
Observations from Isaiah

LESSON XXXIV : REVIVE THY PEOPLE, O LORD! (51:9-52:12)

General outline (from Oswalt's *Isaiah*):

- I. INTRODUCTION: THE PRESENT AND FUTURE OF GOD'S PEOPLE (1-5)
- II. A CALL TO SERVANTHOOD (6)
- III. BASIS FOR SERVANTHOOD: WHOM SHALL WE TRUST? (7-39)
- IV. THE VOCATION OF SERVANTHOOD (40-55)
 - A. MOTIVE FOR SERVANTHOOD: GRACE (40-48)
 - B. THE MEANS OF SERVANTHOOD: ATONEMENT (49-55)
 - 1. Anticipation of Salvation (49:1-52:12)
 - a. Comfort through the Servant (49:1-13)
 - b. Zion not forgotten (49:14-50:3)
 - c. The Servant's confidence (50:4-9)
 - d. Obey the voice of his Servant (50:10-51:8)
 - e. Awake and be delivered (51:9-52:12)
 - (1) The arm of the Lord (51:9-16)
 - (2) Drunken Jerusalem (51:17-23)
 - (3) Captive Zion (52:1-12)

e. Awake and be delivered (51:9-52:12)

(1) The arm of the Lord (51:9-16)

(a) Zion's Cry (51:9-11)

Awake, awake! Clothe yourself with strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in days gone by, as in generations of old. Was it not you who cut Rahab to pieces, who pierced that monster through? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made a road in the depths of the sea so that the redeemed might cross over? The ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their

Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over? Therefore the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they

Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of Jehovah, Awake, as [in] days of old, generations of the ages, Art not Thou it that is hewing down Rahab, Piercing a dragon! Art not Thou it that is drying up a sea, Waters of a great deep? That hath made deep places of a sea A way for the passing of the redeemed? And the ransomed of Jehovah turn back, And they have come to Zion with singing, And joy age-during

heads. Gladness and joy will shall obtain gladness and joy; [is] on their head, Gladness overtake them, and sorrow and and sorrow and mourning and joy they attain, Fled sighing will flee away. (NIV) shall flee away. (KJV) away have sorrow and sighing, (YLT)

“The first subunit is 51:9-16, which may be further subdivided into the cry of Zion for God to act (vv. 9-11), and God’s response declaring that their fear of human enemies is tantamount to disbelief (vv. 12-16). The second subunit is 51:17-23 in which God declares that the terrible cup of punishment that Jerusalem was called on to drink has now, at length, been taken out of her hands and thrust into that of her enemies. The third subunit is 52:1-12, which speaks of the freedom from captivity that God’s mighty arm has secured.... ***Thus the thread of thought in the three segments is from question to affirmation: Will God, can God, really deliver us from our enemies (51:9-16); it is the enemies who will suffer now, not you (51:17-23); yes, God has delivered us from our enemies (52:1-12)! ... In its setting here, the cry seems to be sparked by 50:10-51:8, where the prophet spoke glowingly of the universal salvation that God’s power (his arm, v. 5) would make available to the righteous in the age of the Servant. Now it is as though the hearers are saying, ‘That is wonderful, but we need to see God’s arm now! If all we have heard of him is true, why does he not do something about our bondage? Or has he really forgotten us?’***” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] Put in modern terms, the cry is one from the churches: ‘Lord, why is there no revival? Have you forsaken us?’ Isaiah’s cry is very up-to-date.

RAHAB AND THE DRAGON — Isaiah continues using illustrations mostly from the exodus with additional examples taken from other periods of their history. ‘*Rahab*’ is a term used of Egypt (30:7; Ps 87:4) and ‘*monster*’ or ‘*dragon*’ is a term for Pharoah (Ezek 29:3). The ‘*sea, waters of the great deep*’ is a reference to the Red Sea.

