

## God's Restored People Shall Prosper

"Got the house?" asked Erin, looking at her realtor in confusion.

"I'm totally stunned, too," said Barbara. "There were four offers on the house, and ours was the least. The highest bid was \$50,000 more than ours and the lowest offer was \$15,000 more. And the husband and wife were in agreement," Barbara added.

The house was valued at \$250,000, but the Millers were asking \$200,000. The house seemed like a mansion to Erin, who lived in a modest, medium-sized apartment with her two children. After finally completing her bachelor's degree in education, Erin had been working the last four years as a family engagement specialist with a Head Start program. She prayed and dreamed of owning a home.

When Erin began her house hunting venture, she told Barbara that she could afford a \$180,000 home. Her credit was good, and she had been saving on a down payment. When Barbara talked Erin into looking at "another lovely home," Erin fell in love with it, and the Millers seemed to genuinely like Erin.

"The Millers said God told them to sell the house to you. I've never had this happen to me before," Barbara said. "I couldn't have worked a better deal."

"Praise God," Erin said. "I know God loves me, and He is always working on my behalf."

**1.** *What are some examples of God bringing about something good from unexpected, disappointing, or difficult circumstances?*

**2.** *What is required as one waits for God to work? Why?*

**3.** *What can be a source of encouragement in the meantime?*

## An Inconceivable Event

*Isaiah 49:18-21, 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?

*Isaiah 49:18-21, NIV*

<sup>18</sup>"Lift up your eyes and look around;  
all your children gather and come to you.

As surely as I live," declares the LORD,

"you will wear them all as ornaments;  
you will put them on, like a bride.

<sup>19</sup>"Though you were ruined and made desolate  
and your land laid waste,  
now you will be too small for your people,  
and those who devoured you will be far away.

<sup>20</sup>The children born during your bereavement  
will yet say in your hearing,  
'This place is too small for us;  
give us more space to live in.'

<sup>21</sup>Then you will say in your heart,

'Who bore me these?  
I was bereaved and barren;  
I was exiled and rejected.  
Who brought these up?  
I was left all alone,  
but these—where have they come from?' "

Today's passage describes something that was to happen that could be described as nothing short of a

miracle—the restoration of Israel from both its physical and spiritual ruin.

Isaiah's prophetic ministry began more than 150 years before the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and continued until about 150 years before the beginning of the nation's restoration. What God said was going to happen from that time forward was humanly impossible. It was just as far-fetched as a widowed ("bereaved") and infertile ("barren") woman being found with child (vs. 21). Yet the land would be restored and have multitudes of people.

These promises would have both historical and symbolic fulfillment. The city and its temple were eventually rebuilt under the leadership of Ezra, Nehemiah, and others, beginning in 536 B.C., but the land was not filled afterward with so many that the land seemed "too small" to hold them (vs. 20). Since then, millions have returned to Israel, but it still isn't too small to hold all those who wish to dwell there. Therefore, the "too small" prophecy about the land may refer to a future time, perhaps when many millions have come into a saving relationship with Jesus.

These spiritual children of Israel will embellish the land like jewels adorning a bride. But the barren woman (Israel) will not understand where all these children have "come from" (vs. 21). She thought she was deserted and no longer of value to God. When the final events of this prophecy unfold, she realizes He never abandoned her. God was working behind the scenes to give her a countless number of spiritual offspring.

**4.** *What is the condition of Israel prior to the fulfillment of this prophecy?*

**5.** *What takes place in spite of this?*

**6.** *How does Israel (the "barren woman") respond to this?*

**7.** *What are some hints that this prophecy has not yet been fulfilled?*

## A Worldwide Impact

*Isaiah 49:22-23, KJV*

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.

*Isaiah 49:22-23, NIV*

<sup>22</sup>This is what the Sovereign LORD says:

“See, I will beckon to the nations,  
I will lift up my banner to the peoples;  
they will bring your sons in their arms  
and carry your daughters on their hips.

<sup>23</sup>Kings will be your foster fathers,  
and their queens your nursing mothers.

They will bow down before you  
with their faces to the ground;  
they will lick the dust at your feet.

Then you will know that I am the LORD;  
those who hope in me will not be disappointed.”

God promised Israel that she would one day be honored by others—that kings and queens would eventually bow down before her with “faces to the ground” (vs. 23). Like the promises in the previous verses, this one had both historical and spiritual implications.

