

Exhortation and Encouragement for the Godly Remnant

Isaiah 51-52:12

Isaiah 51:1-3 - *“Listen to Me, you who follow after righteousness, you who seek the LORD. Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the hole of the pit from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bore you; for I called him alone, and blessed him and increased him.” For the Lord will comfort Zion. He will comfort all her waste places. He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness will be found in it - thanksgiving and the voice of melody.”*

Background Notes:

The first exhortation to listen is in verse 1. Notice who is addressed: *‘Listen to Me, you who follow after righteousness, you who seek the Lord.’* In the context, the “godly remnant” of Israel was to listen to the Lord. Israel was not a righteous nation in Isaiah’s day, but a small group of Jews, sometimes called the “godly remnant,” was faithful to the Lord and His Word in spite of the spiritual and moral decline all around them. This portion of Isaiah was addressed to those godly Jews – but this message also looked forward to the godly remnant of Jews who would be captives in Babylon, and even further in the future to the godly remnant in the Tribulation period of the last days.

It certainly can be applied today as well, because the Lord always has a godly remnant - believers who pursue righteousness and seek the Lord in the midst of a world that is characterized by spiritual and moral decay.

Doctrinal Points

1. The “godly remnant” should look and listen.

In the first 8 verses the godly remnant was told three times to listen to the Lord (v1, v4, v7). They were told to look back and remember their roots - Abraham and Sarah, who were called and blessed by God Himself. Even though Israel would go through hard times at the hands of the Assyrians and the Babylonians (and other foreigners throughout history), yet God would not forget His covenant with His people. Israel and its Land would be restored, even like the Garden of Eden (v3). Obviously, the fulfillment of that prophecy looks forward on to the future, to the time when the Lord returns to earth.

Isaiah 51:4-8 - *“Listen to Me, My people, and give ear to Me, O My nation: for law will proceed from Me, and I will make My justice rest as a light of the peoples. ⁵ My righteousness is near; My salvation has gone forth, and My arms will judge the peoples. The coastlands will wait upon Me, and on My arm they will trust. ⁶ Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look on the earth beneath. For the heavens will vanish away like smoke, the earth will grow old like a garment, and those who dwell in it will die in like manner; but My salvation will be forever, and My righteousness will not be abolished. Listen to*

Me, you who know righteousness, you people in whose heart is My law. Do not fear the reproach of men, nor be afraid of their insults. ⁸ For the moth will eat them up like a garment, and the worm will eat them like wool, but My righteousness will be forever, and My salvation from generation to generation.”

In the second exhortation to listen (v4-6), Israel was told that there will ultimately be a new heaven and a new earth. All evil will be judged and the Lord will reign in righteousness over all peoples.

In the third exhortation to look and listen (v7-8), the godly remnant was told to take courage. Even though they were being mocked and reviled, in the end the tables will be turned. The unbelieving skeptics will pass away and righteousness will endure forever.

How encouraging this was for the godly remnant of Isaiah’s day! And how encouraging this should be for godly people today! The “godly remnant” should look and listen.

2. The “godly remnant” should awake and arise.

Isaiah 51:9 to Isaiah 52:12 is obviously a sub-unit because the call to awake was repeated three times (v9, v17, & 52:1).

Isaiah 51:9-16 - *Awake, awake, put on strength, ^[1]^[SEP]O arm of the Lord! Awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Are You not the arm that cut Rahab apart and wounded the serpent? ¹⁰ Are You not the One who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep; Who made the depths of the sea a road for the redeemed to cross over?
¹¹ So the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness; sorrow and sighing shall flee away. ¹² “I, even I, am He who comforts you. Who are you that you should be afraid of a man who will die, and of the son of a man who will be made like grass?
¹³ And you forget the Lord your Maker, Who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth. ^[1]^[SEP]You have feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, when He has prepared to destroy. And where is the fury of the oppressor?
¹⁴ The captive exile hastens, that he may be loosed, that he should not die in the pit, and that his bread should not fail.
¹⁵ But I am the Lord your God ^[1]^[SEP]Who divided the sea whose waves roared—^[1]^[SEP]The Lord of hosts is His name. ¹⁶ And I have put My words in your mouth, ^[1]^[SEP]have covered you with the shadow of My hand, ^[1]^[SEP]that I may plant the heavens, lay the foundations of the earth, ^[1]^[SEP]and say to Zion, ‘You are My people.’”*

The first “awake” section began as a prayer. The godly remnant asked the Lord to show His power as He did when He delivered Israel out of Egypt and through the Red Sea (v9-10). “Rahab” and “the dragon” from pagan myth were used as symbols for pagan Egypt.

In verse 11, the return of the Jews to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity looked forward prophetically to their future return to the Land in Christ’s millennial kingdom. “*So the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness; sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*”

In verses 12-13, the Lord encouraged the godly remnant not to fear - because the **Creator** was on their side! Once again God promised a return from the Babylonian captivity that looked ahead to the return of the remnant of redeemed and restored Israel in the future, on to the time of the new heavens and the new earth (v14-16)

In the second “awake” section (v17-23), the godly remnant was told to arise and to awake to the fact that even though God had to discipline Israel in His wrath against sin, He would comfort them in the future.

