

God Promises to Guide

The philosopher John Dewey once found his son in the bathroom. The floor was flooded, and he was mopping furiously trying to contain the water in that room, keeping the damage to a minimum. The professor began thinking, trying to understand the deeper ramifications of the situation. After a few moments, the son spoke up, “Dad, this is not the time to philosophize. This is the time to mop!” The son knew better than the dad about what really needed to be done in the immediate situation.

Numerous GPS apps are available for the smartphone, and they’re constantly updated. With a push of a button, they can be set to show an old-style map format or to show a continuous photograph of the terrain being driven through—complete with identifiable buildings, fields, and trees. Most give a choice of multiple routes that can be taken, indicating the distance in both miles and how long it will take to drive. It’s up to the driver to choose which route to take and whether or not to follow the directions.

God leaves it up to us to choose the route we’ll take, all the while providing us with directions. But He leaves it up to us whether or not to follow them. He knows what’s up ahead. And He knows better than us what really needs to be done in the immediate situation.

1. *Was it more difficult for you to find the right path to God or to stay on the right path with God? Explain your answer.*

2. *What signs does God give you to show you how to stay on the right spiritual path?*

3. *In what ways does God indicate that you are walking faithfully with Him?*

The Lord Announces Events Beforehand

Isaiah 48:3-6, KJV

3 I have declared the former things from the beginning; and they went forth out of my mouth, and I shewed them; I did them suddenly, and they came to pass.

4 Because I knew that thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass;

5 I have even from the beginning declared it to thee; before it came to pass I shewed it thee: lest thou shouldest say, Mine idol hath done them, and my graven image, and my molten image, hath commanded them.

6 Thou hast heard, see all this; and will not ye declare it? I have shewed thee new things from this time, even hidden things, and thou didst not know them.

Whereas Isaiah 1—39 primarily contains messages of judgment, Isaiah 40—66 mostly focuses on the deliverance and restoration of God's people. Also, while the Lord promised that He would exile His rebellious people to Babylon, the second half of Isaiah's message was written as if the exile was already near its end. Under the Spirit's inspiration, the prophet could see beyond the terrible time to a day of God's blessing that awaited the remnant. This day was so certain that it is as if it had already arrived. Accordingly, chapters 40—48 primarily deal with Judah's restoration to the promised land.

Isaiah 48:3-6, NIV

³"I foretold the former things long ago, my mouth announced them and I made them known; then suddenly I acted, and they came to pass.

⁴For I knew how stubborn you were; your neck muscles were iron, your forehead was bronze.

⁵Therefore I told you these things long ago;

before they happened I announced them to you

so that you could not say,

'My images brought them about; my wooden image and metal god ordained them.'

⁶You have heard these things; look at them all.

Will you not admit them?"

"From now on I will tell you of new things, of hidden things unknown to you."

The Lord “foretold” (48:3) the exile of Judah’s inhabitants to Babylon centuries before it actually occurred. He not only issued decrees, but also made error-free predictions. After a considerable amount of time had passed, God “suddenly” took action and performed what He had declared. He delayed to give His people time to abandon their evil ways.

The Lord, however, knew the people were obstinate—their necks were as rigid as “iron” and their heads were as unyielding as “bronze” (vs. 4). God commissioned spokespersons such as Isaiah to deliver messages of judgment well in advance so that the Israelites could not conclude that idols brought about these calamities.

The broader setting for this text is a trial in which God cross-examined His chosen people. On the one hand, He exhorted them to “admit” (vs. 6) what He had foretold and see all the evidence. How could the people refuse to acknowledge the fulfillment of God’s messages? On the other hand, He knew His people would refuse to admit the truth. Even so, He was announcing a series of “new” events. By referring to them as “hidden things,” the Lord indicated they previously had been unrevealed. It was only because He disclosed them to His people that they even became aware of what was about to occur.

4. *Who made announcements about actual events before they occurred?*

5. *How did God describe the disposition of the Israelites?*

6. *What claim would the people of Judah be unable to make?*

The Lord’s Announcement of New Events

Isaiah 48:7-8a, 17, KJV

7 They are created now, and not from the beginning; even before the day when thou hearest them not; lest thou shouldst

Isaiah 48:7-8a, 17, NIV

7“They are created now, and not long ago; you have not heard of them before today.

say, Behold, I knew them.

8a Yea, thou heardest not;
yea, thou knewest not; yea,
from that time that thine
ear was not opened....

17 Thus saith the LORD, thy
Redeemer, the Holy One
of Israel; I am the LORD thy
God which teacheth thee to
profit, which leadeth thee
by the way that thou shoul-
dest go.

So you cannot say,

'Yes, I knew of them.'

^{8a}You have neither heard nor
understood;
from of old your ears have not been
open." ...

¹⁷This is what the LORD says—
your Redeemer, the Holy One of
Israel:

"I am the LORD your God,
who teaches you what is best for you,
who directs you in the way you
should go."