When the first group of exiles migrated back to Jerusalem, Cyrus, the Persian king, gave back to them the implements taken by the Babylonians from the temple (Ezra 1:7-11). Then King Darius ordered the local governor to pay for some of the costs of rebuilding the temple (6:3-12), and Artaxerxes provided Nehemiah with protection and letters guaranteeing financial support for rebuilding

Jerusalem's walls (Neh. 2:7-9). During recent migrations to Israel, many nations have offered support to Jews desiring to return to the land. However, it's also possible that this prophecy is referring to a more distant time, one perhaps when kings will honor the role Israel played in the salvation of the world.

A "banner" (vs. 22) was a flag placed on a pole that signified the place where soldiers were to gather prior to a battle or people were to meet prior to a great event. Israel was to play an important role in God's future plans and others would flock to her when those plans were fulfilled.

This banner does not represent the literal land of Israel, however, but what God intended to accomplish through it. God promised Abraham that the world would be blessed through him and his descendants (Gen. 12:3). This promise was fulfilled when Jesus was crucified and then rose from the dead. Jews were the first believers and the first evangelists. Through the Jews, Jesus and the Gospel message became "a light for the Gentiles" (Isa. 49:6).

God promised the Jews their land would someday be restored. But more importantly, God promised that they would be blessed in a way they could not imagine. Through them, God was going to save the world from its sin. When the Israelites finally understood this, they would realize that God was indeed Lord of all and that He would not "disappoint" (vs. 23) them—their trust in Him had not been misplaced. God was going to work behind the scenes to bring something good out of a bad situation. This was a promise they could count on in the difficult days that lay ahead.

- 8.** *What part would other nations have in Israel's future?*
- 9.** *What part would Israel have in theirs?*
- 10.** *What would the Israelites learn when they saw this?*
- 11.** *How did God want them to respond in anticipation of their restoration?*

## What I Thought Was a Problem

I remember a time when the conditions at my work place were so bad that I couldn't wait to move on to better surroundings. But no matter how hard I tried, it seemed I couldn't find another job that was a good fit.

What happened then revealed that God had a hand in blocking my path to what I thought were greener pastures. Many of the jobs I applied for that seemed perfect at the time eventually disappeared due to various economic forces. And the management of the company I worked with eventually changed for the better. Years later, I was able to retire with good memories and a substantial pension, something that would not have happened had I decided to move on.

Remembering incidents like that makes it easier to trust that God is at work even when I don't think He is. Yet I still sometimes wonder what He is up to when I don't know what I will find at the end of one of life's tunnels.

Early in the days of the pandemic, I was scrambling to find ways to safely connect with those I ministered to. We were unable to meet in person, and some feared that our group might not survive the restrictions imposed on it. But one year into the pandemic I realized that God was using the crisis to redefine what it meant to connect. Although we could not all be together in the same room, many found ways to meet with video or with distancing. I found that people were actually connecting more frequently than they had in pre-COVID days. They were just doing it differently. What I thought was a problem turned out to be a blessing.

**12.** *How have you seen God working behind the scenes to bring about something good in difficult or disappointing circumstances?*

**13.** *What did you learn from this?*

**14.** *How can this be of help as you respond to unexpected or challenging situations today?*

## He Is Lord of All

God is often at work behind the scenes to bring about something good in even the most challenging of times even though the results may not be easily or quickly seen. He reassures us that He has our best interests in mind and that He is always at work even when we don't know what He's up to. What He asks us to do is to trust in Him. He is after all Lord of all. And He will do what He's promised.

► *Think about an unexpected, difficult, or disappointing circumstance where you need to trust that God is at work behind the scenes to bring about something good. Then write out your response to the following:*

► *I need to respond to this situation by \_\_\_\_\_ instead of by \_\_\_\_\_.*

### KEY VERSE

And thou shalt know that I am the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me. —Isaiah 49:23c, KJV

“Then you will know that I am the LORD; those who hope in me will not be disappointed.” —Isaiah 49:23c, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of June 20 through June 26

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Isaiah 50:4-9—God Will Vindicate God's Servant.
- Tue.** Isaiah 51:9-16—Remember God's Mighty Deeds.
- Wed.** Isaiah 51:17-23—God Defends Israel's Cause.
- Thu.** 2 Corinthians 1:7-14—God Rescues Us from Peril.
- Fri.** 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10—Jesus Rescues Us from Wrath.
- Sat.** Psalm 3—Deliverance Belongs to the Lord.
- Sun.** Isaiah 51:1-8—God's Deliverance Is Coming.