

August 16

Scriptures: Read Isaiah 48 & 49

Key Verse: “I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends to the earth.” (Isaiah 49:6b)

Overview

God’s message in chapter 48 is addressed to all the children of Israel who are hypocritical in their worship to Him and practice idol worship on the side. God specifically tells them that He has given prophecies so that they may know it was He who brings them to pass and not one of their idols. Fulfilled prophecy is a proof of God’s existence, for no one, not even a demon-possessed medium, can accurately and specifically predict events that are far in the future, only God (48:3-5).

The Lord also knew from the beginning that the people He chose would be transgressors. Yet for His own name’s sake and to accomplish His plan of redemption for the world, he would not annihilate them as they deserved. Rather, he would put them through the furnace of trials and purge them, so that only a remnant would remain, and the glory and honour of this possession would not be given over to an idol or to Satan but to the Lord alone (48:9-11; 42:8), the unchanging, eternal Creator (48:12-13; cf. Rev. 1:8; Heb. 1:3; 13:8; Jn. 1:1-3). God calls His people to stop and think about it.. .who but the Lord could use a heathen instrument (Cyrus) to do His pleasure on Babylon (i.e. destroy it; 48:14-15)? What is even more amazing is that from the very beginning He has communicated with His covenant children to reveal His will and to reveal prophecy. The greatest revelation of God, however, was in Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1-2), who declares, “And now the Lord God and His Spirit have sent Me” (48:16). The three-in-one (the trinity) is seen in this one verse, which in the Hebrew has a singular verb.

God’s people should consider all He has done for them, repent, and trust in Him, for if they had obeyed Him, the Babylonian captivity would not have been necessary, and they would have enjoyed wonderful peace. But there is no peace for the wicked. The Lord exhorted the children of Israel beforehand that when He would deliver them from Babylon, they should flee while the way was open and joyously declare to the heathens that the Lord has redeemed them (48:17-22).

The One who spoke through Isaiah in chapter 49 must be none other than the Person of the preincarnate Messiah Jesus, the Servant whom God commissioned. The message is directed to the Gentile nations, in order to declare unto them the way of salvation. God sent His Servant in the form of a baby, and even before His birth God made mention of His name to the virgin Mary (49:1; Matt. 1:21; Luke 1:31). Jesus’ teaching (the Word of God) was like a sharp sword which penetrates into one’s heart and brings justice (49:2; Rev. 1:16; Heb. 4:12). He is referred to as, “My Servant, Israel”, for Jesus was the only one who truly fulfilled God’s expectations of the holy nation, and it was through Him that God was glorified (49:3; cf. John 13:31-32; 17:1).

The Servant would have moments of discouragement, because His teachings were misunderstood, and He was rejected and despised by the very people He was sent to gather unto Himself and save (49:5; 53:3; Matt. 23:37). Yet His work would not be in vain, for God had a wider purpose

(49:4). As well as restoring the souls of the “preserved ones” (the faithful Jewish remnant) through faith in Himself, He would be “a light to the Gentiles” (49:6; Luke 2:32; Acts 13:47). God purposed that people from all parts of the world would experience His salvation which He would procure in the “acceptable [fullness of] time” by Christ’s death and resurrection, thus fulfilling the covenant of Grace (49:8). Indeed, the Servant who was despised, would be praised by kings and princes (49:7; cf. Phil. 2:5-11). The Gentile believers, on whom the Lord would have mercy, would be cared for and guided unto Himself, even though they may come from as far away as China (“Sinim”) to become a part of spiritual Israel. The Lord’s marvelous and merciful work of sending Jesus to comfort His people would cause the whole earth to rejoice.

The prophet speaks on behalf of Zion (Jerusalem) who, after suffering destruction from the Babylonians, would cry out that God had forsaken her. Although the people may forget Jerusalem over the many years in Exile, God tells Jerusalem that He would never forget her, since He had a glorious plan for that city. He had an eternal, protective, and continuous love for her which was based on His faithfulness (49:14-16; cf. Jer. 31:3). Her “sons” (or “builders” in other manuscripts) would return to build her walls (49:17; Neh. 1:3; 2:17-18), for the Lord would release them from the hands of their mighty captors. A more glorious and distant future promise is also given to Zion: the Lord would more than fill her “desolate places” with believing Gentiles. The Gentiles would fill the “desolate heritages” that were lost by unbelieving Jews (49:8,19). God would lift up His “standard” of the cross of Jesus Christ, that the Gentiles who believe may flock to it. They would come to Jerusalem bearing her own sons and daughters (possibly referring to Gentiles who have led Jews to the Lord Jesus), and together they will make the one people of God (49:22).

Prayer

Thank You, Lord, for remembering us, fighting our battles, and giving us the victory as we stay close to Your side. What a blessing it is to serve You!