



**LIBERATING**  
**FAITH STUDIES**



***PARTNERS  
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NEW CREATION***

# **LIBERATING FAITH STUDIES SUNDAY SCHOOL QUARTERLY OF THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

**Vol. 59**  
**Summer Quarter 2022**

**JUNE, JULY, AUGUST**

**No. 3**  
**Price \$4.00**

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**Ages 18-Up**

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**LIBERATING FAITH STUDIES SUNDAY SCHOOL QUARTERLY – USPS 006 – 820**

Volume 59, No. 3, June, July, August 2022. An official quarterly of the African Methodist Episcopal Church prepared by the AMEC Sunday School Union. Published quarterly by the AMEC Sunday School Union, 1722 Scovel St., Nashville, TN 37208. Periodicals Postage Paid at Nashville, Tennessee. Copyright © 2022 by AMEC Sunday School Union.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Liberating Faith Studies Sunday School Quarterly, 1722 Scovel St., Nashville, TN 37208.

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**Entered as Periodicals Postage Paid Matter, March 20, 1942, at the Post Office at Nashville, Tennessee, under the Act of March 3, 1879.**



# The Order of Service

- I. Bell tap or organ voluntary  
as a signal for silence
  - II. Singing
  - III. The Apostles' Creed
  - IV. Prayer, closing with the  
Lord's Prayer in concert
  - V. Singing
  - VI. Calling roll of officers and teachers
  - VII. Responsive reading  
of the lesson text by school
  - VIII. The Decalogue
- 

## The Lesson

- I. Organ interlude while  
the classes are being arranged
  - II. Class study of the lesson
  - III. Warning bell — 5 minutes
  - IV. Closing bell — silence
- 

## The Closing

- I. Singing
- II. Review and application  
of the lesson
- III. Secretary's report
- IV. The Church School Creed
- V. Singing
- VI. Benediction

### Editorial Staff

Publisher • Rev. Dr. Roderick D. Belin

Editor • Rev. Dr. Garland F. Pierce

— Lessons —

Rev. Lionel Merritt

### The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; the third day He arose from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Church Universal, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

### The Church School Creed

I believe my A.M.E. Church School must grow and grow; and that I must make it a top priority to make it so. Every member a Christian, every Christian a worker, every worker trained so that a worker need not be ashamed. This we ask in Jesus' name.

A.M.E. Discipline

Hello, AME Church School Member!

**T**he Home Daily Bible Readings will continue to appear at the end of each Sunday's lesson but they will be the readings for the following week. We made this change in response to your requests. The readings for the first week are on the following page.

This Sunday will highlight the vital work of the Church School and recognize the excellent work of Church School students and leaders. Please visit our website- [www.iamame.org](http://www.iamame.org)- for ideas to observe AME Church School Sunday and to find other worship and study resources to empower you and enhance the life of the church.

For over a year we have used Zoom and Facebook to facilitate our weekly Connectional Church School with teachers (lay and clergy) from around the AME Connection. They generously share their knowledge, talents, and expertise with a weekly average of 500 participants viewing via Zoom and 1500 on Facebook.

This virtual AME Connectional Church School was birthed due to the limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The blessings from the teachings have been immeasurable. We will continue this Connectional Church School on Sundays at 9:00 a.m. EST. Join us! Zoom Meeting ID: 829 9325 1894.

Visit our website- [www.iamame.org](http://www.iamame.org)- to find worship and study resources to empower you and enhance the life of the church.

Like our Facebook page so you will be informed about programming and important announcements from the Publishing House and *The Christian Recorder*. [www.facebook.com/amecpublishing](https://www.facebook.com/amecpublishing).

Join our Facebook Group to continue conversations after Church School and share ideas, thoughts, and best practices with other AME Church School members and teachers: [www.facebook.com/groups/amechurchschool](https://www.facebook.com/groups/amechurchschool).

Thank you for purchasing *Liberating Faith Studies*. We are working every day to fulfill our mission to provide high quality resources to empower us to spread Jesus Christ's liberating gospel, pursue justice, and enhance the social development of all people.

And, always remember, I am praying for you.

Roderick D. Belin  
President/Publisher

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

**May 30-June 5**

<b>Monday</b>	Jeremiah 29:8-14 (Babylon's Days Are Numbered)
<b>Tuesday</b>	Psalms 79 (Let Your Compassion Come Speedily)
<b>Wednesday</b>	Mark 13:1-13 (Persecution Foretold)
<b>Thursday</b>	Mark 13:28-37 (Keep Awake!)
<b>Friday</b>	Psalms 74:10-23 (Rise Up, O God!)
<b>Saturday</b>	Isaiah 47:1-9 (The Humiliation of Babylon)
<b>Sunday</b>	Isaiah 47:10-15 (No Security in Wickedness)

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## God Foretells Destruction

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Lesson Scripture: Isaiah 47

Focus Scripture: Isaiah 47:10-15

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*Key Verse: Such to you are those with whom you have labored, who have trafficked with you from your youth; they all wander about in their own paths; there is no one to save you.*  
*Isaiah 47:15 (NRSV)*

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### ISAIAH 47:10-15 (NRSV)

10 You felt secure in your wickedness; you said, "No one sees me." Your wisdom and your knowledge led you astray, and you said in your heart, "I am, and there is no one besides me."

