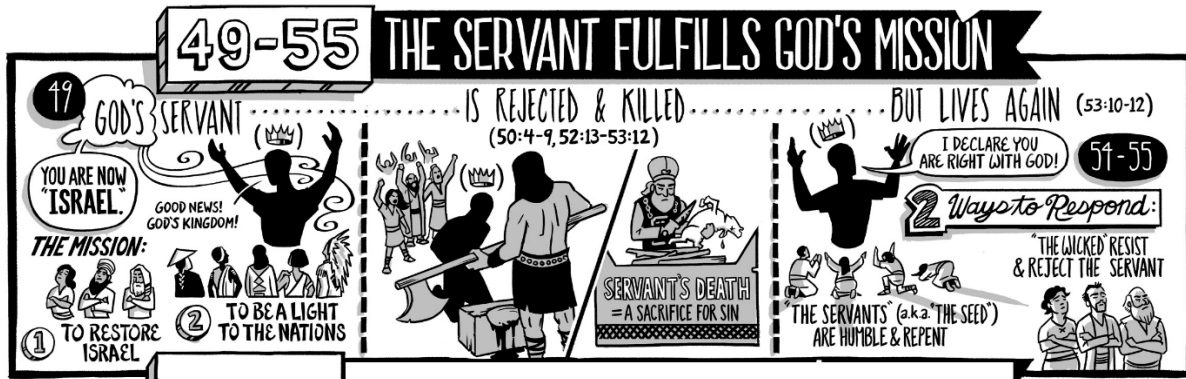


**Rel A 304 Reading Questions  
for Thursday, October 26**

Isaiah 49–55

Jennifer C. Lane, *Finding Christ in the Covenant Path: Ancient Insights for Modern Life* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2020), 17–34.

Scholars see both connections and distinctions between Isaiah 40–48 and Isaiah 49–55. Some of the themes of Isaiah 40–48, such as the foolishness of idolatry or the coming victory of Cyrus, are absent in today’s reading. Instead, we get even more descriptions of a servant of Jehovah. The redemption of Zion (Jerusalem) during the Persian period continues to receive important attention, symbolizing and foreshadowing future, even greater acts of redemption for God’s covenant people.



**The Servant Speaks (49:1–6)**

This section is the second of the four “servant songs” (we already saw one in Isaiah 42:1–4). Remember that last time we learned that these songs can be fruitfully interpreted in different ways, such as reading the “servant” as either a group or an individual. You can interpret Jesus Christ as the servant in any of these songs, although some of them may also have application to other individuals or to a group. In this section, the text explicitly identifies “Israel” as God’s servant, so you will want to at least interpret the servant that way (without excluding other helpful ways to interpret it).

1. When Israel, stuck in exile, complains about their captivity, Jehovah responds that simply getting them out of Babylon is by itself too small of a task considering how big His plans are. “I will also give thee for a \_\_\_\_\_ to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.” In other words, Jehovah tells Israel to remember their primary responsibility under the Abrahamic covenant. He’s still using them to get the job done, even if they have lost sight of the goal!

### **God Responds to His Servant (49:7–13)**

Jehovah continues to explain His purposes for Israel. The section ends with a single verse praising Him for the comfort and mercy He has shown.

### **Zion’s Children to Be Brought Home (49:14–23)**

In this section, “Zion” is the personification of Jerusalem and the land of Israel more generally. Because the land is personified, “Zion” can speak and feel emotion, and also has “children,” referring to the people who live on the land.

2. The land of Zion feels like Jehovah has forsaken her, forgotten her. What comparisons and imagery does Jehovah use to make it clear that not only has He *not* forgotten her, but He *cannot*?
  
3. The land of Zion is promised that although she lost so many children (during the Babylonian exile), soon she will have so many that there will hardly be room for them all. As the land sees unfamiliar people coming toward her, she becomes confused, not recognizing who these strangers are. Jehovah’s response is to *look up*—look, those strangers are carrying your sons and daughters in their arms and on their shoulders! What term does the text use to identify these strangers who are (symbolically) carrying the Israelites home? Based on your knowledge of the empires impacting Israelite history, who would be these people helping the captives leave Babylon and return home?

### **Additional Reassurances (49:24–50:3)**

This section continues to reassure Israel that Jehovah will deliver those who had been captive in exile. As with all these sections, I hope you will see how these assurances applied to that generation of Jews in captivity, but also that you will discern how these messages of deliverance can apply to other times in history and in your personal life.

### **The Servant’s Rejection and Vindication (50:4–11)**

This is the third of the four “servant songs.” Jehovah has called His servant to do His will, but the servant faces rejection and physical abuse. Everyone is called to listen to the servant and trust

in God. Those who ignore God's light and try to light their own way will end up in lying down "in sorrow."

### **Three Words of Comfort (51:1–8)**

This section contains three messages of comfort, each beginning with "Hearken!"

### **An Urgent Prayer for Divine Aid (51:9–16)**

In this section the community prays to Jehovah, and then Jehovah responds to their prayer. Alluding to the cultural image of God slaying a primordial chaos monster (here called Rahab instead of Leviathan), they ask where that powerful God is now.

