

International Bible Lessons Commentary
Isaiah 52:1-15

English Standard Version

International Bible Lessons
Sunday, November 30, 2014

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, November 30, 2014**, is from **Isaiah 52:1-15**. Please Note: Some churches will only study **Isaiah 52:1-2, 7-12**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary* below. **Study Hints for Thinking Further**, a study guide for teachers, discusses the five questions below to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion; these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website. The weekly *International Bible Lesson* is usually posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Isaiah 52:1-15

(Isaiah 52:1) Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion; put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for there shall no more come into you the uncircumcised and the unclean.

Isaiah 52:1-2 concludes a poem or song that began with Isaiah 51:17. Compare Isaiah 51:17 and Isaiah 52:1. Isaiah proclaimed that the end of Jerusalem's punishment was ending, and they should dress for a celebration. The Babylonians, who were called the uncircumcised and the unclean, would not enter Jerusalem again. Jerusalem is called the holy city, and no one and nothing unclean will enter it (see also Revelation 21:2, 27).

(Isaiah 52:2) Shake yourself from the dust and arise; be seated, O Jerusalem; loose the bonds from your neck, O captive daughter of Zion.

After 70 years of exile, after Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians, the exiled Judeans were allowed to return to their homeland. The decree of King Cyrus allowing them to return was issued in 539 BC, but God directed the perfect timing of the king's decree. Before their exile ended, God encouraged His people through Isaiah by inspiring a prophecy that looked forward to the day when Jerusalem would arise from the dust and ashes of her destruction. She would no longer be enslaved under the foreign dominion of Babylon. God commanded and expected His people to return, rise, and rebuild their city, a command that those with established homes in Babylon did not obey. Those who had remained in Jerusalem during the exile and those who returned obeyed God.

(Isaiah 52:3) For thus says the LORD: “You were sold for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money.”

With respect to Babylon, the king and his army had no justification for destroying Jerusalem and carrying the survivors into exile: “you were sold for nothing.” Neither God nor anyone else sold the southern kingdom into slavery to Babylon for money or personal gain. Those in exile would not have their freedom bought with money. The LORD sent them into exile as punishment for their idolatry and sins, and when their time of punishment ended He would redeem them or free them from bondage without paying money, but through the army of the Medes and Persians. In Old Testament times, a slave (or a member of his family) could buy his freedom or redeem himself from slavery by paying money to the slaveholder. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ did not redeem those who were enslaved to sin and Satan with money. He redeems all who believe in Him by having shed His blood and dying as a sacrifice on a cross.

(Isaiah 52:4) For thus says the Lord GOD: “My people went down at the first into Egypt to sojourn there, and the Assyrian oppressed them for nothing.

Isaiah recounted briefly that Jacob and his sons went to Egypt because of famine. When a Pharaoh arose who did not know Joseph, Pharaoh enslaved the Hebrews. Later, after they returned to the Promised Land, the Assyrians

oppressed them without justification, and the Northern Kingdom was destroyed in 722 BC as God's punishment for the sins of the kingdom. Neither Pharaoh nor the Assyrians had a justifiable reason for oppressing God's people. Pharaoh and the Assyrians were moved by their greed, and God used the Assyrians to discipline His unrepentant people.

(Isaiah 52:5) Now therefore what have I here," declares the LORD, "seeing that my people are taken away for nothing? Their rulers wail," declares the LORD, "and continually all the day my name is despised.

The Assyrians and the Babylonians who dispersed the Israelites and Judeans did so in spite of the fact that they had not been attacked first: "without cause." God saw how these rulers and invaders acted unjustly and how they ridiculed God and His people. God saw how they magnified themselves above the LORD by claiming that the LORD was powerless to protect His people. Because of the sins of His people, the LORD needed to punish them and that resulted in God being dishonored by his people and by those He sent to discipline them (see Romans 2:24).

(Isaiah 52:6) Therefore my people shall know my name. Therefore in that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here I am."

Because God would free His people from exile and slavery according to the time He foretold by speaking through His prophets, God's people would learn once again the character, nature, and power of the true God. God would free them without paying their oppressors to free them or paying money or ransom for their release from captivity. God is all-powerful and God can raise up or bring down pagan kings to punish His people or free them from oppression. By freeing them from exile, His people would see once again that the LORD is the great "I Am" (Exodus 3:14).

(Isaiah 52:7) How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."

The Apostle Paul quoted this verse in Romans 10:16. Isaiah predicted the future: the time would come when Judean messengers from Babylon would come and announce in Jerusalem (from "upon the mountains") that God had freed them from captivity through King Cyrus' decree and their families could return from exile. God would reign over them once again instead of their being enslaved by foreign kings. People would return and they would rejoice. Later, John the Baptist brought good news of the Messiah. At Jesus' command, the apostles preached about Him from Jerusalem to Samaria and beyond. Good News! King Jesus reigns! Salvation has come through faith in Him.

(Isaiah 52:8) The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice; together they sing for joy; for eye to eye they see the return of the LORD to Zion.