11 But evil shall come upon you, which you cannot charm away; disaster shall fall upon you, which you will not be able to ward off; and ruin shall come on you suddenly, of which you know nothing.

12 Stand fast in your enchantments and your many sorceries, with which you have labored from your youth; perhaps you may be able to succeed, perhaps you may inspire terror.

13 You are wearied with your many consultations; let those who study the heavens stand up and save you, those who gaze at the stars, and at each new moon predict what shall befall you.

14 See, they are like stubble, the fire consumes them; they cannot deliver themselves from the power of the flame. No coal for warming oneself is this, no fire to sit before!

15 Such to you are those with whom you have labored, who have trafficked with you from your youth; they all wander about in their own paths; there is no one to save you.

### ISAIAH 47:10-15 (KJV)

10 For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness: thou hast said, None seeth me. Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee; and thou hast said in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me.

11 Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know from whence it riseth: and mischief shall fall upon thee; thou shalt not be able to put it off: and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou shalt not know.

12 Stand now with thine enchantments, and with the multitude of thy sorceries, wherein thou hast laboured from thy youth; if so be thou shalt be able to profit, if so be thou mayest prevail.

13 Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee.

14 Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame: there shall not be a coal to warm at, nor fire to sit before it.

15 Thus shall they be unto thee with whom thou hast laboured, even thy merchants, from thy youth: they shall wander every one to his quarter; none shall save thee.

## KEY TERMS

- **Enchantments** – The condition of being put under a spell; something that delights or charms; great delight.
- **Sorceries** – Magic formed with the supposed aid of evil spirits; witchcraft.
- **Stubble** – The lower ends of stalks of grain left in the ground after the grain is cut; any short, rough growth.
- **Sennacherib** (sen-nack-er-ib)
- **Sweyn** (svehn)

## INTRODUCTION

The summer quarter looks at creation in its broadest sense. Believers hold firm that God almighty created the world and all in the world. But that is not the whole creation story. God's creative power was on full display during Christ's earthly ministry. And still, it goes further. The divine creative power is also revealed through believers in acts of redemption and restoration, healing, resurrection, and personal peace. And for believers, the best is yet to come. The creation story climaxes in the new

earth and heaven, in ultimate glory. This latter aspect is the focus of the book of Revelation.

So, see how believers partner with God through Christ in continuing the more comprehensive creation story in these lessons. In "God Delivers and Restores," we consider Isaiah, examining the prophetic foretelling of Babylon's destruction and inspiring hope for Israel's

deliverance. In the second group (lessons 5 to 9) we study "The Word: The Agent of Creation," from John's gospel. Through these lessons, look at how the *creating word* (Jesus Christ) became flesh, healed the sick, saved the lost, resurrected the dead, and granted peace. The final lessons (lessons 10 to 13) highlight "The Great Hope of the Saints" from the book of Revelation.

These lessons give a glimpse of the fulfillment of the believers' great hope for a new home and a secured eternity. Please keep this framework in mind as you work through the thirteen studies.

For lesson one, note that God allowed the nation of Israel to be enslaved by Babylon. Based on such victories, and its military power, Babylon became arrogant and despised other nations and their



God's creative power was on full display during Christ's earthly ministry.



gods. Babylon's leaders missed the point that it was Israel's God who had given Babylon the victory.

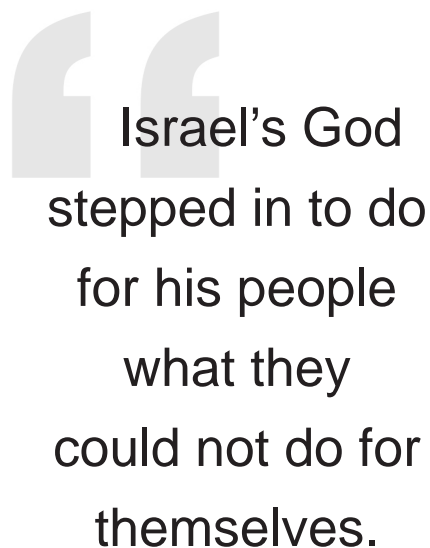
There are striking similarities between how Babylon perceived its success and good fortune and how many people today view their success. Their achievements make them look down on other people and forget God. That foolish pride turned out to be disastrous for the leaders and people of Babylon. Today, people who drink from that same cup of self-centered glory taste the same ruin God planned for Babylon. In this lesson is a strong warning about the dangers of vanity and pride.

### TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

To appreciate the text, we must know the status of the nation of Babylon in its historical context. Babylon was a modern equivalent of a world superpower. Isaiah points out, and historians confirmed, Babylon was a constant, worrisome threat to the existence and prosperity of Israel.

