

Isaiah

Desire of Nations

Lesson #12 for March 20, 2021

Scriptures: Isaiah 59-61.

1. There is a very interesting excerpt from a sermon given by Ellen White to the ministers assembled at the General Conference Session in Battle Creek, Michigan, in November of 1883 that seems quite appropriate for this lesson.

We must learn in the school of Christ. Nothing but his righteousness can entitle us to one of the blessings of the covenant of grace. We have long desired and tried to obtain these blessings, but have not received them, because we have cherished the idea that we could do something to make ourselves worthy of them. We have not looked away from ourselves, believing that Jesus is a living Saviour. We must not think that our own grace and merits will save us; the grace of Christ is our only hope of salvation. Through his prophet the Lord promises, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." [Isaiah 55:7, KJV] We must believe the naked promise, and not accept feeling for faith. When we trust God fully, when we rely upon the merits of Jesus as a sin-pardoning Saviour, we shall receive all the help that we can desire.—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*,* April 15, 1884, par. 3.† Compare *Faith and Works* 36.1; *GW92* 412.1; *1SM* 351.1.

2. There are two very significant verses found in the first part of Isaiah 59.

Isaiah 59:1-2: ¹ Don't think that the LORD is too weak to save you or too deaf to hear your call for help! ²**It is because of your sins that he doesn't hear you. It is your sins that separate you from God when you try to worship him.**—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Isaiah 59:1–2). New York: American Bible Society.†

3. **Isaiah 59:3-8** make it very clear why the people of Judah were not being blessed by God. Fortunately, at least some of the people began to recognize what the problem was and chose to confess their sins. We all are living on life-support. If God should leave us, we would be dead!

Isaiah 59:9-15: ⁹ **The people say, "Now we know why God does not save us from those who oppress us. We hope for light to walk by, but there is only darkness,** ¹⁰and we grope about like blind people. We stumble at noon, as if it were night, as if we were in the dark world of the dead. ¹¹We are frightened and distressed. We long for God to save us from oppression and wrong, but nothing happens.

¹² "LORD, our crimes against you are many. Our sins accuse us. We are well aware of them all. ¹³We have rebelled against you, rejected you, and refused to follow you. We have oppressed others and turned away from you. Our thoughts are false; our words are lies. ¹⁴Justice is driven away, and right cannot come near. Truth stumbles in the public square, and honesty finds no place there. ¹⁵There is so little honesty that those who stop doing evil find themselves the victims of crime."—*Good News Bible*.*†

4. Is it any wonder that God was not happy with the way things were going in Judah?
5. Earlier, in Isaiah 58:3, we see a question that the people addressed to God.

Isaiah 58:3: The people ask, "Why should we fast if the LORD never notices? Why should we go without food if he pays no attention?"

The LORD says to them, "The truth is that at the same time as you fast, you

pursue your own interests and oppress your workers.”—*Good News Bible*.*

6. We do not know exactly at what time and under what circumstances these chapters were revealed to Isaiah. However, Isaiah 59:1 raises another question paraphrased as: “Why do we call for the Lord’s hand to save us, but He does not? Why do we cry to Him, but He does not hear?” Is it not clear from Isaiah 59:2 exactly why God was not answering their prayers?
7. But, don’t we believe that God even hears the prayers of sinners? Is there really a time when God chooses to ignore our prayers? What kind of circumstances lead to that result? So, how does that process actually work? How do our sins separate us from God? Does God get disgusted with us for not doing what we should? Is that why He turns away? Or, does sin affect us in some way which makes it impossible for us to come back to God without repentance and forgiveness?
8. Isaiah 59:2 needs to be put together with three key passages from the New Testament.
1 John 3:4: Whoever sins is guilty of breaking God’s law, because **sin is a breaking of the law.**—*Good News Bible*.*†
James 4:17: **So then, those who do not do the good they know they should do are guilty of sin.**—*Good News Bible*.*†
Romans 14:23: But if they have doubts about what they eat, God condemns them when they eat it, because their action is not based on faith. And **anything that is not based on faith is sin.**—*Good News Bible*.*†
9. **Faith brings us closer to God; sin separates us from God.**
10. Have you ever felt like you were separated from God? What does/did that feel like?
11. Even Isaiah, so many years ago, understood clearly what needed to happen. Surely, God is always trying to work things out for the best. He loves us so much that He weeps when we damage ourselves. But, sometimes, God must act very strictly in order to get our attention, and hopefully, bring about some change in our behavior.
12. Suppose you had a cookie jar located in your kitchen. And suppose you had a child who was five years old who knew that there were cookies in the cookie jar. Perhaps, she was a beautiful young girl. Now suppose that you peeked around the corner and saw the girl coming into the kitchen looking around to see if anyone was watching, and then, reaching up to try to get a cookie out of the cookie jar. You would probably smile and wish that you had your video camera ready. But, she knew that she was supposed to stay out of the cookie jar. That had been made very clear in the past. So, you must put on your very stern face and catch the culprit in the very act! And you must use language which makes it very clear that this kind of behavior will not be tolerated.
13. Does God ever have to behave like that? Does God ever have to take action against those who are doing evil in order to teach a lesson to others?
14. Think about those who were dancing drunk and naked around that golden calf at the foot of Mount Sinai. (Exodus 32)

