

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Isaiah 55:1-9

Verses 1,2

**Hoy! All you who are thirsty, come to the waters.
And though a person does not have money,
come and buy grain and eat!
Come and buy grain without money
and milk and wine without charge.
Why hand over money for what is not bread
or toil for what never satisfies?
Listen! Listen to me!
Eat what is truly good
and your soul take exquisite delight in the richest food.**

The prophet writes during and just after the Babylonian exile, at about 540BC (the edict of Cyrus was issued in 538BC). He foretells the release of Israel and the salvation ahead of her, as well as most importantly in chapters 52-55, he gives the reason for Israel's suffering.

In these verses God shouts to those who have lost faith in him because of the burden of their suffering. They have turned to material things as a compensation, seeking to find some meaning and purpose to their existence.

They are not aware that their material thirsting is really a spiritual thirsting. The Lord is not offering actual water but water and food that will bring about a true fulfillment. This gift of God is a gift of love and grace. God offers it to those who have money and those who do not. All one needs do is come to God and receive. The imperative form of הִלַּךְ is repeated. God wants his people to come, which is another way of saying "receive!" A spiritual buying of faith and trust in God is the only transaction required.

God pleads with his children and questions whether they are really satisfied with the substitutes they have chosen. Beyond our natural needs, the extras do not properly meet the inner longing for that unidentifiable something else. The sinful condition means human beings are lost from God and do not know what is missing. Of course, not all experience this. Many find that the pursuit of pleasure, material and earthly things is satisfying. It is when an encounter with Christ takes place that they realise what they have been missing. In other words, a great joy and happiness is experienced.

God speaks through his word and calls his children to listen שִׁמְעוּ and מוֹעֵט. He repeats this call because his hearts desire is for them to return in faith to him. What God has in store by trust in him is the richest of fare, namely the presence of his love and the revelation of the knowledge of himself. This spiritual food will sustain their life נַפְשָׁם. This word does not mean a literal soul, which does not exist anyway. There is no ghost in the machine, as it were. Israel's existence came about because of God's act of grace to deliver them from Egypt. Each person's life, then, can only be properly established by God and not by human efforts.

Verse 3-5

**Extend your ear and listen to me.
Hear, that your soul may live.
I will establish an everlasting covenant for you;
my loyal love and the promises to David.
See, I have made him a witness of the peoples,
a leader and a commander to the peoples.
Surely you will summon a nation you do not know of,
and a nation that does not know you will hurry to you,
because Yahweh your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.**

Israel had been rebellious and resistant to the Lord and so the Lord commands them to **extend its ear** and heed his call and **come near** to him, literally, walk to him. God proclaims his word, the gospel, so that Israel can receive the good news he wishes to announce to them. His desire is to give them life through faith in his word, for his word is life. God created through his word and people can live through it. **To live**, means to thrive on this earth, not necessarily live eternally. This was God's gift in his first covenant with Israel delivered on Mt Sinai and particularly emphasized in Deuteronomy. By faith and obedience to the covenant, the Lord would guarantee life to them (Dt 28:1-13).

Thus, God promises to reestablish his **covenant**, to literally cut another covenant, reflecting the ancient practice of slaughtering an animal to make a covenant binding (Gen 15:9-11). Israel's existence as God's people will be firmly established; if they accept this in faith, they will live. The covenant is the very covenant God had provided for **David** with all its **promises** (2Sam 7:12-16). Since Israel had broken the Davidic covenant through a series of unfaithful kings both in the Northern and Southern kingdoms, the covenant had to be replaced by a new one, though the promises would remain the same.

The Lord's covenant with David was an **everlasting** one but it depended on a loyal king and people. This new covenant depends only on the Lord's **loyal love** and was, therefore, an unconditionally eternal. The integrity of God's character, and his infinite ability to embrace a people that will, in the future, continue to let him down, would be the reasons it would endure forever.

The messianic king in David's royal line will be first and foremost **a witness** to God's goodness and covenantal love. **To the peoples** לאומים is how the preposition is translated. Clearly, the political and territorial promises are still present in this covenant because the next time peoples are mentioned, the same preposition has to be translated of or over: **of the peoples**; and this messianic ruler is a military **commander** מצוה, issuing orders.

The situation of Babylon's dominance will be reversed; Israel will have power over a nation, a **nation yet unknown**. This vassal state will be under the leader's orders and must do Israel's bidding. In the coming messianic age, the power of the present regimes is completely altered by the Lord. Not only is Israel dominant, politically but also spiritually, for God's love will become known to the world, but in the new age, the major powers will no longer exist, borders will change and a nation, yet unknown, will serve it. However, a political situation is not entirely in mind. Know not, can also refer to a Gentile nations not known by Israel, that is, not included under the covenantal love of God.

Yahweh, Israel's God, will do this because his desire is to lift up the least of the nations and glorify it, or literally, **beautify it** פארך. Israel's glory increases when the Lord enlarges his kingdom through the Messiah.

Verses 6,7