We must also highlight that Babylon was an idolatrous nation; this alone puts it at odds with God's people Israel. Babylon was such a powerful, godless

enemy; the name was and still is used by the church to describe a godless empire or culture (see 1 Peter 5:13; Revelation 17–18). As you read the text, consider how terrible a situation this created for God's people. When your enemy is more powerful than you are, has more skilled and more vicious fighters, deadlier weapons, and no scruples about your destruction, you have to take note. You must be concerned.



Israel's God  
stepped in to do  
for his people  
what they  
could not do for  
themselves.

Israel on its own could not engage Babylon in war and hope to win. For Israel to break Babylon's iron hand of domination, Israel had to get help. The prophet knew this, and the people understood it. Thankfully, Israel's God stepped in to do for his people what they could not do for themselves.

Bear in mind that the set text is part of a broader text in the book of Isaiah (chapters 40–66) devoted to God's planned destruction of oppressive Babylon. Also, don't miss how God spelled out the charges against Babylon. The people felt invincible, secured in their wisdom. Part of this haughty pride came from their practice of witchcraft and other idolatries. This disclosure of charges is a feature of God's judgment. No person will be able to stand before



God and say they don't know the reason for God's judgment or punishment. The statement "be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23) is sound theology, whether for a nation or an individual.

For the next point of interest, we step back into Chapter 45. There we see Cyrus was the person God selected to break the nation of Babylon. God called Cyrus to chastise Babylon when Cyrus did not know God ("I name you though you do not know me"); this lets us know that God may use someone outside our church, outside our faith, or outside our country to reorient us. Some people used as deliverers and/or liberators were "outsiders." They were not recognized as qualified for the roles they played. God does not have to choose a religious, political, or economic liberator from our honored list of likely candidates. You have heard it many times before: God qualifies whom God calls and calls whom God qualifies.

Our focus this far was on the people of Babylon as a nation; but, be sure that on the personal level, our God will do the same. So, to use a popular cliché, when we feel we are under threat by powerful, godless, enemies; we must not watch the


size of the enemy. We keep our eyes on the size and power of our God.

## SANKOFA

The text above noted that Babylon was a super-power, and Israel would be at a distinct disadvantage to take on Babylon in a war. Looking back in Caribbean history, we saw a parallel situation in Jamaica with Nanny of the Maroons (c. 1686 – c. 1733). This woman became the

leader of the resistance movement called the Maroons (runaway or former slaves opposed to slavery). Under her leadership, the Windward Maroons engaged in serious guerrilla warfare against the mighty British army for many years. To the surprise of many, this loosely-organized guerrilla group inflicted heavy losses on the better-trained, better-equipped British army.

As they could not defeat the Maroons, the British agreed to a treaty in April 1740. By that treaty, the running war stopped, the Maroons got freedom from the state, and some 500 acres of land to settle and live on. This was the start of what today is called Moore Town or New Nanny Town in Jamaica. Indeed, when God is ready, God will send liberators from any corner of the earth to free his people.



Indeed, when God is ready, God will send liberators from any corner of the earth to free his people.

**CASE STUDY**

About 13 years ago, the Reverend Dr. Jeremiah Wright released a tornado of public uproar with his comment “God Damn America” in his sermon. Did people really hear the message of the sermon? It appeared that most of the people who were angered by the comments did not hear or did not understand the focal point Dr. Wright was making. Anyone who listened to the sermon would have seen that the good preacher was making the same point the prophet Isaiah made in the text. If indeed God is a God of justice, a nation cannot expect to prosper when it consciously and systematically perpetuates injustice. When injustice is the order of the day, damnation, not blessings, is the outcome to expect. To put it in Bob Marley’s language:

“Until the philosophy which hold one race superior and another inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned everywhere is war.” (From the song *War*)

It may be hard for people to accept, but Proverbs 14:34 still holds, “Godliness makes a nation great, but sin is a disgrace

to any people” (NLT version). Psalm 89:14 reminds us that righteousness and justice are the foundation of God’s rule. Therefore, it is not optional that God will judge injustice. God, by his very nature, must condemn and deal harshly with nations which maintain systems of injustice. Dr. Wright was right. National systems of injustice bring damnation, not blessings.

**LIFE APPLICATION**

Do you think God  
is pleased with the  
direction your country is  
going?

When God judges a nation, everyone in the nation feels the suffering of that judgment. So, we must be intimately concerned about what is happening in our country, its direction, and the blessings or damnation hanging over it.

Second, as Christians, we must pray for our nation (see 1 Timothy 2:1-2 and Jeremiah 29:7). Against that background, take some time to consider the country’s state. Based on the news you hear, the events you witness, and the political landscape, what is the state of your nation? Do you think God is pleased with the direction your country is going?

Whatever your assessment of the above, consider how often you pray and

intercede for the nation. Irrespective of social or political sympathies, our prayers for our country should be regular and constant. We must make it a habit to pray for our nation's peace, prosperity, and godliness. Is earnest prayer for the country a regular feature of your meditation or church meetings? If it is not, consider how you can improve this aspect of your Christian life.

