be gathered and will return home (vs. 18). So many of these children will come that they will say, “‘This place is too small for us’ ” (vs. 20). These “children,” however, will be accompanied by the rulers of the nations who cared for them and who now serve the Lord—signifying the Lord’s worldwide dominion (vss. 22-23).

The Lord admonishes His people twice in Isaiah 51 to “listen to me” (vss. 1, 4) to hear who this salvation is for and what it will be like. This salvation will be for those who “pursue righteousness” and who “seek the LORD” (vs. 1). They will look to and learn from those to whom God revealed Himself, especially Abraham and Sarah. And in ensuring they are on the same foundation of faith, God will comfort them, teach them, and ultimately save them (vss. 3-5). God promises that this salvation will “last forever,” and it will be accomplished, since He promised it, and His “righteousness will never fail” (vs. 6). Therefore, God’s people, those who “know what is right,” are told they do not have to fear the reproach of their enemies who are “mere mortals” (vs. 7).



This painting of a Jewish bride by Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863) illustrates the ornamentation Isaiah described when he said that the returned exiles would “wear [their children] as ornaments; you will put them on, like a bride” (Isa. 49:18).

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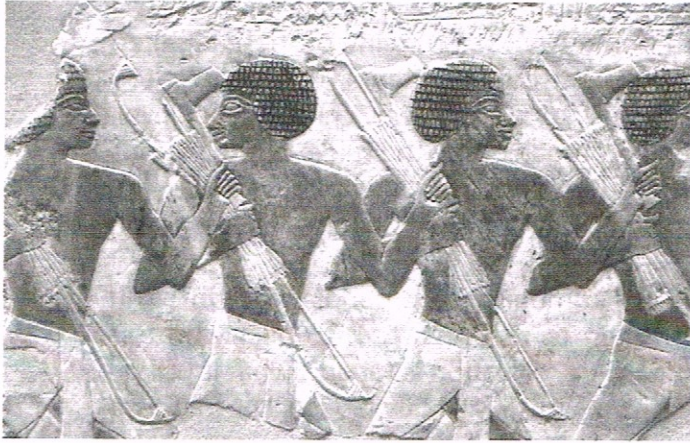
King Jehu of Israel bows before Assyrian king Shalmaneser III in this relief from the Black Obelisk. Isaiah promised that in the restored Israel, kings and queens would one day "bow down before you with their faces to the ground; they will lick the dust at your feet" (Isa. 49:23).

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Babylon today, with rebuilt palace areas on the right, uncovered ruins on the left, and part of the rebuilt city wall in the center. Isaiah said, "A calamity will fall upon you that you cannot ward off with a ransom" (Isa. 47:11).

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This temple relief shows a group of Egyptian soldiers and Nubian mercenaries holding axes, bows, and quivers of arrows. God's Servant says that He is like a "polished arrow . . . concealed . . . in [God's] quiver" (Isa. 49:2).

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A Babylonian incantation bowl with a figure in the middle. The incantations would supposedly ward off evil spirits or cast spells on people. Isaiah condemned those who made "magic spells" and "sorceries" (Isa. 47:12).

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