

# A BETTER KING, SERVANT, CONQUEROR

*The Book of Isaiah*

**Isaiah 51:1—52:12**

## Verse to Remember

*The LORD will lay bare his holy arm  
in the sight of all the nations,  
and all the ends of the earth will see  
the salvation of our God.*  
Isaiah 52:10

This week's reading falls between the third and fourth (last) of Isaiah's Servant songs. It is made up of eight oracles,<sup>1</sup> or "prophetic message[s]."<sup>2</sup> The first three oracles focus on promises; the fourth is a prayer in response to the promises; and the fifth consists of "words of divine assurance" given in response to the prayer.<sup>3</sup> The final three oracles contain commands.

## Day 1 — Read Isaiah 51:1–3.

1. To whom is the Lord speaking? (Is. 51:1)
2. Who is "the rock" or "the quarry" from which these people were "cut" or "hewn" (51:1b)? (Is. 51:2)
3. Before making promises about the future, God tells his people to look back at what he has done in the past with Abraham and Sarah.
  - a. What was the situation for Abraham and Sarah before God's miraculous blessing? (Gen. 15:1–3; Rom. 4:19)
  - b. What did God's miraculous blessing bring about? (Gen 15:4–5; Gen. 21:1–7; Rom. 4:17–18; Heb. 11:11–12)
4. Now what promises does God make regarding the "ruins," "deserts," "wastelands" of Zion (51:3)? (Is. 51:3)
5. What parallel(s) do you see between what God did for Abraham and Sarah and what he will do for Zion? (Is. 51:3)

6. Read Galatians 3:6–9, 14. In these verses Paul exhorts his readers to consider Abraham just as Isaiah did before him (51:2). What encouragement can we gain from looking back to Abraham?

## Day 2 — Read Isaiah 51:4–8.

### God's Arm

This week's passage refers three times to God's arm. In 51:5 God promises, "my arm will bring justice to the nations"; the prayer in 51:9 is addressed directly to God's arm: "Clothe yourself with strength, O arm of the LORD"; and 52:10 looks ahead to when "The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations...." God's arm is an image of his power, often, as in 52:10, of his "saving power."<sup>4</sup>

1. Isaiah 51:1–3 focused on Zion and Abraham's descendants. How do the next two verses, 51:4–5, widen the focus?
2. What promises does God make in 51:4–5?
3. What contrasts does God set forth in the following verses between the things of earth and the things of God?  
Is. 51:6  
  
Is. 51:7b–8
4. How do these contrasts add weight to the commands to hear the Lord and not to fear or be terrified of men (51:7)?

## Day 3 — Read Isaiah 51:9–16.


1. In verse 9 a prayer begins. How would you describe the tone of the prayer's first two verses? (Is. 51:9–10)
2. Once again, our passage is glancing back at God's powerful working in the past.
  - a. What country is being referred to as "Rahab...that monster"? (Is. 30:7; Ezek. 29:3)
  - b. Look back at Isaiah 51:10. What great event does this verse refer back to? (Exod. 14)

Why do you think this prayer calls to mind God's deliverance of his people in the past (51:10)?

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3. This prayer began with a tone of desperation; it then moved on to recall God's faithfulness in the past. What is the tone now, at the close of the prayer? (Is. 51:11)

The prayer in Isaiah 51:9–11 began with the emphatic double command, "Awake, awake!" (51:9). God answers with an equally emphatic "I, even I" (51:12) to reassure his people that he IS awake and powerful.

4. What temptation does God warn the people about? (Is. 51:12–13;  \* Prov. 29:25)
5. "The wrath of the oppressor, who is bent on destruction" (51:13), is real.
- What does the LORD say about himself in Isaiah 51:12–16 to reassure his people that trust in him is well placed?
  - In our world today there are wrathful oppressors, there is destruction—there are many, many things that could cause us "to live in constant terror every day" (51:13). God's words about himself don't necessarily take away our fears, but they do address them. How are his words meant to help us?

#### Day 4 — Read Isaiah 51:17—52:12.

In the Old Testament, "[the] cup is most often used figuratively as a symbol of God's judgment against sin. God is pictured punishing wicked, rebellious people by making them drunk.... [I]n a way, the cup of wrath is a particularly dark symbol of judgment. ...God is seen personally handing sinners their destruction and forcing them to drink."<sup>5</sup>

1. In 51:17 "Isaiah sees the people of God lying in a drunken stupor, having been force-fed the bitter cup of his wrath in Babylonian captivity."<sup>6</sup> What promises does the "Sovereign Lord...who defends his people" (51:22) now make regarding this cup? (Is. 51:22–23)

2. What does God command Zion to put on and take off? (Is. 52:1–2)

Describe the dramatic difference between Zion's circumstances in Isaiah 51:23 and God's call to her now in Isaiah 52:1–2.

3. What two things concern God in Isaiah 52:5 and motivate him to act?
4. Through his image of the beautiful feet on the mountains (52:7) Isaiah depicts a messenger arriving to bring good news. Then in Isaiah 52:8, he describes the watchmen posted on the city walls who see the messenger coming. (📖\* For a historical example of such a messenger and watchmen, see 2 Samuel 18:24–28.)
- a. What good news is this messenger proclaiming? (52:7)
  - b. List the actions God will take to bring these good things about.  
52:8b  
  
52:9  
  
52:12
5. What will be the result of God's acting, or "lay[ing] bare his holy arm" (52:10)? (Is. 52:6a, 10)

### Day 5 — Read Romans 10:9–15, in which Paul quotes Isaiah 52:7.

1. What "good news" does Paul have in mind as he quotes Isaiah 52:7 in Romans 10:15?
2. We who have believed in the Lord are called to "bring good news...proclaim peace...bring good tidings [and] proclaim salvation" (Is. 52:7).
- a. How does this challenge you?
  - b. Share how your sisters can pray for you in this calling.

\*The 📖 symbol indicates verses for further study.

<sup>1</sup> J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), 402.

<sup>2</sup> *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 1265, note on 13:1.

<sup>3</sup> Motyer 410.

<sup>4</sup> Motyer 404.

<sup>5</sup> Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman III, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1998), 186.

<sup>6</sup> Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr., *Isaiah: God Saves Sinners* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 346.