God is always the ultimate judge of every nation. Whether a nation prospers or falls depends on the country's level of justice and righteousness. Consider how you can help expose and root out injustice and evil in your government. Likewise, find out how you can promote systems of justice and godliness in your country. Participating in national elections and supporting candidates who stand for real justice and godliness is an important start. The actions of a nation are the total of the actions of its people. Play your part. Do not undermine your importance in national affairs.


## QUESTIONS

1. Name one person from history or the

Bible who God called and equipped for a special mission or contribution to their community, church, or the world, who in the eyes of his or her contemporaries was not qualified for that assignment.

2. What is your belief on guerilla warfare, and how God may use it to free a people from oppression?

3. Babylon, as a nation, was on the wrong track of justice and righteousness, and therefore God set them up for destruction. What track is your nation on, blessing or damnation?



God is always the  
ultimate judge of every  
nation.

## CLOSING DEVOTIONS

**Closing Hymn:** "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name," *AMECH* #4

**Closing Praise:** Dear Father, I thank you for making me a part of this nation. Help me to know the roles I can play to promote your justice and righteous in this nation. In Jesus' name. Amen.

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS****June 6-June 12**

<b>Monday</b>	1 Corinthians 1:18-25 (God's Redemption Defies Human Wisdom)
<b>Tuesday</b>	1 Corinthians 1:26-31 (Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption)
<b>Wednesday</b>	Psalms 111 (God Sent Redemption to God's People)
<b>Thursday</b>	Hebrews 9:11-14 (Christ Brings Eternal Redemption)
<b>Friday</b>	Psalms 25:1-11 (Pardon My Guilt, O Lord)
<b>Saturday</b>	Psalms 25:12-22 (Redeem Israel, O God)
<b>Sunday</b>	Isaiah 49:1-17 (The Lord Will Have Compassion)



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## GOD FORETELLS OF REDEMPTION

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Lesson Scripture: Isaiah 49:1-17

Focus Scripture: Isaiah 49:1-13

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*Key Verse: Thus says the Lord: In a time of favor I have answered you, on a day of salvation I have helped you; I have kept you and given you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages. Isaiah 49:8 (NRSV)*

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### ISAIAH 49:1-13 (NRSV)

1 Listen to me, O coastlands, pay attention, you peoples from far away! The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me.

2 He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away.

3 And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified."

4 But I said, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward with my God."

5 And now the Lord says, who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honored in the sight of the Lord, and my God has become my strength—

6 he says, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

7 Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers, "Kings shall see and stand up, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

8 Thus says the Lord: In a time of favor I have answered you, on a day of salvation I have helped you; I have kept you and given you as a

### ISAIAH 49:1-13 (KJV)

1 Listen O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far; The Lord hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name.

2 And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me;

3 And said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.

4 Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God.

5 And now, saith the Lord that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength.

6 And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.

7 Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the Lord that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee.

8 Thus saith the Lord, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give

covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages;

9 saying to the prisoners, "Come out," to those who are in darkness, "Show yourselves." They shall feed along the ways, on all the bare heights shall be their pasture;

10 they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them down, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them.

11 And I will turn all my mountains into a road, and my highways shall be raised up.

12 Lo, these shall come from far away, and lo, these from the north and from the west, and these from the land of Syene.

13 Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his suffering ones.

thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages;

9 That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places.

10 They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them.

11 And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted.

12 Behold, these shall come from far: and, lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim.

13 Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted.

## INTRODUCTION

### KEY TERMS

- **Jacob** – Father of the 12 ancestors of the 12 Israelite tribes; son of Isaac and Rebekah; twin of Esau; name later changed to Israel.
- **Abhorred** – Shrunk away from with horror; feel disgust for; hate very much.
- **Prostrate** – To lay down flat; cast down; to make very weak or helpless.
- **Zion** – Hill of Jerusalem; used to refer to the city of God or heavenly Jerusalem; Jewish people.
- **Syene** (sahy-ee-nee) – Modern Aswan in Egypt off the Nile River.

In lesson one, we saw God laying out the charges against Babylon and setting the destruction of idolatrous people. This overthrow of Babylon, Israel's oppressor, would give Israel hope, relief, and liberation. For most people, that would have been enough. But not for God! God wanted his people to have more than a few years of earthly liberation and peace. The Lord wanted them to have freedom and peace forever. Therefore, the almighty gracious creator set in place a plan for this everlasting peace and freedom. The heart of the plan was to send into the earth God's suffering servant to lay the groundwork for eternal liberation.

The set text contains one of what is commonly called the *Servant Songs* or *Servant Poem*. These are four passages

in Isaiah (42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-13; 52:13–53:12) which reveal the person, service, mission, and eventual exaltation of the suffering servant of God. Therefore, see in the text God's preview to Israel of the time of total liberation and the identity of the liberator.

