

Jehovah-Go'el

²⁴ *Who can snatch the plunder of war from the hands of a warrior?*

Who can demand that a tyrant let his captives go?

²⁵ *But the Lord says,*

*"The captives of warriors will be released,
and the plunder of tyrants will be retrieved.*

*For I will fight those who fight you,
and I will save your children.*

²⁶ *I will feed your enemies with their own flesh.*

They will be drunk with rivers of their own blood.

*All the world will know that I, the Lord,
am your Savior and your Redeemer,
the Mighty One of Israel."* – Isaiah 49:24-26 NLT

YHWH-Gā'al – The LORD Your Redeemer." These verses are part of an extended section within the Book of Isaiah that reveals God's plan to return Israel from their captivity in Babylon and restore them to the land of Canaan. Their exile as slaves in a foreign land had been the result of God's judgment for their apostasy and spiritual adultery. He had warned them repeatedly, using prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah to carry His message of repentance. But His chosen people had proved too stubborn and unwilling to give up their love affair with false gods and the pleasures of this world. Over the centuries, they had compromised their convictions and grown complacent regarding their status as God's treasured possession. They had violated their covenant commitment to Him and, as a result, had suffered the consequences of their disobedience.

God had made clear His intentions to bless them if they obeyed.

"If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully keep all his commands that I am giving you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the world. You will experience all these blessings if you obey the Lord your God..." – Deuteronomy 28:1-2 NLT

But He had also warned them of the dire consequences of their disobedience.

"But if you refuse to listen to the Lord your God and do not obey all the commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come and overwhelm you..." – Deuteronomy 28:15 NLT

God provided a list of devastating outcomes for their refusal to live according to His will and in keeping with His commands, including their defeat at the hands of a foreign power and their forced removal from the Land of Promise.

“The Lord will exile you and your king to a nation unknown to you and your ancestors. There in exile you will worship gods of wood and stone! You will become an object of horror, ridicule, and mockery among all the nations to which the Lord sends you.” – Deuteronomy 28:36-37 NLT

By the time Isaiah penned the words found in Isaiah 49, the Babylonians had already defeated the Israelites living in the southern kingdom of Judah, destroying the capital city of Jerusalem and its glorious Temple.

But in chapters 49-52, God reveals His plans for Israel’s future redemption and restoration, and declares His intentions to do so through the aid of His “Servant.” First, He promises a day when He, Jehovah-Go’el will transform Israel’s fate.

*The LORD, the Redeemer
and Holy One of Israel,
says to the one who is despised and rejected by the nations,
to the one who is the servant of rulers:
“Kings will stand at attention when you pass by.
Princes will also bow low
because of the Lord, the faithful one,
the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.” – Isaiah 49:7 NLT*

Despite Israel’s rebellion and refusal to keep their covenant commitments, God would reject those He had chosen as His own. He had punished them justly and appropriately, but He would also restore them graciously and mercifully. They did not deserve to be saved. In fact, the prophet Ezekiel records God’s indictment of their unfaithfulness even while in exile.

“Therefore, give the people of Israel this message from the Sovereign Lord: I am bringing you back, but not because you deserve it. I am doing it to protect my holy name, on which you brought shame while you were scattered among the nations. I will show how holy my great name is—the name on which you brought shame among the nations. And when I reveal my holiness through you before their very eyes, says the Sovereign Lord, then the nations will know that I am the Lord. For I will gather you up from all the nations and bring you home again to your land.” – Ezekiel 36:22-24 NLT

Yet, God was determined to keep His covenant promises and see that His people were restored to the land He had given them as their inheritance. For anyone familiar with the history of Israel, it would be easy to assume that the Isaiah 49 passage addresses Israel’s return from captivity under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah. As God had promised, the exiled Israelites began returning to Judah in 538 B.C.E. Through a series of God-ordained events, a remnant of the Israelites were given permission to make the long journey home so that they might restore Jerusalem, rebuild the Temple, and repopulate the land of Judah.

But Isaiah seems to have something far more significant in mind. In chapters 49-52, he describes a restoration that exceeds anything Israel experienced under the leadership of Ezra

and Nehemiah. In chapter 52, he writes of a day when only the pure and godly will enter the gates of Jerusalem.

*Wake up, wake up, O Zion!
Clothe yourself with strength.
Put on your beautiful clothes, O holy city of Jerusalem,
for unclean and godless people will enter your gates no longer.
Rise from the dust, O Jerusalem.
Sit in a place of honor.
Remove the chains of slavery from your neck,
O captive daughter of Zion.
For this is what the Lord says:
“When I sold you into exile,
I received no payment.
Now I can redeem you
without having to pay for you.” – Isaiah 52:1-3 NLT*

These verses describe a different restoration with far-reaching implications for Israel and the world. Isaiah describes a far-distant day when God will redeem and restore Israel once and for all.