Love no less than justice demanded that for this sin judgment should be inflicted. God is the guardian as well as the sovereign of His people. He cuts off those who are determined upon rebellion, that they may not lead others to ruin....

So with the apostasy at Sinai. Unless punishment had been speedily visited upon transgression, the same results would again have been seen. The earth would have become as corrupt as in the days of Noah. Had these transgressors been spared, evils would have followed, greater than resulted from sparing the life of Cain. **It was the mercy of God that thousands should suffer, to prevent the necessity of visiting judgments upon millions. In order to save the many, He must punish the few.** Furthermore, as the people had cast off their allegiance to God, they had

forfeited the divine protection, and, deprived of their defense, the whole nation was exposed to the power of their enemies.... And it was no less a mercy to the sinners themselves that they should be cut short in their evil course. Had their life been spared, the same spirit that led them to rebel against God would have been manifested in hatred and strife among themselves, and they would eventually have destroyed one another. **It was in love to the world, in love to Israel, and even to the transgressors, that crime was punished with swift and terrible severity.**—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 325.2-3.†

15. The Levites slew them! (Exodus 32:28) Compare the story of Achan recorded in Joshua 7.

16. It is sometimes thought without careful consideration of all the evidence that God will save those who are not sinners and punish those who are sinners! But, how many of us are not sinners?

Romans 3:23: Everyone has sinned and is far away from God's saving presence.—*Good News Bible*.*

17. Clearly then, those who are saved will be saved because they: (1) Have been forgiven, (2) Have reestablished a right relationship with God, and (3) Have been changed or healed.

Jeremiah 31:34: [The LORD said:] "None of them will have to teach his fellow-citizen to know the LORD, because all will know me, from the least to the greatest. I will forgive their sins and **I will no longer remember their wrongs.** I, the LORD, have spoken."—*Good News Bible*.*†† [There is nothing wrong with God's memory!][†]

18. God's government has rules, and they must be obeyed! God paid that enormous price in order that some of us might recognize the very essence of sin and its consequences and turn back to God.

Romans 3:25-26: God offered him, so that by his blood he should become the means by which people's sins are forgiven through their faith in him. **God did this in order to demonstrate that he is righteous.** In the past he was patient and overlooked people's sins; but in the present time he deals with their sins, **in order to demonstrate his righteousness.** In this way **God shows that he himself is righteous** and that he puts right everyone who believes in Jesus.—*Good News Bible*.*†

19. **However, we also know that the Bible clearly states that we will be judged by our works. (Revelation 20:12-13) So, is it, in fact, works that save us? Not at all! It is just that works give evidence that we have been transformed, forgiven, and restored into a right relationship with God.**

Romans 4:14: For if what God promises is to be given to those who obey the Law, then faith means nothing and God's promise is worthless.—*Good News Bible*.*

James 2:18: But someone will say, "One person has faith, another has actions." My answer is, "Show me how anyone can have faith without actions. **I will show you my faith by my actions.**"—*Good News Bible*.*†

20. So, in all of this, what is the function of law? **The purpose of the law is to point out sin.**

Works are an outward expression, the human manifestation of a saving faith. Hence, a true Christian experience is one in which faith is expressed in a daily commitment to the Lord that is revealed by obedience to the law. In the judgment, God uses works as evidence for His creatures, who cannot read thoughts of faith as He can. But for the converted person, only works following conversion, when the life is empowered by Christ and the Holy Spirit, are relevant in the judgment. The preconversion life of sin has already

been washed away by the blood of the Lamb (see *Romans 6*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Monday, March 15.[§]

Isaiah 60:1-2: Arise, Jerusalem, and shine like the sun;
The glory of the LORD is shining on you!