From our experience with movies, we know the power of the preview. You would recall that in the first lesson, we said Israel could not hope to free itself militarily from the domination of Babylon. In like manner, Israel and the whole world could not save themselves from the power of sin. Humanity needed help to be free. So, God was offering that help through his suffering servant.

### TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

For the sake of clarity, we acknowledge there is some debate about the identity of the suffering servant in the four *Servant Songs*. In this lesson, we take the view that in the first case, the term refers to the nation of Israel through whom God would reveal his redeeming power. However, in the second instance, the term describes the person and work of the savior Jesus Christ. While we want to keep this approach as simple as

possible, we cannot avoid justification for our position.

Consider verse three of the text, in which Israel is clearly identified by name. Contrast this with verse seven, in which the servant is not Israel, but the redeemer of Israel. Note the clear transition from the nation of Israel to the redeemer of Israel. Unless we see this transition, we cannot interpret the text logically.



Humanity needed help to be free. So, God was offering that help through his suffering servant.

After clarifying the identity, we next consider the people to whom the prophecy was sent. Yes, it was for the nation of Israel. But not Israel alone! The reference in verse one to the “coastland” and “people from afar” gives the prophecy a wider audience. It is for the people to whom the suffering servant would be sent: the whole world, all humanity.

After that, we want to focus on the role of the servant in the prophecy. Our modern idea of a servant could hurt our appreciation for the servant Isaiah saw. In the prophecy, the term “servant” is related to a trusted ambassador. Of course, the servant is low, but only in regards to his master. Think of an ambassador to the United Nations. That person serves at the

pleasure of the country's leader. Hence ambassadors must do the will of the country they represent. Yet, such a person is held in high esteem on the world stage. When an ambassador speaks, the world listens. That is the context of the servant in Isaiah's prophecy. He is enslaved to God. His whole being is focused on doing God's will. Still, when this servant speaks, his words are like a "sharp sword" and are as deadly as a "polished arrow." Humility blended with divine authority and power is the vivid image of this suffering servant.


Then we may ask, "How can someone so powerful be so 'deeply despised' (verse 7)?" The only sure intelligent answer was the will of the servant's master, God almighty. Therein lay the character of servanthood. He served his master's will without question, whether good or bad (comfortable or uncomfortable). Oh, that we could be like the servant!

Lastly, take a moment to appreciate the sheer beauty of scripture. The text had meaning and value for the people of Isaiah's day. It had meaning for the times and people of Jesus' earthly ministry. Yet, it has meaning and value for us today. Further, it has apocalyptic (end times) value. To see the last extension, compare

Isaiah 49:2 to Revelation 1:16 and Isaiah 49:10 to Revelation 7:16.

## SANKOFA

As Christians, we accept that Jesus Christ gave us the perfect portrait of servant leadership. And no mere human can equal or surpass his example. Yet, in history, we can look back to some persons who took on the posture of a suffering servant for the sake of the gospel.



As Christians, we accept that Jesus Christ gave us the perfect portrait of servant leadership.

One such person was Susan Angeline Collins, a Methodist missionary. Before answering the call to the mission field in Africa, Ms. Collins was a successful entrepreneur, owning a small laundry in Huron, Dakota. One day by chance, she saw an advertisement about the Chicago Training School. This school trained persons for

missionary work at home and in foreign lands. Susan's heart was captured. Eventually, she sold her laundry business and went to that school for training.

Her desire to share the message of Christ pushed Ms. Collins at age 36 to leave her home for Africa in 1887. For over a decade, she worked without payment under the plan of the self-supporting



mission. The report says at times, Susan could not afford to buy herself shoes and had to rely on the charity of others.

Struggling against the odds and personal adversities, Susan Collins set up a boarding school for girls in Angola. When in 1900, she returned to her home base in Iowa, she was told that at age 50, she was too old to stay on the mission field. She refused to accept that advice. Her desire to serve Christ and make his message a reality was still vital. She could not let go of her dream and sought funding to continue.

After her retirement, Susan returned to Iowa and remained a cherished member of the Methodist Episcopal Church and community. She died just before her 89th birthday in 1940.

According to all the accounts we found, what was truly remarkable about Susan Angeline Collins was a desire to serve without seeking personal gain. She gave unselfishly of herself and all she had to serve her God. Her heart of service is probably reflected in one of the quotations attributed to her: "Praise God for continued health, and strength, and contentment in the work that he has given to me to do..." How

often do we see such a picture of selfless service, even among church members?

## CASE STUDY

### John Wycliffe

#### 'The Morning Star of the Reformation'

***"Trust wholly in Christ; rely altogether on his sufferings; beware of seeking to be justified in any other way than by his righteousness."***

Her heart of service is probably reflected in one of the quotations attributed to her: "Praise God for continued health, and strength, and contentment in the work that he has given to me to do..."