Isaiah 51:17-23 - *“Awake, awake! Stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk at the hand of the LORD the cup of His fury. You have drunk the dregs of the cup of trembling, and drained it out. ¹⁸ There is no one to guide her among all the sons she has brought forth; nor is there any who takes her by the hand among all the sons she has brought up.*

¹⁹ These two things have come to you. Who will be sorry for you? Desolation and destruction, famine and sword— by whom will I comfort you? ²⁰ Your sons have fainted; they lie at the head of all the streets like an antelope in a net. They are full of the fury of the Lord, the rebuke of your God.

²¹ Therefore please hear this, you afflicted, and drunk but not with wine. ²² Thus says your Lord, the Lord and your God, Who pleads the cause of His people: “See, I have taken out of your hand the cup of trembling, the dregs of the cup of My fury. You shall no longer drink it. ²³ But I will put it into the hand of those who afflict you, Who have said to you, ‘Lie down, that we may walk over you.’ And you have laid your body like the ground, and as the street, for those who walk over.”

All of Israel’s enemies - from Assyria and Babylon on down in history, including Nazi Germany, and Russia, and Israel’s enemies during the Tribulation period - will drink the cup of God’s wrath. Redeemed and restored Israel will never drink the cup of God’s wrath again - not because they are perfect, but because the Messiah, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, will drink the cup of God’s wrath against sin.

The third “awake” section in Isaiah 52:1-12. The godly remnant was exhorted and encouraged to awaken, and to prepare for her future blessings when Israel will be redeemed and restored from all her former problems and wrong associations.

Isaiah 52:1-12 - *“Awake, awake! Put on your strength, O Zion! Put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city! For the uncircumcised and the unclean shall no longer come to you. ² Shake yourself from the dust, arise; sit down, O Jerusalem! Loose yourself from the bonds of your neck, O captive daughter of Zion! ³ For thus says the LORD: “You have sold yourselves for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money.” ⁴ For thus says the Lord GOD: “My people went down at first into Egypt to dwell there; then the Assyrian oppressed them without cause. ⁵ Now therefore, what have I here,” says the LORD, “That My people are taken away for nothing? Those who rule over them make them wail,” says the LORD, “And My name is blasphemed continually every day. ⁶ Therefore My people shall know My name. Therefore they shall know in that day that I am He who speaks: ‘Behold, it is I.’” ⁷ How beautiful upon the mountains are*

the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns!" ⁸ Your watchmen shall lift up their voices, with their voices they shall sing together; for they shall see eye to eye when the Lord brings back Zion. ⁹ Break forth into joy, sing together, you waste places of Jerusalem! For the Lord has comforted His people; He has redeemed Jerusalem. ¹⁰ The Lord has made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. ¹¹ Depart! Depart! Go out from there; touch no unclean thing. Go out from the midst of her. Be clean, you who bear the vessels of the Lord. ¹² For you shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight; for the Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard."

Again, this prophecy goes beyond the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity and the restoration of Jerusalem in the 6th & 7th century BC. The use of the phrase "*in that day*" (v6) indicates that Isaiah was looking forward to the far future, when the Lord will return and make restored Jerusalem the capital of His earthly kingdom (v7).

We believe this prophecy should **not** be "spiritualized." It should **not** be "spiritually" applied to the New Testament Church, making the Church some kind of "spiritual Zion" or "spiritual Jerusalem." ***This prophecy was given to the godly remnant of Israel*** and it refers to the Jewish people! In that day, the nations of the world will be blessed through Israel (v10). The godly remnant not only should - but **will** - awake and arise.

Practical Application:

Make your application a smooth transition from the interpretation.

You've probably heard the hermeneutical principle (or principle of interpretation): "There is ***one interpretation***, but ***many applications***." Isaiah 52:7 says, "*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things.*" In the context of Isaiah's time, the good news was the announcement of the return of the Jewish captives to Jerusalem. It also looked on to the future when restored Israel will return to the land and to the Lord. That's the proper ***interpretation*** of this passage in its context.

In Romans 10:15, the apostle Paul ***applied*** this verse to preachers who bring the good news of salvation. Notice how the apostle Paul made **a smooth transition from the *interpretation* to the *application***: As the Jewish people were captive slaves in Babylon but were delivered by God's direct intervention, so people today are captive slaves to sin and Satan - but God can intervene and bring deliverance and bring them to the Lord in salvation. This indeed is good news! The apostle Paul made a smooth transition from the proper ***interpretation*** to a valid and valuable ***application***.

There is a nice parallel and smooth transition between the ***interpretation*** of Isaiah 52 and the ***application*** in Romans 10:15. Make your application a smooth transition from the interpretation!