

April 26 Lesson 9 (NIV)

A JUSTICE-LOVING GOD

DEVOTIONAL READING: Isaiah 42:1–9

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 61:8–62:12

ISAIAH 61:8–11

⁸ “For I, the LORD, love justice;
I hate robbery and wrongdoing.
In my faithfulness I will reward my people
and make an everlasting covenant with them.
⁹ Their descendants will be known among the nations
and their offspring among the peoples.
All who see them will acknowledge
that they are a people the LORD has blessed.”
¹⁰ I delight greatly in the LORD;
my soul rejoices in my God.
For he has clothed me with garments of salvation
and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness,
as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
¹¹ For as the soil makes the sprout come up
and a garden causes seeds to grow,
so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness and praise
spring up before all nations.

ISAIAH 62:2–4A

² The nations will see your vindication,
and all kings your glory;
you will be called by a new name
that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.
³ You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD’s hand,
a royal diadem in the hand of your God.
^{4a} No longer will they call you Deserted,
or name your land Desolate.

KEY VERSE *I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery and wrongdoing. In my faithfulness I will reward my people and make an everlasting covenant with them. —Isaiah 61:8*

JUSTICE AND THE PROPHETS

Unit 2: God Promises a Just Kingdom

LESSONS 6–9

LESSON OUTLINE

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- A. Blessed and Blessing
- B. Prayer
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HOW TO SAY IT

AssyriaUh-sear-ee-uh.

CyrusSigh-russ.

DeuteronomyDue-ter-ahn-uh-me.

HabakkukHuh-back-kuk.

HosheaHo-shay-uh.

IsaiahEye-zay-uh.

PersiaPer-zhuh.

Introduction

A. Contrasts

The father of one of my high school friends was a coach for a nearby college basketball team. A group of us went to one of the games. I had gone to many high school basketball games, but this

was my first college game. I was immediately struck by how much faster and more highly skilled the players were. My appreciation for their abilities was due to the contrast of what I had observed at the college level compared to high school.

Another time, I overheard two high school boys conversing at a hamburger stand. Before leaving, one realized he had been given too much change. As he started to give it back, his friend said, “If you give that back, you’re stupid!” The young man gave the money back anyway. His simple act was a contrast to the habits of his friend, who clearly had a different set of values.

Lifestyle contrasts can indeed reveal important truths. Today’s lesson will leave no doubt about that fact!

B. Lesson Context

Isaiah (ministered about 740–680 BC) lived in the days when Israel, the northern kingdom, was struggling against Assyria and was finally exiled from the land. For a time, the northern kingdom sent tribute to Assyria; however, Israel’s King Hoshea sought an alliance with Egypt in order to end Israel’s vassal relationship to the Assyrian oppressors. The consequence of Israel’s rebellion against Assyria was that they were carried away into captivity by the Assyrians in 722 BC (2 Kings 17), never to be restored.

The southern kingdom of Judah remained, but Isaiah predicted punishment for its disobedience as well (example: Isaiah 3). His predictions were fulfilled almost a century after his ministry. God used the Babylonians as his instrument to bring down the monarchy of Judah and destroy the temple in 586 BC (see 2 Chronicles 36:15–21; Habakkuk 1:6).

The Lord, in faithfulness to his covenant with David (2 Samuel 7:1–17), brought back the Jews from exile in 538 BC and reestablished them as a nation. He used the Persians as his instrument to accomplish that restoration (2 Chronicles 36:22, 23; Ezra 1:1–8).

The book of Isaiah is typically viewed in terms of two large sections: chapters 1–39 and chapters 40–66 (see Lesson Context of lesson 6). Most of Isaiah 40–66 is conveyed in a poetic style. These chapters can be read as an ancient play.

Imagine a large stage with all the characters present. On one side of the room, there is Heaven with the Lord and the heavenly host present; on the other side, the earth and its inhabitants. Different characters speak, are addressed, or are discussed. The characters are the nation of Israel and the nations.

Within Israel there are the righteous and the wicked, the leaders and the commoners, and the servant of the Lord. The Gentile nations are distant but interested observers. Usually they are talked about, whether for future judgment or for blessing. But sometimes they are addressed directly.

