Isaiah – Chapter 51

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Theme: God comforted His remnant church in Babylon with deliverance and great blessing in the future.

Outline:

1-3 Remnant to Follow Their Parents' Faith for Blessings

4-6 God's Righteous Salvation to All Men Was Permanent

7-8 Their Persecutors On the Other Hand Were Temporary

9-11 They Could Trust God to Deliver Them Like Before

12-16 God Himself Would Save Them By Almighty Power

17-20 They Were Impotent By Just and Severe Chastening

21-23 The Sentence of Comfort Was Reversal of Violence

Preparatory Reading: Isaiah 13-14; Isaiah 25-26; Isaiah 48.

Related Links:

1. Exposition of Isaiah 13 *(Babylon beat)*.
2. Exposition of Isaiah 26 *(Babylon beat)*.
3. Exposition of Isaiah 35 *(Desert bloom)*.
4. Exposition of Isaiah 48 *(For His name)*.

Introduction:

A. We have reached the third section of the book of Isaiah that directs increasing attention to Messiah.
   1. The first 39 chapters covered Assyria/Sennacherib, many other nations, and glimpses of Messiah.
      a. The next 10 chapters exalted God by prophecies of Cyrus saving Israel and clearer views of Christ.
   2. The previous chapter comforted Israel with the glory, meekness, truth, and authority of Messiah.

B. This chapter should be read along with the first twelve verses of the next chapter for they are related.
   1. Note the three unique uses of … *Awake, awake* … tying the chapters together (Isaiah 51:9,17; 52:1).
   2. The last three verses of these chapters (Is 52:13-15) are very different and introduce chapter 53.

C. We view this chapter and its prophecies from the perspective of the remnant still captive in Babylon.
   1. However, the prophecy extends far beyond Isaiah's time and rescue from Babylon 160 years later.
   2. It extends to the times of Messiah and the gospel era of the New Testament and Jews of that time.
   3. Therefore, like other sections and lessons of Isaiah, the prophet's view is near and distant together.
   4. Isaiah saw the future captivity in Babylon (many chapters) and later the Messiah (some chapters).

5. When looking forward, the largest events would rise from the horizon to minimize minor events.

D. When reading and studying the chapters of Isaiah, remember prophetic similitudes and loose grammar.
   1. Prophetic similitudes (stated in Hosea 12:10) are the figurative and metaphorical uses of language.
   2. Keep in mind Isaiah moves all over the timeline in both directions e.g. Rome (Is 6:9-13), Assyria (Is 7:2), Messiah (Is 9:1-2,6-7), Assyria (Is 10:1-34), Messiah (Is 11:1-10), Babylon (Is 13-14).
   3. Observe Isaiah's frequent change in verb tenses, for it his perspective (Is 43:12,16-17; 45:13-14).
   4. Observe Isaiah's frequent change in persons of pronouns like David in the Psalms (Is 52:14; etc.).

Remnant to Follow Their Parents' Faith for Blessings – Verses 1-3

1 Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged.

1. Let the first word move you. Do you hear the call to listen? Bereans did (Acts 17:11).
   1. Any word and every word from God's mouth should excite us greatly (Job 23:12).
   2. Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word from God's mouth (Deut 8:3).
2. God by the prophet Isaiah called the remnant church in Babylon to attentive hearing.
   1. These elect and good figs (Jer 24:1-10) were identified by two character traits here.
   2. Elect persons, true children of God, are known by traits (Ps 15:1-5; II Peter 1:5-11).
   3. They follow after righteousness – their character and conduct is diligently to do right.
   4. They seek the LORD – they reject mere intellectual assent for true worship of God.
   5. God will always reveal more to such persons, so you should be one (Ps 25:12-14).
3. God told His church to look to the character of the founding father/mother of the nation.
   1. People can be said to be hewn from a rock, meaning the foundation stone of a family.
   2. Parents can be compared to a stone first dug up out of the quarry of the human race.
4. John the Baptist condemned Pharisee heresy by saying God could use stones (Matt 3:9).
   1. John wrote later that regeneration as the children of God is not by blood (John 1:13).
   2. Jesus then condemned the Abraham-adoring Jews as children of Satan (Jn 8:33-44).
5. The only ancestors worthy of being revered are those that were righteous (Prov 16:31).
   1. Success in business or the military or finances are nothing more than good pagans.
   2. But success being a Christian and living a spiritual life of fruitfulness is far greater.

