

The Speaking God: Give Ear and Come to Me!¹

*“[Jesus] has to lead us to the mystery of God—to the light that our eyes cannot bear and that we therefore try to escape. ...He shows us God: not an abstract God, but the God who acts, who intervenes in our lives, and wants to take us by the hand. He shows us through everyday things who we are and what we must therefore do.”*²

Isaiah 45

² I will go before you [, says the LORD,]
and will level the mountains;
I will break down gates of bronze
and cut through bars of iron.

³ I will give you the treasures of darkness,
riches stored in secret places,
so that you may know that I am the LORD,
the God of Israel, who summons you by name.

⁴ For the sake of Jacob my servant,
of Israel my chosen,
I summon you by name
and bestow on you a title of honor,
though you do not acknowledge me.

⁵ I am the LORD, and there is no other;
apart from me there is no God.
I will strengthen you,
though you have not acknowledged me,

⁶ so that from the rising of the sun
to the place of its setting
men may know there is none besides me.
I am the LORD, and there is no other.

⁷ I form the light and create darkness,
I bring prosperity and create disaster;
I, the LORD, do all these things.

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¹ Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David. I will make an everlasting covenant with you.... Isaiah 55:3-4a, NIV.

² Joseph Ratzinger, Jesus of Nazareth (Doubleday: New York, 2007, pp. 192-193.

The Christian Church has seen reflections of Jesus' person and ministry, especially His death, in various parts of the Old Testament, particularly in the Psalms and the Prophets. Of these sources concerning the Son of God, none is as detailed as the one in Isaiah 52:13-53:12. In the lesson "**The Speaking God: Nothing from Nothing**" I asked you to read this passage from Isaiah and determine how the Church might "find" Jesus in that passage. This "song of the suffering servant" in Isaiah has been a favorite text for preaching in the Church seasons of Advent and Lent. [If you are a United Methodist, turn to Hymn no. 165, "Hallelujah! What a Savior," in The United Methodist Hymnal and check out how song writer P. P. Bliss used Isaiah 53 to sing about Christ's death on our behalf.] It is important to note that the Church believes that Jesus is the uniting reality between the Old and New Testaments, especially in terms of prophecy given and prophecy fulfilled.



If we were to compare ancient Israel to a military campaign, the first ones to hit the beach, dodging vicious enemy fire, exposing themselves to almost certain death, would not be the Marines; it would be the prophets! The Old Testament prophets thought of only one thing: YAHWEH, God of Israel! They gladly risked everything for the glory of YAHWEH, even their own life. Driven by an intense experience of God's call, Isaiah and Joel, Ezekiel and Malachi, and all the other prophets, ran headlong into the battle, sometimes winning, sometimes losing, always fighting! Their only weapons were their voices and dogged determination; they needed nothing else. After all, they came as God's messengers and they spoke "the word of the LORD" with God's authority, freely and with power.

Reading the prophets one runs across the words "remember" and "forget" with frequency. We find them in complaints by the Lord as, for example, when He is talking of His chosen people. One of the incredible realities about the Israelites is their tendency to "**forget**" that God cares them (God's "steadfast love") and protects them. In the early parts of the Old Testament, biblical writers go to great lengths to show that God loves and interacts with His people. As we have observed already, YAHWEH is a personal God, not a meaningless idol; YAHWEH encourages His people to high moral behavior, especially within the family and to those people who are poor and powerless. And yet, the people called by His NAME OFTEN forget all this! For reasons unknown to me, they prefer the idols of their neighbor nations and the ethics of a me-oriented culture rather than the living God and His command to love the neighbor.

Our other word is "**remember,**" and is used frequently of the acts of the Lord, such as the unforgettable crossing of the Red Sea. Did I just say "unforgettable?" Well, I have misspoken. In the early history of the Hebrew people when they were captives of the Egyptians, the men were used as forced labor. Centuries before, the Hebrews had come to Egypt to escape massive starvation. It would take God's work through Moses to free the people and lead them to the edge of the Red (Reed) Sea. Then one of the greatest OT miracles occurred: the deliverance of the people by the Lord. The full story can be found in the book of Exodus.

The crossing of the Red Sea, and attending miraculous events, became part of the glorious heritage of the Jews. But over the centuries the story of this act of God lost its edge and gradually the people lost interest in the God of power on their behalf. Eventually it became a sort of “What have you done for me today?” kind of thing as the Hebrews took up the ways of Semitic peoples around them.

The prophets, however, saw through what was happening. They knew their leaders wanted to push YAHWEH to the side and then to follow the Babylonians and Assyrians. So, the leaders treated God as a lesser pagan god, rather than as YAHWEH, living God of the Universe. The text for this lesson is from Isaiah 45 and focuses on God’s use of Cyrus³, king of Persia, as the power who would overcome Babylon and release the Hebrews from captivity to go home again. God could not use His people to do this, since they were a people of unbelief, so He used a pagan nation whose roots were sunk deeply into India’s spiritual soil and whose greatest god of antiquity was “Ahura-Mazda”, the god of light and wisdom. It is ironic that Persia’s chief god was the god of wisdom and YAHWEH charged Israel with a lack of wisdom and knowledge.

You might want to reread the text for our lesson with this in mind: God is speaking principally to Cyrus, king of Persia; secondarily God speaks to the people of God in Judah. Just a little later in Isaiah God says that the Egyptians will also come to know the LORD, as well as the Babylonians, who will do the will of the LORD, whether they understand it at the time or not.

What we are learning in these lessons so far is:

1. That human beings feel the need for God in their lives.
2. Humans want to believe in God and will make an idol to worship if God does not reveal Himself to them.
3. God wants to communicate with the human beings He has made. Therefore, the Lord has a personal interest in the life and destiny of the human family.
4. Humans refuse to listen to God if they think God will make too many demands of them.
5. God’s desire for the human family is good, even though humans are hard put to believe that.



The Prophets by Abraham Heschel is a highly respected book on the prophets of the Old Testament. In a section entitled “Man’s Relevance to God,” Heschel observes: “The predicament of man is a predicament of God Who has a stake in the human situation. Sin, guilt, suffering, cannot be separated from the divine situation. The life of

³ Isaiah 45:1: *"This is what the LORD says to his anointed,
to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of
to subdue nations before him
and to strip kings of their armor,
to open doors before him
so that gates will not be shut:*

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sin is more than a failure of man; it is a frustration to God.”⁴ The reason our sin is a frustration to God is because God is *not an abstract God, but, as Jesus shows us, the God who acts, who intervenes in our lives, and wants to take us by the hand.*⁵ Christians are convinced that God wants to take each one of us *by the hand* and lead us all the way to the kingdom of God at the end of life.

One of the great stories of the book of Daniel is that of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Read the story in Daniel 3:1-30 and note how God communicates His will to these Hebrew and what effect it has on Nebuchadnezzar.

The next installment of our series is entitled
The Speaking God: I will not leave you.
Have you had a dream that has come true?
If so, write it out and indicate how it
has impacted on your life.

--Jerry Mercer
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⁴ (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1962), p. 226.

⁵ Excerpt from the top of p. 1.