On two occasions, Cyrus, the future king of Persia, is specifically named (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1–7; again, see Lesson Context of lesson 6). Isaiah is at times an actor onstage with the other characters; sometimes he is an offstage narrator to the readers, who are the theater audience.

Isaiah 56–66 begins with the prediction of the salvation of the nations (56:1–8). The text then describes the punishment of the wicked of Israel, especially the leaders (56:9–57:21), for their ritual and ethical sins (chap. 58).

But the Lord is able and willing to deliver the repentant (Isaiah 59). As a result, Israel will become a light to the nations (chap. 60) and embrace its priestly role (chap. 61).

Then comes a lengthy description of Israel’s glorious future with the arrival of their triumphant Lord (Isaiah 62–65). The grand conclusion describes the blessings and ministry of the contrite and the ultimate punishment of the wicked (chap. 66).

Isaiah 61:1–11 is a sequence of four speeches that follow up on the Lord’s declaring Israel a light to the Gentiles in Isaiah 60. The identity of the speakers is not always clear. But paying attention to changes in pronouns helps the reader identify different parts:

<u>Verses</u>	<u>I/We</u>	<u>Thou/Ye/You</u>
1–4	Messenger	Zion
5–7	Isaiah	Zion
8, 9	The Lord	The Messenger and Zion
10, 11	Zion	The Lord and the Messenger

I. The Priestly Nation

(ISAIAH 61:8–11)

A. Attitudes and Actions (v. 8)

8a. “For I, the LORD, love justice;

Isaiah 61:8 identifies the third speaker as *the Lord* (see Lesson Context). The conjunction *for* links verses 8, 9 to the previous verses and explains what it means for God’s people to be a nation of priests (see Isaiah 61:6).

First, the priestly people have moral requirements that stem from the very character of God. One of these is to practice *justice* (compare Isaiah 5:16). The word *justice* as commonly used today implies judgment and condemnation. It can mean that in the Bible as well (example: 34:5). However, the meaning of justice here has more to do with God’s character and what he expects from his people.

The Lord himself is just (Deuteronomy 32:4), and he requires the same of his people (compare Proverbs 21:3; Isaiah 56:1). This applies especially to their leaders (Proverbs 16:10; 29:4; etc.). Justice has to do with the setting right of wrongs (example: Isaiah 1:17). In many cases it refers to moral behavior: the Hebrew word being translated “justice” is used in Genesis 18:19 to describe the actions of God and in Proverbs 21:15 the actions of the righteous.

8b. “I hate robbery and wrongdoing.

Contrasted with the justice that the Lord loves is *robbery* that he hates, along with all types of *wrongdoing*.

The Hebrew of the Old Testament was originally written in consonants only. Vowels were not put in until centuries after Christ. This gives translators problems because words with identical consonants can change meaning with different vowels—just like in English. That is the case here with the word *wrongdoing*; with different vowels it can also be translated “burnt offering,” as it is in the NIV translation of this verse. And there’s always the possibility that the writer intends a double meaning—a play on words.

In his condemnation, Isaiah may be casting the spotlight on the practice of fulfilling requirements of sacrifices only ritually, without keeping the moral requirements of the law (example: Isaiah 1:10–17). God makes clear that acts of worship from those who do not follow him wholeheartedly are repulsive (example: Amos 5:21–24). The Lord intends to bring about dramatic changes in his people; his righteous standards do not vary.

8c. “In my faithfulness I will reward my people

In my faithfulness refers to God’s character and the certainty of his direction or rewarding.

8d. “and make an everlasting covenant with them.

The Lord is giving his assurance that he will not forget his people in their exile. He will keep his promise to them. At the same time, however, those to return from exile likely prefigure the new-covenant people of God (see Jeremiah 31:31–34; Hebrews 8:6–13; 9:15; 10:14–22).

The Hebrew word translated *everlasting* can refer to an indefinite period of time that has no discernible end from the point of view of the original reader. The word is used frequently in that way with regard to Old Testament laws and ordinances that do not apply in the New Testament era (compare “lasting” in Exodus 12:24; Leviticus 3:17; etc.). In the verse before us, however, it refers to a truly eternal *covenant* (compare Hebrews 13:20).