2 Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him.

1. Abraham and Sarah and no others were the original progenitors of the Church of Israel.
   1. Hagar and Keturah had no relation to it, for their combined seven sons were rejected.
   2. These two begat Isaac, the son of promise, and from his elect son Jacob came Israel.
2. These two were worthy parents to consider, for they were both known for righteousness.

1. Abraham and Sarah are listed in the Hall of Faith for exploits (Hebrews 11:8-19).
2. Abraham and Sarah are honored elsewhere (Rom 4:16-22; Jas 2:21-23; I Pet 3:5-6).

3. What were the captive exiles to consider when they looked back at their two parents?
    1. They were to find comfort that God would deliver them from Babylon in like favor.
    2. First, Abraham was called, or chosen, by God exclusively as His man out of Chaldea.
    3. Second, Abraham was blessed and did not find service of Jehovah to be profitless.
    4. Third, Abraham did not remain small for long, for God greatly multiplied His family.

3 For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.

1. The remnant Jews could have hope in their father Abraham that they would be blessed.
    1. First, there was his example of God's choice, God's blessing, and God's increase.
    2. But second, they were all that remained of promises to Abraham (Is 41:8; 29:22).
    3. Surely the LORD would not forsake His friend Abraham and the promises to him.
2. The LORD God comforted Israel by restoring her destroyed and desolate land again.
    1. Nebuchadnezzar by three expeditions into Judea had wasted the whole land to ruin.
    2. The prophetic language is glorious – wilderness like Eden and desert like His garden.
    3. Do not neglect the beauty of the simile here, for God planted a garden (Gen 2:8-15).
3. The LORD God would so alter their condition and situation to produce great prosperity.
    1. Note the three things listed here – emotional excitement, praise to God, and singing.
    2. These three things had not existed much during their captivity in pagan Babylon.
    3. Reader, as you known for these three things – are you excited, thanking, and singing?
4. At places like here, we see much of it fulfilled in restoration to their homeland in Judea.
    1. The prophetic similitudes fit Israel's joy rebuilding their city and the temple worship.
    2. However, there is another fulfillment of her joy, praise, and singing with Messiah.
    3. Without greater direction from the text, we will be content thinking of Zerubbabel.
    4. The next lesson looks past Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah to Christ and the gospel.

Lesson: If Israel could take comfort by relationship to Abraham, how much more can we take comfort by our relationship to the Seed of Abraham, our covenant Head (Gal 3:16,29).

God's Righteous Salvation to All Men Was Permanent – Verses 4-6

4 Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation: for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light of the people.

1. Let the first word grab you. Do you hear a call to listen? Solomon warned (Pr 1:20-33).
    1. Any word and every word from God's mouth should excite us greatly (Job 23:12).

2. Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word from God's mouth (Deut 8:3).

2. This lesson takes God's promised blessings far beyond the mere recovery back to Judea.
3. God would give a new law and His new judgment would remain for a light of the Jews.
    1. Both *law* and *judgment* (and other words) are used of God's words (Ps 19; Ps 119).
    2. Promise of a new law going out of Jerusalem has been seen (Isaiah 2:3; 11:1-5; 42:4).
    3. They had Moses' law; this new law was of gospel liberty (Jas 1:25; 2:12; Gal 5:1).
    4. God would send forth judgment (another word for law) to be the light of the people.
    5. Be thankful the law was changed to provide you a much better priest (Heb 7:11-19).
    6. This judgment (divine revelation) would rest; it would remain; it would not change.
    7. The time of reformation changed Moses' law and judgment to the new (Heb 9:10).
    8. A law or judgment that changes is a very inferior light to a new one that is permanent.
    9. There is no reason to corrupt this use of *rest* to fit other places (Is 11:10; Heb 4:1).