CRY FOR REVIVAL — Israel’s cry for the Lord to ‘awake’ implies that He’s not been active in the life of His people. Their cry is ‘*where is the power of the arm of the Lord?*’ ***“One may believe quite sincerely that it is possible for God to do something about one’s situation, and even that he will do something, and yet at the same time be deeply troubled that he does not seem to do anything now.*** That is the situation here.... The use of way is significant, because this and related terms, such as ‘highway,’ are used throughout the book to speak of God’s ability to bring his own back to him. ***Thus if that is what God did in the past for the descendants of Abraham, is it not possible that God could, if he would, do the same thing again?***” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] “The paradisaical restoration of Zion, the new world of righteousness and salvation, is a work of the arm of Jehovah, i.e., of the manifestation of His might. His arm is now in a sleeping state. It is not lifeless, indeed, but motionless. Therefore the church calls out to it three times, ‘Awake.’ It is to arise and put on strength out of the fulness of omnipotence.” [K&D, *Isaiah*] The cry here is “*God, You delivered us in the past ... come in Your might once again!*”

e. Awake and be delivered (51:9-52:12)

(1) The arm of the Lord (51:9-16)

(b) The Lord’s Response (51:12-16)

I, even I, am he who comforts I, even I, am he that comforteth I — I [am] He — your you. Who are you that you you: who art thou, that thou comforter, Who [art] thou — fear mortal men, the sons of shouldest be afraid of a man and thou art afraid of man?

<i>men, who are but grass, that you forget the LORD your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth, that you live in constant terror every day because of the wrath of the oppressor, who is bent on destruction? For where is the wrath of the oppressor? The cowering prisoners will soon be set free; they will not die in their dungeon, nor will they lack bread. For I am the LORD your God, who churns up the sea so that its waves roar — the LORD Almighty is his name. I have put my words in your mouth and covered you with the shadow of my hand — I who set the heavens in place, who laid the foundations of the earth, and who say to Zion, You are my people. (NIV)</i>	<i>that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; And forgettest the LORD thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor? The captive exile hasteneth that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit, nor that his bread should fail. But I am the LORD thy God, that divided the sea, whose waves roared: The LORD of hosts is his name. And I have put my words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art my people. (KJV)</i>	<i>he dieth! And of the son of man — grass he is made! And thou dost forget Jehovah thy maker, Who is stretching out the heavens, and founding earth, And thou dost fear continually all the day, Because of the fury of the oppressor, As he hath prepared to destroy. And where [is] the fury of the oppressor? Hastened hath a wanderer to be loosed, And he doth not die at the pit, And his bread is not lacking. And I [am] Jehovah thy God, Quieting the sea, when its billows roar, Jehovah of Hosts [is] His name. And I put My words in thy mouth, And with the shadow of My hand have covered thee, To plant the heavens, and to found earth, And to say to Zion, My people [art] thou. (YLT)</i>
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It is not as easy to trace the line of thought in these four verses as it was in vv. 1-8. Perhaps much of the difficulties in this section has to do with the poetic nature of the writing. Oswalt says commentators are divided in their praise or condemnation of what is being said here.

OUR COMFORT IN THE UNIQUENESS OF GOD — This subdivision forms a response from God to the people’s cry of the previous verses. “Here God promises that he will indeed act in behalf of his people as he had in the past. But he begins with a question growing out of an emphatic assertion. The question had been asked, ‘Are you really the one who did all those wonderful things in the past?’ (vv. 9-10). *God does not merely respond with a mild ‘I am your comforter.’ Instead he says, ‘I, I am he, your comforter.’ ‘I am he’ is the expression of self-existence that is repeatedly used of God in this part of the book. Thus the reality of God being able to comfort his people is predicated on a much greater reality: the uniqueness and incomparability of God. Yes, he created the world, and yes, he redeemed Israel from Egypt; but more than that, he is the one being like whom there is no other in the universe. Can such a being as that ‘comfort,’ that is, breathe life, hope, strength, and encouragement into his people? If not he, then who?’* [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

IF WE FEAR MEN AND NOT GOD, THEN WHO ARE WE? — Immediately after establishing His identity, the Lord re-directs the question to His people. “*Who are they who are dominated by the fear of dying, transitory man? Can they really be the Zion of the eternal, omnipotent, faithful God and at the same time be controlled by such an outlook? ... What is the*

fundamental description of man? He will die. How shall we describe the son of man? he is made like grass. Should we forget God (v. 13) and have our lives ruled by fear of what passes away before our own eyes?” [Oswalt, Isaiah]