In verse two of the text, we find a picture of the word being "like a sharp sword" and its power being like a "polished arrow." How does this look in reality? The life of John Wycliffe gives some clues. Most of us know John Wycliffe as the person credited for the first translation of the Bible from Latin to English. This translation work was

motivated by Wycliffe's firm belief that all people should read the scriptures in their mother tongue. Why? "Englishmen learn Christ's law best in English. Moses heard God's law in his tongue; so did Christ's apostles."

This conviction, and others about church doctrines and practices, put Wycliffe at odds with the established

Catholic Church. A vicious battle for the hearts of Christian believers developed. In this struggle of words, Wycliffe had to defend himself against the church in England and the papacy in Rome. At times the state got involved because of the close merging of the church and state at that time. Wycliffe was declared a heretic, called before the church court to defend his position, and ordered to give up his positions. He refused.

The biting effect of his teachings on the established church was indeed like a cut from a sharp sword. He could not be ignored. He was sure his teachings were firmly rooted in scripture. As time passed, Wycliffe attracted many supports and defenders. At his death, the war of words he started was still raging.

The profound effect his teaching had on the church was that even his dead body was not allowed to rest in peace. Some 43 years after his death, church officials dug up Wycliffe's body, burned his remains, and scattered his ashes into the River Swift. Those actions were too little and too late. Wycliffe's influence on the church kept growing. The English translation of the Latin Bible was a reality, which paved the

way for the Bible we use today. Such is the undeniable power of the scriptures and the cutting effect of believers who live by their convictions. There is power in preaching the word, not opinion.


### LIFE APPLICATION

In life, we come face to face with some ironies (contradictions) that arrest our attention. For example, as a rule of life, people who are truly powerful

and understand the responsibility of power do not go around showing off their ability to impress others. Also, people who are rich, really wealthy, and can buy the clothing store and the block it is in don't feel the social pressure to be among the first to wear new clothing styles. Likewise, the life of our savior Jesus gives us a giant paradox to consider. How could the

redeemer of the world, the only begotten son of the almighty Jehovah, the miracle worker, live the life of a lowly suffering servant? The key to this riddle is the definition of the word "servant."

A servant has no will or purpose for existence except the will and purpose of his master. Jesus alluded to this on many occasions, e.g., "My nourishment (food)



There is power in  
preaching the word, not  
opinion.

comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work.” Further, our Lord taught us to take on this mindset when we pray: “Your kingdom come. You will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

All of us, who name the name of Christ, must stop often and ask ourselves how well we follow Jesus’ example of being a servant. Are our desires his desires for us; are our agendas consistent with God’s righteous plan? Also, in our prayers, do we approach God as our master; or is God our page boy who we can order around to get for us those things that make us feel comfortable, secure, and unique (according to worldly standards)? The mighty God Jesus lived as a suffering servant! How well is this reflected in our lives? A great clue is in the things we pray for. So consider the focus of your prayers.

Can we draw a good line between humility and weakness in a similar vein? Many persons cannot. Today, it is common to hear believers talk of a “strong man” or a “strong woman.” Strength in these cases is measured by stopping others from “pushing us around.” But what is genuinely righteous

strength? Jesus was not weak. Yet, he stayed hungry when he could have made bread from stones (Matthew 4:1-4); ran and hid when people came to beat him up (Luke 4:29-30); and paid taxes when he owned everything (Matthew 17:24-27). This is an excellent time to examine your definition of strengths and weaknesses. Are your purposes consistent with the life and teaching of Jesus?

Last, God’s prophecies through Isaiah had an end-time component. One day, all the redeemed will be genuinely free. The hope from that promise has guided the church throughout many dark periods of history. Consider how strong that hope is in you bosom. To what extent does such hope guide the choices and actions you make in life? It was the guiding principle in the life of the first

apostles and the early church. If that hope is indeed alive in you, how well do you share and transfer it to people you meet in the ordinary course of life? (Caution: we cannot communicate effectively, what we do not believe intensely.)

## QUESTIONS

1. What is your mental image of a servant, and did the life of Jesus fit that image?

All of us, who name the name of Christ, must stop often and ask ourselves how well we follow Jesus’ example of being a servant.

2. What message did God send to believers by branding Jesus as a suffering savior?
3. John Wycliffe withstood threats, persecutions, brief imprisonment, and shaming to defend his faith and convictions. How far are you willing to go to defend your Christian faith?

### CLOSING DEVOTIONS

**Closing Hymn:** "All the Way My Savior Leads Me," (Fanny Crosby) *AMECH* #293

**Closing Prayer:** Heavenly Father, help me to draw the wisdom and strength I need for effective living now from your promise of total freedom and peace in eternity. Let your will be done, and let it be the guiding principle of my living. In Jesus' name. Amen.

### HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

June 13-June 19

<b>Monday</b>	Psalm 75 (God Puts Down and Lifts Up)
<b>Tuesday</b>	Leviticus 26:3-13 (God Protects a Restored, Holy People)
<b>Wednesday</b>	Luke 6:20-26 (Blessings Upon God's People)
<b>Thursday</b>	Psalm 30 (God Has Turned Mourning Into Dancing)
<b>Friday</b>	James 1:13-18 (God Gives Good Gifts)
<b>Saturday</b>	Deuteronomy 28:9-14 (Blessings for Obedience)
<b>Sunday</b>	Isaiah 49:18-23 (Wait for the Lord)



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## GOD'S RESTORED PEOPLE SHALL PROSPER

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Lesson Scripture: Isaiah 49:18-26

Focus Scripture: Isaiah 49:18-23

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*Key Verse: Then you will know that I am the Lord; those who wait for me shall not be put to shame. Isaiah 49:23c (NRSV)*

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### ISAIAH 49:18-23 (NRSV)

18 Lift up your eyes all around and see; they all gather, they come to you. As I live, says the Lord, you shall put all of them on like an ornament, and like a bride you shall bind them on.

19 Surely your waste and your desolate places and your devastated land—surely now you will be too crowded for your inhabitants, and those who swallowed you up will be far away.

20 The children born in the time of your bereavement will yet say in your hearing: “The place is too crowded for me; make room for me to settle.”

21 Then you will say in your heart, “Who has borne me these? I was bereaved and barren, exiled and put away—so who has reared these? I was left all alone—where then have these come from?”

22 Thus says the Lord God: I will soon lift up my hand to the nations, and raise my signal to the peoples; and they shall bring your sons in their bosom, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders.

23 Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. With their faces to the ground they shall bow down to you, and lick the dust of your feet. Then you will know that I am the Lord; those who wait for me shall not be put to shame.

### ISAIAH 49:18-23 (KJV)

18 Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to thee. As I live, saith the Lord, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee, as a bride doeth.

19 For thy waste and thy desolate places, and the land of thy destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants, and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away.

20 The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell.

21 Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been?

22 Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders.

23 And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.

## KEY TERMS

- **Barren** – Not producing anything; not able to bear offspring, yield fruit or seeds; without interest.
- **Artaxerxes** (ar-tuh-zerk-seez)
- **Belshazzar** (bel-shazz-er)
- **Nabonidus** (nab-uh-nye-dus)

## INTRODUCTION

At this point it is fitting to highlight distinctive features of godly prophecy. At times we hear people throwing around personal wishes and calling them prophecy. Innocent believers who know not the difference can be misled by such prophetic illusions. So, what is the special feature of true prophetic revelation? It has detail and divine elements which are consistent with scripture. In the set text we see both. God does not foretell what will happen in broad terms. The Lord gives supporting details and time frames. Examine the passage to see if you can identify this feature.

The text also points to a major plank of God's grace. God judges sin, and often judges it harshly. Yet, the Lord's ears are

always open to the cries of the redeemed sinner. So full restoration can follow divine chastisement. And when God restores, he does it in grand style. The Lord knows our innate desires for peace, prosperity, freedom, and justice. Hence, when God restores, he provides all of these for his redeemed people. As we work through this lesson, notice how the God that allowed his people to be dominated by the Babylonians, gave them grand visions of amazing restoration. What mercy, what grace!

## TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

...the Lord's ears are  
always open to the cries  
of the redeemed sinner.  
So full restoration  
can follow divine  
chastisement.

You cannot read the text without being captured by the poetic elegance of the writer. The images are lively and bright. To grasp the full impact of the text, swing into it from verses 15 and 16. These set the springboard for what the prophet declares. God says to his redeemed people, as a mother cannot forget her child, the Lord cannot forget them. The Lord has

tattooed the redeemed people on the palm of his hand. So, every time he looks at his hand, he sees them.

The image of the bride is striking. Brides and weddings in scripture are

always associated with happy moments, with bonding, with coming together, unifying and acceptance. It is as if God is saying to the redeemed people, get ready, something great and everlasting will happen. Instead of the sorrow and loss you suffered, you will have joy and reward. Prepare for your glory days. Further, this imagery of the redeemer (Christ) and his bride runs throughout the New Testament with a glorious conclusion in Revelation (see Ephesians 5:23-32 and Revelation 19:6-8).

The theme of restoration is amplified in the text. Catch the picture! Open your mind's eye and picture the words "waste," "desolate," and "devastated." It is a sad picture, isn't it? Then open the next eye and see expansion, rebirth, peace, and security. The redeemed people move from a small, dead, narrow existence to abundance and prosperity, from death to life. That is the promise God holds out to all humanity. In Christ we find life, liberation, abundance, and honor (people bowing down). Outside of Christ come restrictions, scarcity, disgrace, and death. Oh, that we would choose life!

In verse 23 we see the cliffhanger to the promise of restoration. "Then you will

know that I am the Lord; those who wait for me shall not be put to shame." This is what it is all about: the majesty, the power, and the supremacy of God. God jealously guards his pride of place in the world. The creator will not be disrespected, belittled, or displaced by his creatures. We owe a certain level of honor and worship to God and he must get it. One way or the other, the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord (Numbers 4:21 and Habakkuk 2:14).