- We now have the final administration of the kingdom of God (Dan 2:44; Heb 12:28).

5 My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the people; the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust.

1. God's promise of the gospel had been ordained and would go forth to all in due time.
    1. Do not make *righteousness* only legal justification – it is also doctrine (Is 51:4,7).
    2. Do not make *salvation* only substitutionary atonement – it is also the word of such.
2. Do not let the verb tenses confuse – *present* near, *perfect* gone forth, and *future*
3. Understand this verse by the previous one to describe the gospel going for to Gentiles.
    1. The new law or gospel would be the light of His people Israel by the previous verse.
    2. The new law or gospel would be the light and hope of the Gentiles far off from Israel.
    3. The gospel is called righteousness and salvation for the means and blessings of it.
    4. The new law – the gospel of Jesus – would have better righteousness and salvation.
    5. The whole drama of creation and human history and Israel was moving to Messiah.
    6. The arm of God should be understood as His strength to get the gospel to the isles.
    7. By prophetic similitude, God would powerfully declare His justice to the Gentiles.
    8. By prophetic similitude, the Gentiles would learn to trust in His almighty strength.
    9. For any that love literary creativity, the Spirit introduced arm here for help (Is 51:9).

6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.

1. The planet, its people, and the universe shall disappear, but Christ's kingdom will not.
    1. God used a similar comparison to declare the fulfillment of the law (Matthew 5:18).
    2. Jesus used a similar comparison for the veracity of His declarations (Luke 21:33).

2. The most permanent things we know or can imagine are planet earth and the universe.
    1. But God's plans for His people – His salvation and righteousness – are more sure.
    2. Do not make *righteousness* only legal justification – it is also doctrine (Is 51:4,7).
    3. The redemption of Jesus Christ and His gospel kingdom will never be abolished.
    4. We now have the final administration of the kingdom of God (Dan 2:44; Heb 12:28).
3. There is a literal fulfillment of destruction and renovation of all things (II Pet 3:10-14).
4. Lesson: Everything you know is transitory and temporal, even the universe as it now exists, but the kingdom of Messiah, salvation of His people, and gospel truth is forever and ever.

Their Persecutors On the Other Hand Were Temporary – Verses 7-8

7 Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings.

1. Let the first word grab you. Do you hear a call to listen? Be like Samuel (I Sam 1:10).
    1. Any word and every word from God's mouth should excite us greatly (Job 23:12).
    2. Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word from God's mouth (Deut 8:3).
2. Reader, never forget promised blessings in the Bible are for the obedient (Ps 91:1-16).
    1. Remember similar words from the first verse of the chapter for captive, godly Jews.
    2. If you want God's blessings of protection, prosperity, and truth, then obey (Is 50:10).
3. Israel's loving God and Father by the Spirit here used the context to condemn enemies.
    1. He appealed to the dissolution of the universe for comfort and will in the next verse.
    2. The Jews were so few and their strength so meager that enemies mocked (Neh 4:3).
    3. Compare how Pharisees mocked the man born blind and his parents (John 9:13-34).
    4. Consider how Jesus may have referred to this passage about reproaches (Luke 6:22).
    5. Jesus declared that there is only One whom His disciples should fear (Luke 12:4-5).
    6. Paul wrote we should reject fear since Christ promised to be with us (Heb 13:5-6).