GOD HAS NOT FORGOTTEN HIS PEOPLE, THEY HAVE FORGOTTEN HIM — *“To live in fear of humans is to have effectively forgotten God. This is the problem. It is not that God has forgotten his people; it is that they have forgotten him. This is the problem with Ahaz, and it will be the problem of the exiles, as it is that of the church today. It is easy to say certain theologically correct things, such as that he is both the world’s and our maker, that he is the one who stretched out the heavens and founded the earth, while giving the lie to those fine words by our continually living as though he can do nothing to prevent humans from doing ultimate harm to us. This is a call to live out the reality of our confession, to make creed and behavior coincide. If God is the creator, then we need not fear the anger of any oppressor, no matter how horrifying his or her plans are. None of this is to deny the horror, the pain, the degradation of oppression. This is not an exercise in self-delusion (imagine you are not being oppressed and you won’t be!). Rather, it is a call to focus on a larger reality. If the oppressor fills my horizon, then I have only one option: be ruled by fear and hatred. But if a larger reality fills my horizon, then where is the anger of the oppressor? If we know that it is God who holds our ultimate destiny, then the oppressor no longer holds power over us. Yes, oppressors may hurt us, even kill us, but they do not have the power to make us fear them or hate them. God is the ruler over all.” [Oswalt, Isaiah]* What words to us today who face the uncertainty of World War 3! What a rebuke to us who see the morals in our country degrading and the opposition gaining ground! Paganism is rapidly replacing Christianity as the national religion and it is easy to direct our disappointment and frustration in anger against those who are pushing such humanistic causes. It is easy to fear the future as we consider terrorism, Israel and the Middle East, China, North Korea, and other hot-spots in this age. But Jesus reinforced Isaiah’s teaching in the NT: *“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.” (Matt 10:28-31)*

THE BELIEVER’S HOPE — *“God will not allow his oppressed people to perish. The oppressor’s rage will finally be ineffectual. This is the hope that has given meaning to God’s people ever since. Yes, they as individuals might die before the temporal hope was realized, but this they knew: it would be realized! They were part of the people of God, and as such, no oppressor could triumph over them. This has been the case for Jews and Christians alike. But it has particular meaning for Christians since the resurrection. Not only is there temporal hope for the people of God, there is eternal hope. It is not merely the people as a whole that will not perish: neither will the people as individuals! Where, indeed, is the oppressor? With Paul we can say that nothing can ‘separate us from the love God in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (Rom 8:39).” [Oswalt, Isaiah]* “The promise, as the pledge of which Jehovah has staked His absolute power, to which everything must yield, now rises up to an eschatological height, from the historical point at which it began.... It is a lofty calling, a glorious future, for the preparation and introduction of which Israel, although fallen as low as v. 7 describes, has been equipped and kept in the shadow of unapproachable omnipotence.... The reference is to the last times. The Targum explains it thus: ‘to restore the people of whom it is said, They will be as numerous as the stars of heaven; and to perfect the church, of which it is said, They will be as numerous as the dust of the earth.’ ... **But the prophecy speaks of a new heaven and a new earth, in something more than a figurative**

sense, as a new creation of God (Isa 65:17). Jehovah intends to create a new world of righteousness and salvation, and practically to acknowledge Zion as His people. The preparation for this great and all-renewing work of the future is aided by the true Israel, which is now enslaved by the heathen, and disowned and persecuted by its own countrymen. A future of salvation, embracing Israel and the heaven and the earth, is implied in the words placed by Jehovah in the mouth of His church, which was faithful to its calling. These words in their mouth are the seed-corns of a new world in the midst of the old. The fact that the very same thing is said here of the true spiritual Israel, as in Isa 49:2 of the one servant of Jehovah, may be explained in the same manner as when the apostles apply to themselves, in Acts 13:47, a word of God relating to the one Servant of Jehovah, by saying, 'So hath the Lord commanded us.'"
[K&D, Isaiah]

e. Awake and be delivered (51:9-52:12)

(2) Drunken Jerusalem (51:17-23)

Awake, awake! Rise up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the LORD the cup of his wrath, you who have drained to its dregs the goblet that makes men stagger. Of all the sons she bore there was none to guide her; of all the sons she reared there was none to take her by the hand. These double calamities have come upon you — who can comfort you? — ruin and destruction, famine and sword — who can console you? Your sons have fainted; they lie at the head of every street, like antelope caught in a net. They are filled with the wrath of the LORD and the rebuke of your God. Therefore hear this, you afflicted one, made drunk, but not with wine. This is what your Sovereign LORD says, your God, who defends his people: See, I have taken out of your hand the cup that made you stagger; from that cup, the goblet of my wrath, you will never drink again. I will put

Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the LORD the cup of his fury; thou hast drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling, and wrung them out. There is none to guide her among all the sons whom she hath brought forth; neither is there any that taketh her by the hand of all the sons that she hath brought up. These two things are come unto thee; who shall be sorry for thee? desolation, and destruction, and the famine, and the sword: by whom shall I comfort thee? Thy sons have fainted, they lie at the head of all the streets, as a wild bull in a net: they are full of the fury of the LORD, the rebuke of thy God. Therefore hear now this, thou afflicted, and drunken, but not with wine: Thus saith thy Lord the LORD, and thy God that pleadeth the cause of his people, Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again: But I will put it into the

Stir thyself, stir thyself, rise, Jerusalem, Who hast drunk from the hand of Jehovah The cup of His fury, The goblet, the cup of trembling, thou hast drunk, Thou hast wrung out. There is not a leader to her Out of all the sons she hath borne, And there is none laying hold on her hand Out of all the sons she hath nourished. These two are meeting thee, who is moved for thee? Spoiling and destruction — Famine and sword, who — I comfort thee? Thy sons have been wrapt up, they have lain down, At the head of all out places, as a wild ox [in] a net, They are full of the fury of Jehovah, The rebuke of Thy God. Therefore, hear, I pray thee, this, O afflicted and drunken one, and not with wine, Thus said thy Lord Jehovah, and thy God, He pleadeth [for] his people: 'Lo, I have taken out of thy hand the cup of trembling, The goblet, the cup of My fury, Thou dost not add to drink it any more. And I have put it

<i>it into the hands of your tormentors, who said to you, Fall prostrate that we may walk over you. And you made your back like the ground, like a street to be walked over.</i> (NIV)	<i>hand of them that afflict thee; which have said to thy soul, Bow down, that we may go over: and thou hast laid thy body as the ground, and as the street, to them that went over.</i> (KJV)	<i>into the hand of those afflicting thee, Who have said to thy soul, Bow down, and we pass over, And thou makest as the earth thy body, And as the street to those passing by!’</i> (YLT)
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“This segment continues God’s response to the call for him to awake in 51:9. It reverses the appeal and calls for Israel to awake from her helpless condition and receive the promise that ‘her warfare has ended’ (40:2) and that from now on it is Israel’s oppressors who will suffer. This is the second of three segments (51:9-16, 17-23; 52:1-12) that move from questions about God’s intent to deliver his people to joyful affirmations of the imminence of that deliverance. As is typical of this entire subdivision (chs. 49-55), the Babylonian captivity is in the background, providing the imagery, but it is never mentioned explicitly. This suggests that larger issues than merely that captivity are being addressed.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

A CALL TO FAITH — *“It is Israel, not God, who is lying helpless in face of enemy threats (v. 9). It is not God who must be aroused to action, but Israel that must be aroused to faith. The reflexive nature of the verb, wake yourself, may be significant at this point as it calls on Israel to pay attention to its own condition. That condition is one of drunken stupor.* Reeling from the military and theological shocks that would fall on her between 740 and 540, Zion would be literally incapable of taking action of any sort. But these shocks would come from God and would not be merely the random results of certain geopolitical facts. This conviction is forcefully stated through the imagery of a cup filled with a terrifically potent liquor received from the hand of God. It is the anger of God that Zion has drained to the bottom, a cup that has made her stagger and fall. If she lies sprawled out on the ground now, it is not because of the overwhelming power of her enemies but because of the justice of God. Therefore the enemies are powerless to prevent Zion from responding to God when he now bids her arise.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

THE INABILITY OF ISRAEL TO DELIVER HERSELF — *“But Zion is unable to stand up by herself. Moreover, there are none left from among all the sons that she bore or reared to take her by the hand and guide her home. The cup of God’s wrath has deprived her of all her children. While this imagery of children may be applied in some degree to the people exiled from Jerusalem and Judah, the analogy should not be pressed too far. The point is to speak of the utter helplessness of the people of God as a result of his just anger. Thus we have the picture of an inebriated old woman whose children are either dead or helpless so that there is none left to help her home.* The Ugaritic ‘Tale of Aqht’ suggests that one of the specific duties of a child in the ancient Near East was to assist a drunken parent home. This person has no one; she is utterly helpless in her shame and weakness. Yet God calls this bereft, drunken widow to stand. If she has no one to take her hand and lead her to salvation, then God, the God whose anger brought her to this pass, will lead her out of it.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