We can bow voluntarily and humbly in prayer and worship, or we can bow in distress and judgment. But we bow.

### SANKOFA

What Isaiah had prophesied was a miraculous transformation of fortunes for Israel. It is natural to ask if such an amazing turn-around in fortunes is possible.

Outside of the Bible, can we find examples of countries that saw extraordinary growth and development? Such examples would help believers to hold their ground in face of accusations that passages like Isaiah 49 are just preserved fables.

According to a *Washington Post* article in December 1979 the Ivory Coast had 19 years of amazing growth

In Christ we find life,  
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and development. Read for yourself what Leon Dash wrote about that development. “When the Ivory Coast gained independence from France in 1960 it had a marginal communications system and a primitive road network. Today, the Ivory Coast has the best roads in Africa, the most reliable source of electricity, the best communications and the most equitable distribution of personal annual income -- about \$1,100 per capita. Most impressively, it has the highest rate of economic growth in black Africa, a phenomenal 7 percent a year for the past 19 years.”

Such reports should strengthen our faith in the amazing promises of God. They provide reasonable platforms for us to believe exceptional outcomes in God’s promises.

### CASE STUDY


The text is truly profound. The prophecies given have been traced through history in relation to outcomes in Israel and related territories. It is the type of passage a person can reflect on to feed the belief that in the final analysis, God controls everything. But wait! Can you share the idea that the fate of the nation is in the hands of God, with

a friend who is concerned about recent political events? Let us ask it another way. How would you respond to a friend who tells you that events in our nation have nothing to do with God?

Before you answer, consider some results from a Pew Research survey. In the survey results published April 25, 2018, Pew found that the number of people who belief in God is in decline. Of those responding to the survey, 80%

believed in God; 19% didn’t. But here is the shocker. Only 56% of those who believe in the existence of God, believe in the God of the Bible. Did you get that? This means only 44.8% of persons believe in the God of the Bible. If these results hold true, one in every two persons we meet may not accept our stories about God in national events.

Those results should inform how we approach people about the things of God. Persons involved in social action programs and evangelism outreach should take note. We cannot ignore such results when planning to engage with people outside the church family.



How would you respond to a friend who tells you that events in our nation have nothing to do with God?

## LIFE APPLICATION

The above results in the **Case Study** should push us to examine our beliefs about happenings in our nations. What really is the function of God in national affairs; does God set outcomes irrespective of human personalities; and, how does the sin factor affect the national outcomes we experience? You can use the context of this lesson to guide your thinking on such matters. Israel found themselves in captivity because of the nation's abandonment of godly principles. The nation's captivity was not an accident. It was foretold and engineered by God. The same God, at the right time, foretold and engineered their redemption from captivity. You may use this background to think about recent national events in your country.

Today we have many groups advocating for freedom, justice, and compensation for past wrongs. This fact forces us to ask, what does true freedom and justice look like? We must have firm visions of freedom and justice, to avoid the pitfalls from merely responding to hashtags and public relation stunts. Do the freedom and justice movements we support have a righteous foundation? Would God

approve and/or support our involvement in these movements? These are things we must assess.

Although the lesson has a national flavor (relating to the collective nation), it also has a great personal component. Ask yourself, "How does the way God dealt with Israel at that time, reflect how God deals with me today?" God judged Israel's unfaithfulness then. Does that mean the Lord judges my unfaithfulness

now? After a period of punishment (captivity), God planned an amazing restoration for Israel. Can you see God doing the same for you: restoring you to a brighter path after a period of chastisement? Your answer to these issues will set your outlook for the life ahead of you.

“God judged Israel's unfaithfulness then. Does that mean the Lord judges my unfaithfulness now?”

## QUESTIONS

1. How can you share the belief that despite human personalities, God is in control of world outcomes?
2. The results of the Pew Survey aside, do you see evidence that belief in God is declining?
3. What does the text tell you about the width of God's mercy and restorative love?



**CLOSING DEVOTIONS**

**Closing Hymn:** "Now Thank We All Our God," *AMECH* #573

**Closing Prayer:** Dear Father, I am

happy that your mercy and love extends to me. Such wonderful knowledge gives me hope that even when I abandon your principles, you do not abandon me. Oh God, I am grateful for your far-reaching love. With praise in Jesus' name. Amen.

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

**June 20-June 26**

<b>Monday</b>	Isaiah 50:4-9 (God Will Vindicate God's Servant)
<b>Tuesday</b>	Isaiah 51:9-16 (Remember God's Mighty Deeds)
<b>Wednesday</b>	Isaiah 51:17-23 (God Defends Israel's Cause)
<b>Thursday</b>	2 Corinthians 1:7-14 (God Rescues Us from Peril)
<b>Friday</b>	1 Thessalonians 1:6-10 (Jesus Rescues Us from Wrath)
<b>Saturday</b>	Psalms 3 (Deliverance Belongs to the Lord)
<b>Sunday</b>	Isaiah 51:1-8 (God's Deliverance Is Coming)