² Other nations will be covered by darkness,
But on you the light of the LORD will shine;

The brightness of his presence will be with you.—*Good News Bible.**

21. What is this talking about? **Back in the beginning, it was God’s intention that all nations would be attracted to the righteousness and the beauty of the behavior of the children of Israel who were living in Palestine. Unfortunately, as we know, that never happened.** But, God knew that someday it would be true.

Isaiah 60:3: Nations will be drawn to **your** light,

And kings to the dawning of **your** new day.—*Good News Bible.*†*

[In Hebrew the two pronouns translated, *your*, are] feminine singular (see also *Isa. 60:1, 2*). It must be “Zion,” personified as a woman, who is mentioned near the end of the previous chapter (*Isa. 59:20*). So, the people of the earth, who are covered in darkness, will come to Zion. They will be drawn by the light of God’s glory that has arisen over her (*Isa. 60:2*). “Zion is summoned to enter into the light that is hers and then to observe and react to the nations as they gather to the same light.”—J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, p. 494.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Tuesday, March 16.^{†§}

22. Has there ever been a time when all the nations of the world were attracted to Jerusalem, that is, to the righteousness of the people who lived there? Wasn’t that God’s plan starting back with Abraham? It will never happen until we live in the New Jerusalem!

Genesis 12:1-3: ¹The LORD said to Abram, “Leave your country, your relatives, and your father’s home, and go to a land that I am going to show you. ²I will give you many descendants, and they will become a great nation. I will bless you and make your name famous, so that you will be a blessing.

³ I will bless those who bless you,

But I will curse those who curse you.

And **through you I will bless all the nations.**”—*Good News Bible.*†* [See also Genesis 18:18 and Genesis 22:18.][‡]

23. Isaiah was asking the people, particularly the people in Jerusalem, to return to the challenge that God had presented to Abraham back in the beginning. Notice Isaiah 56:7.

Isaiah 56:7: [The LORD said:] “I will bring you to Zion, my sacred hill, give you joy in my house of prayer, and accept the sacrifices you offer on my altar. **My Temple will be called a house of prayer for the people of all nations.**”—*Good News Bible.*†‡* [Small pillars and signs forbade Gentiles to enter the inner courtyard!][‡]

24. Has there ever been a time when the Jews have welcomed Gentiles into their sacred services?

25. And what about the Seventh-day Adventist Church in our day? Have we ever felt like we are a special club that meets on Sabbath mornings, and we are not sure we want to welcome anyone else in?

26. We turn now to Isaiah 61.

Isaiah 61:1: The Sovereign LORD has filled me with his Spirit.

He has **chosen** me and sent me

To bring good news to the poor,
To **heal** the broken-hearted,
To announce release to captives
And freedom to those in prison.—*Good News Bible*.*†

27. Is it clear from this passage who was being referred to? It is interesting that Isaiah 42:1-7 uses very similar terms. And that passage seems to be speaking about the Messiah.
28. Furthermore, Isaiah 61:2 talks about the “acceptable year of the Lord.” When the Messiah came to this earth, it was a very acceptable year of the Lord. Did He not proclaim liberty to those who would follow Him?
29. Isaiah 61:2 talks about having an acceptable year of the Lord. That idea came from Leviticus 25:10 where it is speaking about the jubilee. Does this parallel suggest to us that Jesus was announcing a “jubilee” for the whole world?
30. It is known from historical documents that some of the ancient Mesopotamian kings in order to promote social kindness and favor with their subjects, proclaimed a release from all debts during the early years of their reigns. Jesus came to proclaim a release from our debt of sin. He also binds us up, comforts us, and brings about restoration. (Isaiah 61:1-11)
31. Isaiah 61:1-11 also talk about foreigners coming and being accepted in Jerusalem, bringing with them the wealth of the nations. How do you think the Jews felt about that promise? Look at Luke 4:16-21 to get a clue about when this prophecy was fulfilled.

Luke 4:16-21: ¹⁶ Then Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and **on the Sabbath he went as usual to the synagogue**. He stood up to read the Scriptures ¹⁷and was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it is written:

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has **chosen** me to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind;
to set free the oppressed

¹⁹ and announce that the time has come
when the Lord will save his people.”