Centuries later, the New Testament writers will confirm the fact of the Lord’s preservation of Israel for the inauguration of a permanent new covenant through the Messiah (see Romans 9:3–5; 11:1–10; Hebrews 8:7–13; etc.). The salvation brought about by the one-time sacrifice of Jesus produces a covenant that is absolutely everlasting.

B. Results and Reactions (vv. 9–11)

9. “Their descendants will be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the Lord has blessed.”

One of the most easily observable characteristics of Hebrew poetry is parallelism. This involves using, in adjacent lines, words having either similar or opposite meanings. These phrases can explain each other or offer a contrast. Repetition through the use of parallel terms emphasizes whatever truth the writer is trying to convey.

The verse at hand offers an excellent example of such parallelism in Hebrew poetry: *their descendants* parallels *their offspring*, and *the nations* parallels *the peoples*. The repetitions found in these parallel phrases highlight one aspect of the dramatic transformation to come regarding the ancient Israelites’ reputation. In their future captivity, the Israelites will be derided by foreigners (Deuteronomy 28:36, 37); God’s covenant people will become a “scorn and reproach” to the nations around them (example: Jeremiah 29:17–19).

The prophet Isaiah, however, predicts a time when that reputation is to change. The release from captivity and subsequent events will result in the descendants of Isaiah’s current audience being known as *a people the Lord has blessed* (compare Genesis 12:2; Isaiah 43:5; 48:19).

10a. I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God.

The speaker here is Zion (see the Lesson Context). The partial verse before us and the two that follow each feature a poetic pair in the mold of Hebrew parallelism, just discussed. The parallel here is easy to see:

I	delight greatly	in the Lord,
↓	↓	↓
my soul	rejoices	in my God.

We normally think of cause and effect in just that order. But here Isaiah starts with the effect, then moves to state the cause.

10b. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness,

The second poetic pairing states the cause of Zion's rejoicing. Note that we say "cause," not "causes." There is one cause mentioned here, not two. That's a key to interpreting Hebrew parallelism properly. The phrases *clothed me* and *arrayed me* point to one action by God, expressed twice with different words. Likewise, the *garments of salvation* equate to *a robe of his righteousness*. These are figurative descriptions of a vitally important reality: they describe a person fully clothed by God so as to be acceptable in his sight (see Revelation 3:4, 5; 19:8; contrast Isaiah 64:6).

The parallelism further shows that salvation and righteousness are closely related. Of course, no one earns salvation through personal righteousness (see Ephesians 2:8, 9; Titus 3:5). Instead, the Lord imputes, or credits, his own righteousness to the sinner to make salvation possible. We see the need when we realize that "all our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6; see also Philippians 3:9; Romans 1:16, 17; 10:3). To have salvation is to have the imputed righteousness of God.

10c. as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

The third pair uses a comparison to describe the beauty of the clothing. The garments given by the Lord are as magnificent as the finest accessories worn by a *bride* and groom at their wedding (compare Isaiah 49:18). We may wonder what kind of adornments a *bridegroom* wears. The Hebrew word seems to refer to some type of headdress, as the word is used in Ezekiel 24:17, 23; 44:18. A bridegroom in biblical times usually wore a headpiece that resembled a turban.

The analogy involving a bridegroom and a bride brings to mind the relationship between Jesus and his church (Ephesians 5:22–33). While recognizing that the language of the verse before us is spoken by Zion, we also note that the blessings described are blessings Jesus shares with his followers. Revelation 19:7–9 informs us of the special clothing that awaits those who are part of the "wife" of the Lamb; he prepares us to join him at his "marriage" (compare 21:2).

11. For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.

This verse features two pairs. The first pair introduces the main thought by an analogy. *Righteousness and praise* will grow out of *all nations* just like plants grow in *the soil* and in *a garden*. God causes all things to grow—not just flowers or trees but also right living and worship (compare Isaiah 45:8).