8 For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation.

1. Administration of God's kingdom by Jesus Christ would be forever with no disruption.
    1. The apostolic gospel for Jews and Gentiles is revealed *righteousness* and *salvation*.
    2. God's new law would go out of Jerusalem by John, Jesus, and empowered apostles.
    3. God's commitment to the salvation of His people would never be altered by enemies.
    4. The kingdom of Jesus Christ is here to stay and to destroy all others (Heb 12:28-29).
2. The enemies of the kingdom of God would disappear and dissolve away in judgment.
    1. Eliphaz gave a great description to Job of moths crushing hypocrites (Job 4:18-20).
    2. The similes here are prophetic similitudes to describe no resistance to judgment.

3. Regardless of pagan enemies or hypocrite Jews, the Israel of God would be saved.

Lesson: The world of pagans and many so-called Christians hate true Bible believers, but we must not worry about either, for God will expose and destroy the enemies of His people.

They Could Trust God to Deliver Them Like Before – Verses 9-11

9 Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon?

1. Here is a unique chorus prayer – Isaiah and the people of God asking Jehovah to work.
    1. This unusual appeal to God – *Awake, awake* – is in the Bible four times, three here.
    2. The only other occurrence in the Bible is within the song of Deborah (Judges 5:12).
    3. The triple use of it here (Is 51:9,17; 52:1) is after *hearken* is used thrice (Is 51:1,4,7).
    4. Do not overlook the additional use of *awake* in the second compound clause here.
    5. Waking up is a very good thing (Eph 5:14; Rom 13:11), but this is for God to wake.
2. The arm of the LORD is always strong, but the prayer is for Him to use His strength.
    1. The request is for God to exert His mighty power, which is represented by arms.
    2. When we call on God to see our lives, we know He already sees, but needs to act.
    3. God's people were captives in Babylon for seventy years. Were His arms folded?
3. The prayer – the united appeal – is for God to work marvelously like He had before.
    1. Since the prayer is directed to the arm of the LORD, both He and it are mentioned.
    2. Rahab = Egypt (1) ancient, (2) dried, (3) way to pass, (4) redeemed = Ps 87:4; 89:10.
    3. Dragon = Pharaoh (Ps 74:12-15; Ezek 29:3; 32:2), leviathan and monster of the Nile.
    4. They appealed and prayed to God to work a great salvation as He had done in Egypt.

10 Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?

1. Because the prayer is directed to the arm of the LORD, both He and it are mentioned.
2. The deliverance from Egypt is one of God's great rescues when all hope seemed lost.
3. The exodus out of Egypt by Israel is one of the most impossible and spectacular ever.
4. David and Jesus prayed due to God's earlier deliverances of Israel (Ps 44:1-8; 22:4-5).

11 Therefore the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.

1. The answer is given in the prayer – the confidence God would hear and stretch His arm.
    1. If you do not believe God enough to express trust in His answer, then grow in faith.
    2. Isaiah as a prophet was looking ahead to future prayers and to their future salvation.
2. As the Jews were redeemed out of Egypt, so would God redeem them out of Babylon.
3. They would return with singing for God's goodness to them to restore religion in Zion.

1. Everlasting joy, gladness and joy, and no sorrow and mourning mounts up over time.
2. It began with Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah, etc. … but then to Christ and beyond.
3. Zion on earth moves without interruption to Zion in heaven for the permanent view.

Lesson: You may pray like this inspired prayer with such a bold request for God to work on your behalf like He has in the past, with trust in His answer, though you are no prophet.

God Himself Would Save Them By Almighty Power – Verses 12-16

12 I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass;

1. As is common in Isaiah, there is an abrupt change in the first person and second person.
2. Now God Himself takes credit for the deliverance He would work to get Israel home.
    1. Due to God that redeemed you in ancient times and will do so again, fear no enemy.
    2. The Jews feared Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Ahasuerus, Haman, and many others.
    3. But God's answer is that they missed the vast difference between Him and enemies.
3. When we fear man or a nation or a virus, we reflect poorly on the God that created us.