²⁰ Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. All the people in the synagogue had their eyes fixed on him, ²¹as he said to them, “This passage of scripture has come true today, as you heard it being read.”—*Good News Bible*.*† [Notice clearly that Jesus was able to read Hebrew!][†]

32. When Jesus read this passage to those in attendance at the synagogue, He stopped short of reading their favorite part of the passage from Isaiah, verse 2 of chapter 61.

Isaiah 61:2: He has sent me to proclaim

That the time has come

When the LORD will save his people

And defeat their enemies.—*Good News Bible*.*†

33. In what sense did the Messiah defeat His enemies?

When Jesus in the synagogue read from the prophecy, He stopped short of the final specification concerning the Messiah’s work. Having read the words, “To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord,” He omitted the phrase, “and **the day of vengeance of our God**.” Isaiah 61:2. This was just as much truth as was the first of the prophecy, and by His silence Jesus did not deny the

truth. But this last expression was that upon which His hearers delighted to dwell, and which they were desirous of fulfilling. They denounced judgments against the heathen, not discerning that their own guilt was even greater than that of others. They themselves were in deepest need of the mercy they were so ready to deny to the heathen. That day in the synagogue, when Jesus stood among them, was their opportunity to accept the call of Heaven. He who “delighteth in mercy” (Micah 7:18) would fain [to] have saved them from the ruin which their sins were inviting.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 240.4-241.0.^{†‡}

34. Is there a sense in which Christ announced the beginning of “the year of the Lord’s favor” which would eventually lead to His defeating of His enemies?
35. Look at Joel 2:31; Malachi 4:5; and Revelation 19. Compare Daniel 2:44-45. Why do you suppose the people asked Jesus to read the key passage from the scrolls that day?

And often in the synagogue on the Sabbath day He [Jesus, as a young person] was called upon to read the lesson from the prophets, and the hearts of the hearers thrilled as a new light shone out from the familiar words of the sacred text.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 74.2.^{†‡}

36. Why would a God of love ever promise vengeance on His enemies? Are those two ideas completely incompatible?

Matthew 5:39: [Jesus said:] “But now I tell you: do not take revenge on someone who wrongs you. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, let him slap your left cheek too.”—*Good News Bible*.^{*‡}

Matthew 8:12: [Jesus said:] “But those who should be in the Kingdom will be thrown out into the darkness, where they will cry and grind their teeth.”—*Good News Bible*.^{*‡}

1 Thessalonians 5:15: See that no one pays back wrong for wrong, but at all times make it your aim to do good to one another and to all people.—*Good News Bible*.^{*}

2 Thessalonians 1:8: With a flaming fire, to punish those who reject God and who do not obey the Good News about our Lord Jesus.—*Good News Bible*.^{*}

Which of the following incidents would make you more likely to want to see vengeance returned upon someone who does evil? (1) A person who hurts someone you do not love or (2) a person who hurts someone you do love? How do we understand the link between God’s love for us and the warnings of vengeance?—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Thursday, March 18.

37. If you have an opportunity to do so, read carefully *The Desire of Ages*, pages 236-243.

The day of God’s vengeance cometh—the day of the fierceness of His wrath. Who will abide the day of His coming? Men have hardened their hearts against the Spirit of God, but the arrows of His wrath will pierce where the arrows of conviction could not. God will not far hence arise to deal with the sinner. Will the false shepherd shield the transgressor in that day? Can he be excused who went with the multitude in the path of disobedience? Will popularity or numbers make any guiltless? These are questions which the careless and indifferent should consider and settle for themselves.—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works** 33.3.

38. So, how will God bring about separation of the righteous and the wicked at the second coming? When He appears, the wicked will be crying for the rocks and hills to fall upon them (Revelation 6) while the righteous will be proclaiming:

Isaiah 25:9: “He is our God! We have put our trust in him, and he has rescued us.

He is the LORD! We have put our trust in him, and now we are happy and joyful because he has saved us.”—*Good News Bible*.*

39. One of the challenges in understanding ancient prophecies is understanding how they related to the local situation in which the prophet lived and comparing that with the future times that the prophet was speaking about. Often, the time the prophet was speaking about was far later than the time when he actually lived.

40. Isaiah 60 presents a picture of a time which has still not yet happened in our world. There are three main points about Isaiah 60 that we need to look at in closing.

1. What do you think is the relationship between Isaiah 60 and Number 6:24-26? Surely, Isaiah must have recognized and often had heard the priestly blessing from the days of Moses.