The Lord God's grace shown to Israel will in turn cause *all nations* to bloom with the same *righteousness* and subsequent *praise*. The righteousness that Zion displays will have an effect on the nations as well. They too will know the Lord. The theme of people from among the nations coming to the Lord is highlighted throughout Isaiah (examples: Isaiah 2:2–4; 5:26; 49:6; 60:3; 66:18–20). Their praise is an intended consequence of God's faithfulness to Israel.

II. The Righteous Nation

(ISAIAH 62:2–4a)

A. New Name Predicted (v. 2)

2a. The nations will see your vindication, and all kings your glory;

In this pair, the second thought builds on the first. *The nations* in the first line corresponds to *all kings* in the second. Kings represent the other nations because of their leadership roles. The word *your* refers to Zion, also called Jerusalem (Isaiah 62:1).

The Hebrew word here translated *vindication* is frequently translated “righteousness” (see Job 29:14; Psalm 9:8; Isaiah 51:5; etc.). Righteousness most often refers to moral integrity in doing what God declares right (example: Psalm 7:8). And so it is here. Parallel to *vindication* in the first line is *glory* in the second. Beyond simple restatement, the glory seen by the kings describes the magnitude of the righteousness of Zion. The people of Zion will live lives so markedly distinct from sin that the nations will take notice (compare 67:2; Isaiah 40:5; 45:14).

2b. you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.

A general prediction is made before specifying that the Lord will be the one who acts. Renaming in the Bible communicates some new characteristic of the one renamed. The new name is prophetic, either in condemnation (example: Hosea 1:4–9) or commendation (example: Genesis 32:28).

Isaiah often uses prophetic name changes for the redeemed (examples: Isaiah 1:26; 44:5; 45:4). Christians look forward to the new names the Lord will grant after the resurrection of the dead (Revelation 2:17; compare 3:12).

B. Old Name Discarded (Isaiah 62:3, 4a)

3. You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD’s hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

The second statement once again builds on the first. A *crown* is often made of gold and worn by a king (example: 2 Samuel 12:30); *diadem* occurs parallel to the crown. They both signify the *splendor* of the Lord and his royalty. Zion is the crown or diadem *in the Lord’s hand* (contrast Isaiah 28:5; compare 1 Thessalonians 2:19). To be in the hand of the Lord is to be under his control (compare Psalm 75:8; Proverbs 21:1).

4a. No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate.

The Hebrew word translated *Deserted* is used over 20 times by Isaiah and represents a theme in the book. Israel forsook the Lord (Isaiah 1:4, 28). Because of this, the land was to be deserted (32:14). From all appearances, the people will seem to be forsaken in the Babylonian captivity to come (49:14). Once they yield to become the righteous crown in God’s hand, they will know they are not forsaken (42:16; 60:15).

The Hebrew word translated *Desolate* is used six times in Isaiah, and in every case it predicts the destruction of the land of Israel (Isaiah 1:7 [two times]; 6:11; 17:9; 64:10). Here alone is desolation set in a positive light, because it will be permanently ended.

Conclusion

A. Blessed and Blessing

A few years ago I went on an outing to a retreat center. Among the many activities was horseback riding. One of the wranglers told me two things about horses. First, he said horses can

live 50 years or more. Domesticated horses live longer and healthier lives than wild ones because of care. Second, horses thrive when they have work to do.

We are similar. As we place ourselves in the hand of God, under his care and control, we live better: we are blessed. Whether our years be many or few, they are of higher quality. In turn, living under the control and care of God comes with a mandate to take Christ to the world (see Matthew 28:19, 20).

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, empower us by your Spirit to let our lights shine! May others see your Son in our good works and give glory to you. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Obeying the righteous God of justice
blesses ourselves and others.¹

¹ Fields, L. M., Eichenberger, J., Frey, C., & Lockhart, M. (2020). [A Justice-Loving God](#). In R. L. Nickelson, J. A. Kenney, M. K. Williams, & J. Gerke (Eds.), *The NIV Standard Lesson Commentary, 2019–2020* (Vol. 26, pp. 293–299). Colorado Springs, CO: Standard Publishing.