13 And forgettest the LORD thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor?

1. Israel's God was their Creator, Who also created everything else in the whole universe.
2. There are three crimes – fear of dying man, forgot the Creator, feared man's fury always.
3. There are two questions vastly different – the first against unbelief … then of His rescue.
    1. God by implication described the end of Belshazzar and arrival of Cyrus for Israel.
    2. The oppressor of the Jews – captivity and mockery by Babylon – was to now end.
    3. Israel's Jehovah God mocked their constant fear of an oppressor He had destroyed.

14 The captive exile hasteneth that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit, nor that his bread should fail.

1. The Jews were in terrified desperation to be released for safety from two great evils.
    1. They did not want to die in the pit or prison of Babylon where God had sent them.
    2. They did not want their families to perish from their lack of means of production.
2. We choose a negative, doubting aspect here from the verse before and *but*
    1. The prisoner Jews were frantic and impatient to get out of their bonds in Babylon.
    2. They were desperate to escape the danger and risk of the long, 70-year captivity.

15 But I am the LORD thy God, that divided the sea, whose waves roared: The LORD of hosts is his name.

1. We choose a negative, doubting aspect previously by the verse before and *but*

2. They did not need to be so worried or anxious about release, for God would save them.
3. As given in context, God had redeemed them through the Red Sea and its roaring waves.
4. I am the God that gave Moses your leader through the Red Sea my name – JEHOVAH!

16 And I have put my words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art my people.

1. God had revealed His words and doctrine to these remnant Jews – He would save them.
2. God had protected them so they had survived 70 years in Babylon – He would save.
3. The Holy Spirit played on content in context (Is 51:13) that He will finish His building.
    1. The new building of heaven and earth is His spiritual kingdom for Zion His people.
    2. Do you appreciate the great work of what He has done in the earth through Messiah?
    3. The apostles turned the world upside down to set up a new world order under Christ.

Lesson: When you doubt God, fear man, or get anxious about things, you reflect poorly on your Maker and knowledge of Him, for He has done greater things for you spiritually.

They Were Impotent By Just and Severe Chastening – Verses 17-20

17 Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the LORD the cup of his fury; thou hast drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling, and wrung them out.

1. Here is a unique chorus prayer – Isaiah and the people of God asking Jerusalem to stand.
    1. This unusual appeal to a city – *Awake, awake* – is in the Bible four times, three here.
    2. The only other occurrence in the Bible is within the song of Deborah (Judges 5:12).
    3. The triple use of it here (Is 51:9,17; 52:1) is after *hearken* is used thrice (Is 51:1,4,7).
    4. Waking up is a very good thing (Eph 5:14; Rom 13:11), and this is for Israel to wake.
2. This address is to the city … having suffered terribly at its ruin … and ruined 70 years.
    1. God had 70 years earlier ruined the city in fury, but it should stand up with new life.
    2. The cup of God's fury and wrath leaving Jerusalem waste had come to an end. Glory!
3. It was time for the nation to end their mourning, praying, or whining and be His people.
    1. Though she had no real leaders and rulers in Babylon, God would supply some now.
    2. The worst part of God's judgment was Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem.
4. The timing of this lesson – section of the prophecy – looks at the taking of Jerusalem.

18 There is none to guide her among all the sons whom she hath brought forth; neither is there any that taketh her by the hand of all the sons that she hath brought up.

1. The Jews, the remnant of the nation, were as a drunk from God's cup with none to help.
    1. As frequently used by the prophets, Jerusalem is a woman, but here she is a drunk.
    2. Confused and desperate people usually find comfort and strength in strong leaders.
2. Under God's furious judgment for their sins, He had removed all leaders (Isaiah 3:1-5).

1. The Jews continued to reproduce and train sons, but there was none to be her king.
2. Consider this – God raised judges and kings before – but not during this judgment.

19 These two things are come unto thee; who shall be sorry for thee? desolation, and destruction, and the famine, and the sword: by whom shall I comfort thee?