### **The Cup of Wrath Taken Away (51:17–23)**

Now the prophetic voice responds to the prayer that the community offered in the previous section. Whereas the people had called upon Jehovah to "wake up!," now the prophet calls upon the people to do the same.

### **Heralds Announce the Redemption of Zion (52:1–12)**

This section again announces that Zion's bad fortunes are about to change completely.

4. Jehovah tells the people that they have sold themselves into slavery for how much money (i.e., what did they gain)? He promises to redeem them from captivity, explaining that it will cost them how much to get out of this mess? How might this apply to you spiritually in your own relationship with the Redeemer?

In Isaiah 52:7–10, watchmen look out from the dilapidated walls of Zion (Jerusalem)—practically a ghost town since the Babylonians had come. Someone approaches! It's a messenger, and he's bearing a peaceful message of good news. "Thy God reigneth!" he shouts to the watchmen. Israel has been saved, her exiled inhabitants are coming home! Upon hearing this joyful news the watchmen on the walls lift up their voices in songs of praise. The Lord God of Israel has comforted His forsaken people, and now Jerusalem will be rebuilt. Furthermore, Israel's miraculous salvation has come about in view of "all the nations," meaning the Gentile nations surrounding Babylon and Persia, showing them the power of the God of Israel—all of which helps fulfill the purpose of the Abrahamic covenant, which aims to use Israel to bless "all the nations of the earth" (Genesis 22:18).

5. Based on the explanation provided above, summarize the meaning of Isaiah 52:7–10 in its original context.

### **The Suffering Servant (52:13–53:12)**

This is the fourth of the “servant songs.” Perhaps no other Old Testament text has received so much scrutiny and so many interpretations. While it’s possible that it could have additional historical fulfillments in some other individual or group, the New Testament and Book of Mormon consistently focus our attention on its fulfillment in the suffering, rejection, and atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We’ll discuss this more in class.

### **The Eternal Covenant of Peace (54:1–17)**

Isaiah 54 is a beautiful text promising hope and renewal for those who have been disillusioned and hurt. Although it surely had a comforting message for the Jews in captivity, Jesus taught that it will also “come to pass” in the last days (see 3 Nephi 22), which suggests that this beautiful message has broad application to different people and circumstances.

6. Jehovah says that He “forsook” the people for how long? For how long did His “wrath” last? By contrast, how long do His “kindness [*hesed*]” and “mercy” last?

### **An Invitation to Abundant Life (55:1–13)**

Isaiah 55 closes this section of the book with an invitation for people to trust the promises God has made and “come unto me.”

7. Isaiah 55:8–9 famously declares that God’s thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are His ways our ways: “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” We quote this passage in a variety of contexts to make the point that God sees things differently than we do and does things differently than we would. However, it can be illuminating to see what God was specifically talking about in context. Carefully read Isaiah 55:6–7. What is the message of vv. 6–7? How is what God promises “higher” or different than what we humans might be prone to think or fear?

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8. What is the basic meaning of *redemption*? How does this concept relate to *salvation*?

### *The Redeemer of Israel*

9. The Hebrew *pādāh* is a generic verb meaning “to redeem,” and cognate words are found in languages related to Hebrew. (The verb *pādāh* is found 59 times in the Old Testament, including Isaiah 1:27, 29:22, 35:10, and 51:11). However, the Old Testament also uses a verb for redemption that is specific to the Israelites: *gā’al*. (The verb *gā’al* is found 81 times in the Old Testament, including Isaiah 35:9, 43:1, 44:22, 44:23, 48:20, 51:10, 52:3, 52:9, 62:12, 63:4, and 63:9). There is also an important related noun: *gō’ēl*. (The noun *gō’ēl* is found 23 times in the Old Testament, including Isaiah 41:14, 43:14, 44:6, 44:24, 47:4, 48:17, 49:7, 49:26, 54:5, 54:8, 59:20, 60:16, and 63:16.) Explain what the verb *gā’al* and the noun *gō’ēl* meant in Israelite culture (provide more than just one-word definitions—explain the ideas).
10. Jehovah is known throughout the Old Testament as “the *Gō’ēl* of Israel.” (For example, see Isaiah 49:7.) What was the basis of the relationship between Jehovah and Israel that allowed Him to function as a *gō’ēl* for the Israelites?

### *Looking to the Redeemer*

#### *Our Redemption*

11. In our personal lives, our bondage will usually not be external, but will rather be captivity to the natural man in us. Satan wants us to believe that our weaknesses are our true nature and that we can’t leave this condition of spiritual bondage. Knowing that the Lord is our Kinsman-Redeemer gives us confidence to ask for help. This is true even when we are the ones that have done what?
12. In 2 Nephi 4, Nephi provides a psalm that shifts from lamenting to rejoicing. It is critical to see that Nephi didn’t cheer himself up by telling himself that what he had done (or left

undone) didn't matter. He didn't try to convince himself that he was better than he thought he was. This account is not about positive self-image or positive thinking. It is a brutally honest struggle to abandon the despair over our own spiritual captivity to the natural man by beginning to what?

*Trusting Our Redeemer*

*The Song of Redeeming Love*