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and other prophets foretold the return of the LORD and the exiles to Jerusalem and the Promised Land after their exile and dispersion into foreign nations. In his poem or hymn, Isaiah foretold that the time would come when the sentinels or lookouts or watchmen on the ruined city walls would shout to the remaining residents of Jerusalem what they had heard from the messenger and they would sing for joy that the LORD and His people were coming home. Today, Christians eagerly await for the return of Jesus the Messiah.

(Isaiah 52:9) Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people; he has redeemed Jerusalem.

Even though Jerusalem remained in ruins after 70 years of exile, with the return of the LORD and His people restoration of fellowship with God and reconstruction of the temple and the city walls would begin; which would inspire singing by God's people. God would comfort those who had remained in the ruined city of Jerusalem and those who returned to Jerusalem with His presence in their midst.

(Isaiah 52:10) The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

Isaiah rightly ascribed to the LORD the return of God's people to Jerusalem. To "bare the arm" meant to get ready for battle, and Isaiah said all the nations would see God in His holy power bringing justice to all the earth by His almighty power. The Holy Spirit inspired Simeon to refer to this verse when he saw the baby Jesus (Luke 2:30). Filled with the Holy Spirit, John the Baptist foretold the coming of Jesus the Messiah and quoted this verse (Luke 3:6). Today, Christians declare "the salvation of our God" through faith in Jesus Christ and they do so in almost every nation on earth. However, Christians are persecuted in many places for making this proclamation of good news.

(Isaiah 52:11) Depart, depart, go out from there; touch no unclean thing; go out from the midst of her; purify yourselves, you who bear the vessels of the LORD.

Since the LORD was returning to Zion (Jerusalem), God wanted His people to leave Babylon and return to Jerusalem also. They were not to bring any unclean idols or items with them, but they were to purify themselves and prepare themselves to enter the holy city of Jerusalem. King Cyrus did allow the returning exiles to return with their sacred temple vessels just as Isaiah foretold (see Ezra 1).

(Isaiah 52:12) 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.

Isaiah looked back upon how God's people had left Egypt with Moses after celebrating the first Passover. They fled with haste and were pursued by Pharaoh and his army. God protected them when His people fled through the Red Sea and the waters of the Red Sea swallowed Pharaoh's army. Just as Isaiah predicted, the Jews left Babylon after careful planning and the LORD protected them (see Ezra and Nehemiah – especially Ezra 8:21-23).

(Isaiah 52:13) Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.

Beginning with Isaiah 52:13, Isaiah began to describe and predict the coming Messiah that God would send after the people returned to Jerusalem. More than 500 years later, the Messiah did come to Jerusalem, and He promised to return having completed His work of atonement for our sins and being raised from the dead. Jesus was exalted and lifted up on the cross and on the day of His ascension. Jesus is very high now: seated at the right hand of God. The Apostle Paul wrote about Jesus, "he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death--even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should

confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (see Philippians 2:8-11). Jesus told the people, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me” (John 8:28).

(Isaiah 52:14) As many were astonished at you—his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—

As Isaiah further described in chapter 53 (see the *International Bible Lesson Commentary* on Isaiah 53:1-8 from April 27, 2014), the Messiah did not look like the statue of a Greek or Roman idol. He did not look like a hero of the Olympian Games. The psalmist described how the Messiah came to look after He was flogged, as He hanged on a cross, and as He died for our sins (see also Psalm 22:6-7, 16-18).

(Isaiah 52:15) so shall he sprinkle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand.

For almost 2000 years, the good news of Jesus Christ has startled many nations as people have turned to Him as their Lord and Savior. Some translations prefer “sprinkle” to the word “startle.” Jesus the Messiah will cleanse and set apart all the nations of the earth to serve God after He

returns (see Revelation 22:1-5). Jesus' blood cleanses from all sin in a way that is similar to the sprinkling of the blood on the altar to cleanse it, make atonement, and set it apart for a holy use (see Ezekiel 43:20). At some point in the future, everyone will come to know that Jesus the Messiah is the King over all things and peoples. As the gospel of Jesus Christ began to be preached to the Gentiles, even some kings began to understand why God sent Jesus the Redeemer to earth and what they had never heard before they began to understand as they heard the gospel preached. The Roman Emperor Constantine is an example. The Apostle Paul knew of Isaiah's prophecy and that is one reason he wanted to preach to those who had never heard the gospel before (see Romans 15:20-21).

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Read Isaiah 47:1-2 and Isaiah 52:1-2. In what way does Isaiah describe Babylon and Jerusalem that is similar? What does he say will happen to them?
2. In Isaiah 52:1-2, what did God want the exiled Jews and those left in Jerusalem to do when their time of punishment ended?
3. What was the messenger supposed to announce in Jerusalem "upon the mountains" in Isaiah 52:7? What did Jesus the Messiah bring when He came? What does He bring into the lives of His followers?

4. How were the sentinels supposed to respond when they heard the announcement “upon the mountains”?

5. How did the Israelites leave Egypt? How did God say through Isaiah that His people would leave Babylon? How do both ways demonstrate the awesome power of God?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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