1. The two things here are in the two verses – the ruin of the nation and loss of leadership.
2. These two things have already been listed … drunk the Lord's fury and lost her sons.
3. There was no ruler to be sorry or to comfort the Jews in their horrible plight in Babylon.
4. The ruin of the nation was by several means that are listed elsewhere (Jer 15:2; 24:10).

20 Thy sons have fainted, they lie at the head of all the streets, as a wild bull in a net: they are full of the fury of the LORD, the rebuke of thy God.

1. The two things here are in the two verses – the ruin of the nation and loss of leadership.
2. Young men are a great blessing – when they are young men gifted and faithful to God.
    1. Nebuchadnezzar took the very best young men during his first invasion (Dan 1:1-4).
    2. Young men are known for their strength and to be honored for it (Pr 20:29; Is 40:30).
3. Young men are like bulls – fearless with much strength and vigor – but they had fainted.
    1. God's furious judgment for their sins included removing male leadership (Is 3:1-5).
    2. Jeremiah also described taking of the young men of Jerusalem (Lam 1:15; 4:2; 5:13).
4. The head of streets is their top or end that joins a city's other streets (Lam 2:19; 4:1).
5. The young men – the riches of the nation – were violently worthless under God's fury.
    1. They would faint, an effeminate term, either by famine or fear or both. God forbid!
    2. They were like a bull in a net – lots of anger and movement that dissipated energy.
6. Let this text apprehend young men to be great for their Maker and live like their Savior.
    1. In 2020 the situation in America is similar in that most young men are effeminate.
    2. God makes some men, and mothers rejoice (John 16:21), but they must be strong.
    3. God seeks even one strong man (Ezek 22:30), and Paul exhorts all to it (I Cor 16:13).

Lesson: God can neutralize the best part of a nation if they rebel against Him, which should cause us to pray for our sons to man up and be the godly bulls He created them to be.

The Sentence of Comfort Was to Reverse the Violence – Verses 20-23

21 Therefore hear now this, thou afflicted, and drunken, but not with wine:

1. In the midst of such a terrible description came the comforting answer to their *Awake*.
2. Yes, for their sins (Is 50:1-3), God had violently chastened and punished these Jews.
3. The cup of God's fury and wrath for sins is in context – leaving them ruined (Is 51:17).

22 Thus saith thy Lord the LORD, and thy God that pleadeth the cause of his people, Behold, I have taken out

of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again:

1. Note carefully identification of the LORD Jehovah as *thy* Lord and *thy* Hallelujah!
2. Not only was the LORD the only true and living God, but He was *their* Lord and God.
3. God would now step forward on behalf of His people to plead for them against enemies.
    1. There are two acts of God – He was done hurting Israel; He would hurt their enemies.
    2. The Jews as a people certainly drank again – even worse – by the Romans in 70 A.D.
    3. But those that returned – those with Babylon in their memory – would drink no more.
4. It is a great blessing to have God take away the cup of His fury and give it to enemies.
    1. God poured out His fury against His Son for sins, but then He destroyed the Jews.
    2. God allowed Satan great liberties to condemn the world and crucify His Son, but He has exalted His Son over all, Who will one day soon cast Satan to eternal torment.

23 But I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee; which have said to thy soul, Bow down, that we may go over: and thou hast laid thy body as the ground, and as the street, to them that went over.

1. There are two acts of God – He was done hurting Israel and would now hurt their foes.
    1. The Babylonians had been cruel to the Jews, but God had not missed their cruelty.
    2. The Chaldean conquerors had abused and used the poor Jews for very mean uses.
2. The words of bowing down and lying down are metaphorical and literal (Psalm 110:1).
3. A psalmist wrote of this great reversal of fortune in most graphic terms (Ps 137:1-9).

Lesson: No matter how bad things get in your life, with repentance there is a personal God that will plead for you and against enemies that had previously been victorious over you.