Numbers 6:24-26: ²⁴ May the LORD bless you and take care of you;

²⁵ May the LORD be kind and gracious to you;

²⁶ May the LORD look on you with favour and give you peace.—*Good News Bible*.*

So, when Isaiah was seeking to comfort Jerusalem, he used language with which they were familiar.

2. What is the meaning of *the brightness of the city*? There should not be any question in our minds about the presence of the brightness of God’s glory surrounding His being. Think again about Exodus 34:29. What do you think was happening then? The children of Israel should have immediately recognized that the brightness on Moses’s face came from his association with God on top of the mountain. They had been guided by the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night since the early days of their exodus. (Exodus 13:21)

Isaiah 60:2: Other nations will be covered by darkness,

But on you the light of the LORD will shine;

The brightness of his presence will be with you.—*Good News Bible*.*

Compare **Romans 3:1-4:** ¹ Have the Jews then any advantage over the Gentiles?

Or is there any value in being circumcised? ²Much, indeed, in every way! In

the first place, **God trusted his message to the Jews.** ³But what if some of

them were not faithful? Does this mean that God will not be faithful?

⁴Certainly not! God must be true, even though every human being is a liar. As the scripture says,

“You must be shown to be right when you speak;

you must win your case when you are being tried.”—*Good*

News Bible.*†

41. We may not have had the experience of seeing God’s glory manifested to our eyes in a visible manner; however, God’s truth presented in Scripture has a glory beyond anything anywhere else in our known environment.

42. We know that, one day, when Jesus appears in the clouds, the entire sky will be full of brilliant, shining angels. From that day on, the very presence of the Lord will be our light. (Isaiah 60:19)

Isaiah 60:19: [The LORD says:] “No longer will the sun be your light by day

Or the moon be your light by night;

I, the LORD, will be your eternal light;

The light of my glory will shine on you.”—*Good News Bible*.*†‡

43. Isaiah 60 presents a very clear, glorious picture in the future for Jerusalem, the once forsaken city of the people of God.

Isaiah 60:5,9,18: ⁵ You will see this and be filled with joy;

You will tremble with excitement.

The wealth of the nations will be brought to you;

From across the sea their riches will come....

⁹ They are ships coming from distant lands,

Bringing God's people home.

They bring with them silver and gold

To honour the name of the LORD,

The holy God of Israel,

Who has made all nations honour his people....

¹⁸ "The sounds of violence will be heard no more;

Destruction will not shatter your country again.

I will protect and defend you like a wall;

You will praise me because I have saved you."—*Good News Bible*.*

"Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." Isaiah 60:1. Christ is coming with power and great glory. He is coming with His own glory and with the glory of the Father. And the holy angels will attend Him on His way. **While all the world is plunged in darkness, there will be light in every dwelling of the saints.** They will catch the first light of His second appearing. The unsullied light will shine from His splendor, and Christ the Redeemer will be admired by all who have served Him. While the wicked flee, Christ's followers will rejoice in His presence.

Then it is that the redeemed from among men will receive their promised inheritance. **Thus God's purpose for Israel will meet with literal fulfillment.** That which God purposes, man is powerless to disannul. Even amid the working of evil, God's purposes have been moving steadily forward to their accomplishment. It was thus with the house of Israel throughout the history of the divided monarchy; **it is thus with spiritual Israel today.**—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings** 720.2-3.†

3. Isaiah 60 also speaks to the idea of a Messiah or Christ, an "anointed one" or "chosen one."

The anointed one is a recurrent theme in the Bible. To anoint means to take an individual and set him apart for some particular office or mission. For instance, Aaron is anointed by Moses to be the high priest (*Exod. 40:13*). Saul and David are anointed by Samuel as kings of Israel (*1 Sam. 10:1, 1 Sam. 16:13*). Christ is anointed by God the Father, through the Holy Spirit (*Ps. 45:7, Acts 10:38*) (see Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 317). In Isaiah 61:1, 2, **Jesus interprets that He is the Anointed One. After reading the passage, He begins by saying to the people: "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21).**—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 160-161.†§

44. Isaiah 59-61 provide us with some challenging prophecies to try to understand. Many of the ideas found in these chapters have a clear fulfillment in the first coming of the Messiah. But, there are also clear references to a future kingdom where all will be peace and quiet and joy and celebration. Are you looking forward to that day?

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Last Modified: January 24, 2021

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