*Let the ruins of Jerusalem break into joyful song,
for the Lord has comforted his people.
He has redeemed Jerusalem.
The Lord has demonstrated his holy power
before the eyes of all the nations.
All the ends of the earth will see
the victory of our God. – Isaiah 52:9-10 NLT*

What Ezra and Nehemiah accomplished in leading the exiles back to the land of Judah cannot be overlooked. They took on the gargantuan task of rebuilding the ruins of Jerusalem under great duress and significant opposition. However, their efforts, while ultimately successful, do not match what Isaiah describes.

After their return to Judah, the Israelites were surrounded by enemies and under constant threat of annihilation. They had no king and no standing army, making them an easy target for any nation that coveted their fertile and well-watered land. It would not be long before they found themselves under the thumb of yet another world power when the Romans invaded the land and became their overlords. Their occupation began in 68 B.C.E. and was still going on when Jesus appeared on the scene.

But Jesus' arrival adds another important element to the prophecies of Isaiah because He is the “servant” of whom Isaiah wrote. The descriptions of this coming servant mirror the life of Jesus, both in His incarnation but also in His future return.

*"The Sovereign Lord has given me his words of wisdom,
so that I know how to comfort the weary.
Morning by morning he awakens me
and opens my understanding to his will.
The Sovereign Lord has spoken to me,
and I have listened.
I have not rebelled or turned away.
**I offered my back to those who beat me
and my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard.
I did not hide my face
from mockery and spitting.***

*"Because the Sovereign Lord helps me,
I will not be disgraced.
Therefore, **I have set my face like a stone,
determined to do his will.**
And I know that I will not be put to shame."* – Isaiah 50:4-7 NLT

These verses are mirrored by the gospel writers when they describe the abuse Jesus suffered during His trials before the Sanhedrin and the Roman governor Pilate. Jesus confessed His unflinching determination to do His Father's will when He said, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me" (John 6:38 ESV). Though He knew what would happen when He arrived in Jerusalem, Jesus set His face like a stone and made the journey anyway (Luke 9:51).

Jesus was the servant whom God promised to send. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. He came to redeem all those who were enslaved to sin and condemned to death. He was Jehovah-Go'el, the LORD Our Redeemer. According to the Isaiah, it was always God's plan to send His Servant to redeem what was lost and, as Paul states, "because of him, you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:30 ESV).

But Jesus is not yet done. While He has finished His atoning work on the cross, He has not completed the mission God gave Him. He will one day return and fulfill His role as Jehovah-Go'el, the Savior and Redeemer of God's chosen people, the Israelites. Every covenant promise God made to them will be fulfilled – in Christ.

"For I will gather you up from all the nations and bring you home again to your land.

"Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. Your filth will be washed away, and you will no longer worship idols. And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations.

“And you will live in Israel, the land I gave your ancestors long ago. You will be my people, and I will be your God.” – Ezekiel 36:24-28 NLT

God is a redeeming God. From the moment Adam and Eve disobeyed His divine directive in the garden, He has been on a relentless quest to restore what was damaged by the fall. But this quest is not some sort of Don Quixote-esque ill-fated hope for a non-existent future; it is based on a pre-ordained outcome that was established before the foundation of the world. In other words, the fall was not a fly in the ointment for God. It did not come as a surprise to God or require Him to formulate a Plan B to replace His obviously flawed and failed Plan A.

No, the redemption of Israel and the redemption of sinful humanity was always a part of God’s strategic plan, and you see it mapped out in these chapters of Isaiah. Redemption has always been part of God’s sovereign, providential will. Israel’s rebellion and subsequent punishment was not an unscheduled detour in God’s road map of redemption; it was a pre-planned, pre-scheduled stop along the way. God had always planned to redeem Israel because He had always intended for His “Servant” to be an Israelite. He had to be born of the seed of Abraham and come from the lineage of David so that He could one day sit on the throne of David and rule over the redeemed and restored nation of Israel. As Isaiah wrote in an earlier portion of his book, Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s promise to send a redeemer for His rebellious people, including both Jews and Gentiles.

*For a child is born to us,
a son is given to us.
The government will rest on his shoulders.
And he will be called:
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
His government and its peace
will never end.
He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David
for all eternity.
The passionate commitment of the Lord of Heaven’s Armies
will make this happen! – Isaiah 9:6-7 NLT*