ISRAEL AS A CHILDLESS WIDOW — It is unsure as to what ‘these two things’ is referencing. The same phrase is used in 47:9 where it refers to childlessness and widowhood. This is possible since widowhood may be implied in v18 and childlessness in v20. “However one understands ‘these two things,’ the verse further emphasizes Zion’s hopeless state and God’s understanding of that state. Who is there who can offer any real sympathy or encouragement to one

in such a condition as this? Terrible things have been suffered; all the resources that might offer some hope of recovery on a naturalistic basis are gone; what is left? Any human words of sympathy or encouragement at a time like that can only sound hollow. Is there hope? Yes, for it is God who is speaking these words. In speaking them, he communicates both his understanding and his experience of our situation. But, at the same time, the hope is not some easy glossing over of the grim reality.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

ISRAEL BROUGHT LOW BY THE JUDGEMENT OF GOD — “Here we receive further explanation concerning Zion’s children.... The imagery is functioning on several levels, and any attempt to make over neat equations with specific historical situations would be to miss the point of the images. The writer is primarily concerned to convey to his readers the utter hopelessness of Israel’s situation, and he is willing to use images on several different levels to accomplish that purpose. Here the children are presented as being just as helpless as the mother. Like antelopes that have been netted, they are wild-eyed in exhaustion with their hopeless struggle. They lie in the main intersections (*the heads of all the streets*) where they have fallen together from starvation, terror, and hysteria. Why has this happened? Again the prophet wishes to make clear that these events are neither because of chance nor because of the superior arms of some conqueror. The victims have fallen because *they are full of the anger of the Lord*. They have drunk from his cup and have fallen senseless.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] “In v. 17, Jerusalem is regarded as a woman lying on the ground in the sleep of faintness and stupefaction. She has been obliged to drink, for her punishment, the goblet filled with the fury of the wrath of God, the goblet which throws those who drink it into unconscious reeling; and this goblet ... she has not only had to drink, but to drain quite clean.” [K&D, *Isaiah*]

THE LORD HUMBLER THE PROUD AND GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE — By ‘therefore’ Isaiah makes the transition from *threat* to *promise*. “The causal connection is implied: Because this is the condition of my people, therefore I will act on their behalf. This, the action of God, is what Israel’s restoration depends on. Israel is not a victim. They have experienced the inexorable action of cause and effect in the world God made. It is God with whom they have to do, and it is God who must deliver them if they are to be delivered at all.... *Unlike Babylon, who sees herself as voluptuous (47:8), Zion knows herself as afflicted. But the same God speaks to both, telling Babylon to go down into the dust, and telling Zion to arise from the dust (52:2). Babylon thought herself independent and self-existent (47:10), but Zion believes the very opposite of herself: she is a helpless victim who can do nothing about her situation (40:27; 49:14). All this could be changed; if she would only listen to the voice of God (through the Servant, 50:10), she could stand in quiet confidence. But she must remember that her afflictions have to do with her relation to God and not with some other cause. She is now helpless because she made choices in relation to God’s law that led to her drinking from a cup that held something other than wine.*” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

GOD WILL USE THE NATIONS TO DISCIPLINE ISRAEL, THEN JUDGE THOSE NATIONS — “This verse expresses the final element in the prophetic program, which has four elements: (1) Israel will be punished unless they repent; (2) the surrounding nations will be God’s instrument of punishment; (3) after punishment God will restore the remnant; (4) the nations that arrogantly believed they were serving themselves and their own purposes in oppressing Israel will be punished by God. The oracles against the nations (chs. 13-23; Jer 46-51; Ezek 25-32; Obadiah; Nahum) are expressions of this point. *Just because God will use these nations as tools to accomplish his larger purposes with Israel does not mean they are immune from the moral*

standards of God.... What had been the lot of Zion will now become the lot of her tormentors. The cup will not only be taken away from Zion, but it will be passed on to her oppressors. In this way the justice of God will be confirmed. If he uses a wicked people to discipline his own, this does not mean the wicked will escape judgement.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] Habakkuk preached a similar message. “Jerusalem has been obliged to let her children be degraded into the defenseless objects of despotic tyranny and caprice, both at home in their own conquered country, and abroad in exile. But the relation is reversed now. Jerusalem is delivered, after having been punished, and the instruments of her punishment are given up to the punishment which their pride deserved.” [K&D, *Isaiah*]

“I, even I, am he who comforts you. Who are you that you fear mortal men, the sons of men, who are but grass?”

— Isaiah 30:18 NIV

DUE TO CHANGES MADE AT THE CHURCH I WAS ATTENDING, THIS SERIES OF LESSONS ON ISAIAH STOPPED AT THIS POINT AND WAS NOT RESUMED