

**SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS**  
**Commentary by Michael Sigler**  
**January 16, 2011**

**Reassurance for God's People**

Isaiah 48:14-22

**Key verse:** “Go out from Babylon, flee from Chaldea, declare this with a shout of joy, proclaim it, send it forth to the end of the earth; say, ‘The Lord has redeemed his servant Jacob!’” (Isaiah 48:20).

*God the indulgent Santa Claus or God the vengeful Judge*—which image best describes your concept of God?

If your answer is “neither,” then you are probably closer to the Biblical view of God than someone who chooses either of these extremes. Many of our spiritual problems stem from an unbalanced view of God's nature. An accurate view of God includes both God's grace and God's justice. Both are seen in Isaiah 49:14-22.

First, *grace*: Verses 14-16 refer to Cyrus, king of Persia, who God chose to deliver the exiles from Babylon. Cyrus conquered Babylon in 539 B.C. and issued the decree allowing the Jews to return to their homeland:

“Assemble, all you, and hear! Who among them has declared these things? The Lord loves him [that is, Cyrus]; he shall perform his purpose on Babylon, and his arm shall be against the Chaldeans. I, even I, have spoken and called him, I have brought him, and he will prosper in his way” (vv. 14-15, brackets mine).

In verse 21, the prophet reminds the exiles of the grace that God demonstrated when He delivered the Jewish people from Egypt: “They did not thirst when he led them through the deserts; he made water flow for them from the rock; he split open the rock and the water gushed out.” By implication, this verse is saying that, just as God was with Israel when He led them out of Egypt and into the Promised Land, so He will be with them as they return from Babylon to Jerusalem.

It was God's love and grace that moved Him to use Cyrus and the Persians as instruments with which to bring the exiles home. That love and grace is clearly seen in this text, but so is God's justice. Verses 17-19 and 22 remind the exiles that, if Israel had been faithful to God, they would not have experienced the exile. By implication, God warns them that future disobedience and idolatry could result in future judgment:

“Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I am the Lord your God, who teaches you for your own good, who leads you in the way you should go. O that you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your prosperity would

have been like a river, and your success like the waves of the sea; your offspring would have been like the sand, and your descendants like its grains; their name would never be cut off or destroyed from before me....'There is no peace,' says the Lord, 'for the wicked'" (vv. 17-19, 22).

God is a God of limitless love and extravagant grace. But God is also holy and just. Only by holding in healthy tension these two truths about God can our relationship with Him be what it should be.

Reminders of God's grace and reminders of God's justice are both seen in these verses. But the main purpose of this passage is to celebrate Israel's deliverance from exile. God is about to do another great and gracious work—bringing the exiles home. So, God's people are called to celebrate and proclaim the goodness of the Lord:

"Go out from Babylon, flee from Chaldea, declare this with a shout of joy, proclaim it, send it forth to the end of the earth; say, 'The Lord has redeemed his servant Jacob!'" (v. 20).

Isaiah 48 reminds me of an important New Testament verse that is often overlooked: "Behold, the goodness and the severity of our God" (Romans 11:22). In Romans 11, the Apostle Paul speaks of the Gentiles having been grafted into the "vine" of God's covenant because of Israel's unbelief. But Paul warns that Gentile believers should not fall into idolatry or unbelief, lest they be "removed" from the vine.

Stuart Briscoe comments: "God in all His majestic power is thus seen to be a God of 'goodness and severity,' and it is the behavior of the people that determines which aspect of His nature becomes most clear then. If they fall, severity in judgment is a reality. If they continue, only the goodness of God will be their portion. In the same way that those who do not continue in faith reveal the spurious nature of their faith and are thus broken off, so those who previously were hard to the gospel but subsequently believe will be grafted in. In other words, Gentiles should no more presume on the goodness of God than the people of Israel, because God has the power to graft in any who believe and to break off all who will not—Jew or Gentile—and He will use this power" (from *The Communicator's Commentary*, Vol. 6).

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