In keeping with God's past dealings with His people, well in advance He foretold the return of the Jewish exiles from Babylon. The announcement He made to them concerned a series of events that had never before been prophesied. Since the return was a completely new development, the people could not say they "heard" (vs. 7) about it already.

The Lord took note of His people's tendency to be deceitful and rebellious, even from the earliest days of their existence as a nation. Neither they nor the lifeless and powerless gods they prized could know beforehand the amazing things in store for the people. Their "ears" (vs. 8) had never been open to truly hear the Lord's messages.

God could have completely wiped out His people for their disobedience. Nonetheless, for the sake of His reputation and prestige, He held back His judgment and instead used the time of exile in Babylon to spiritually refine the captives, to remove their love of idols and their rejection of Him (vss. 9-10).

The Lord's decision to free His people was to preserve the honor of His name. He refused to allow His name to be defiled and His reputation tarnished by erroneous claims. He was the one, true, and living God, the beginning and the end of all things, the Creator and Lord of the universe (vss. 11-13).

Therefore, the One would could command the stars could command the people to assemble and listen to His words.

God would use the Persians to defeat the Babylonians, and nothing could stop His will from being accomplished (vss. 14-15). Nothing the Lord was saying would be said in secret; the exiles would hear through Isaiah the Lord's plans for His people (vs. 16).

The Lord continued by referring to Himself as the "Redeemer" (vs. 17), or covenant protector and deliverer, of His people. Further, in calling Himself the "Holy One of Israel," He indicated that He was the Israelites' sovereign King and the one to whom they were morally accountable. Through the law of Moses, the Lord had instructed the people the best way to live. In addition to the written Word, the Lord used the rituals of their faith, along with the input from their religious leaders, to teach them, to guide them along the path of righteousness. In short, they had all the resources they needed to obey God and carry out His will for them. The Lord was the only one who knew what was "best" for His people. The lifeless and powerless pagan gods could not guide His people along the paths they should follow. He is still the only One who knows what is best for His followers.

Tragically, time after time the Jews disregarded the Lord's guidance, and this was a root cause for Him sending them into exile. Today, we often still ignore what is best for us, and we do so at our own peril.



7. What would God's people learn from Him?

8. What claim could God's people not make?

9. Who knew what was "best" (vs. 17) for Judah's inhabitants?

The Israel National Trail in the Hula Valley. The Lord said He will direct you "in the way you should go" (Isa. 48:17).

God's Singular Great Design

When game puzzlers design mazes, they make them so there is only one path from beginning to end. If there is no path, the player becomes frustrated and even angry. If there is more than one path, the player becomes disappointed and even disgusted. The most challenging and rewarding mazes are carefully and insightfully designed much in the same way God guides our path in life.

One of Jesus' most memorable quotes is "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Interestingly, the entertainment media often includes the first sentence and excludes the second sentence in their depiction of Jesus' life. It's as though they don't want to offend viewers who believe there are other paths to God. The truth, however, is that Jesus Himself said there is only one way to God and that is through Him, and to believe otherwise is not to believe Jesus at all. There is only one way to God, and truly God knows better than any of us what that way is.

Meanwhile, time stops for no one. Even if you are the most powerful ruler or the most amazing magician, time does not beckon to such notables. And when you take a moment from your life journey to reflect or rest, time still marches onward. You cannot stop time; your life continues on whatever path you're on.

At times, the struggle to remain faithful to the path God has given us may seem even more difficult than discovering that path in the first place, but we must go on, for time does not stop for us to explore any detours. The best way to move forward with the Lord is to move forward with Him despite the doubts in our mind and the pangs in our heart.

"What does the LORD require of you?" asked Micah, then answered, "to walk humbly with your God" (Mic. 6:8).

- 10.** *In what ways is your life like a maze?*
- 11.** *Why is the only path to God through Jesus?*
- 12.** *How does God help you stay on the right path?*

In Step with the Lord

As a dedicated servant of the God of Israel, Isaiah was one of the Lord's most reliable spokespersons. The Israelites who were faithful to God could trust in Isaiah's word and God's promise and hope of liberation. Though we likely will not be restored to our homeland like the Hebrews, Isaiah's words show that God's intervention in the lives of His children is both personal and reliable.

► *Write here your pledge to faithfully stay on the path God has planned for you. Each day this week, note how God guided you through a specific situation and why His direction was best for your spiritual well-being. Be prepared to share those next week with the class.*

KEY VERSE

Thus saith the LORD, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I am the LORD thy God which teaches thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go.

—Isaiah 48:17, KJV

This is what the LORD says—your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; “I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go.”

—Isaiah 48:17, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Week of January 16 through January 22

(See *The Quiet Hour* for devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. 1 John 3:14-24—Passing from Death to Life.

Tues. Ephesians 5:1-10—You Are Light in the Lord.

Wed. Ephesians 5:11-20—Christ Will Shine upon You.

Thurs. Psalm 119:97-112—God's Word Lights My Path.

Fri. Isaiah 60:1-8—Your Light Has Come.

Sat. John 8:12-20—Jesus, the Light of the World.

Sun. Isaiah 58:1-14—Obeying God Brings Justice.