

September 25

Lesson 4

EVERLASTING COVENANT

DEVOTIONAL READING:: Isaiah 42:5-9

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 61

ISAIAH 61:1-4, 8-11

¹ The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn,
³ and provide for those who grieve in Zion—
to bestow on them a crown of beauty
instead of ashes,
the oil of joy
instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise
instead of a spirit of despair.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
a planting of the LORD
for the display of his splendor.
⁴ They will rebuild the ancient ruins
and restore the places long devastated;
they will renew the ruined cities
that have been devastated for generations.

⁸ "For I, the LORD, love justice;
I hate robbery and wrongdoing.
In my faithfulness I will reward my people
and make an everlasting covenant with them.
⁹ Their descendants will be known among the nations
and their offspring among the peoples.
All who see them will acknowledge
that they are a people the LORD has blessed."
¹⁰ I delight greatly in the LORD;
my soul rejoices in my God.
For he has clothed me with garments of salvation
and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness,
as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

**For as the soil makes the sprout come up
and a garden causes seeds to grow,
so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness
and praise spring up before all nations.**

KEY VERSE

I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery and wrongdoing. In my faithfulness I will reward my people and make an everlasting covenant with them.—Isaiah 61:8

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Describe the nature and range of God’s promised blessings.
2. Explain Jesus’ use of [Isaiah 61:1](#), [2](#) in [Luke 4:18](#), [19](#).
3. Write a prayer of thanks for God’s faithfulness in keeping his promises.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. “My Name’s in the Bible!”
- B. Lesson Background

I. Future Blessings ([Isaiah 61:1-4](#))

- A. The Person ([v. 1a](#))
- B. The Message ([vv. 1b, 1c](#))
- C. The Time ([vv. 2a, 2b](#))
- D. The Impact ([vv. 2c-4](#))

Mighty Trees, Small Acorns

II. Faithful God ([Isaiah 61:8-11](#))

- A. Covenant’s Endurance ([v. 8](#))
- B. Israelites’ Reputation ([v. 9](#))
Reputations: Ours and God’s
- C. Special Clothing ([v. 10](#))
- D. Global Witness ([v. 11](#))

Conclusion

- A. It’s Our Move
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. “My Name’s in the Bible!”

One summer found my future wife helping with a church in the Boston area during her college years. Among her responsibilities was working with Vacation Bible School, which the church conducted yearly.

During that VBS, she became acquainted with a teenage girl of Asian descent whose first name was Yi (pronounced *Ye*). One of the Scriptures covered was Jesus’ Great Commission, which is recorded in [Matthew 28:18-20](#). [Verse 19](#), as worded in the *King James Version*, begins with his command to “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations.”

When young Yi heard that verse, she became very excited. “Jesus is talking to me!” she exclaimed. “He wants Yi to go and tell others about him!” Yi was quite thrilled to think that her name was in the Bible.

Names are important, none more so than that of *Jesus*, found throughout the New Testament. Although Jesus is not mentioned in the Old

Testament specifically by that name, numerous prophecies there highlight various aspects of his life and ministry that were to come. Today's text includes a passage that Jesus specifically cited and declared as "fulfilled" in himself ([Luke 4:21](#)).

B. Lesson Background

Today's study is the final one in this unit of lessons, "The Sovereignty of the Father," drawn from the book of Isaiah. Our passage under consideration, like those of [lessons 1](#) and [2](#), includes an important messianic thrust.

[Isaiah 61](#) appears in the closing section of the book of Isaiah, a section typically delineated as being chapters 60-66. Bryan Beyer rightly refers to these chapters as "the grand finale of God's restoration." Their content was intended to give great hope to God's people in Isaiah's day. Their purpose may be compared with the closing chapters of the book of Revelation. Those chapters offer hope to Christians in any age, particularly those suffering persecution. In fact, there are numerous similarities between the closing chapters of the two books, as this listing makes clear:

Isaiah	Revelation
60:3, 5, 11	21:24-26
60:19, 20	21:23; 22:5
61:6	1:6; 5:10
61:10	19:8; 21:2
62:2	2:17
62:11	22:12
63:1-3	14:20; 19:13, 15
65:17; 66:22	21:1
65:19	21:4
66:6	16:1
66:7	12:2, 5

I. Future Blessings

(ISAIAH 61:1-4)

Traditionally, the book of Isaiah is seen to feature four "servant songs": [Isaiah 42:1-4](#); [49:1-6](#); [50:4-9](#); and [52:13-53:12](#). Scholars do not agree on the passage boundaries, and some see [61:1-3](#) as a fifth servant song, building especially on the fourth.

A. The Person (v. 1a)

^{1a} The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,

In [lesson 1](#) we saw Isaiah foretell the Branch promised to come "up from the stump of Jesse" ([Isaiah 11:1](#)). The prophet declared, in wording similar to the half verse before us, "The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him" ([11:2](#)). The New Testament records that "the Holy Spirit descended on [Jesus] in bodily form like a dove" ([Luke 3:22](#)). Jesus, "full of the Holy Spirit," then "was led by the Spirit into the wilderness," where he was tempted ([4:1](#)). Later, "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit" ([4:14](#)). Then, in the Nazareth synagogue, he quotes from our passage in Isaiah ([Luke 4:16-19](#)). Without the witness of the completed New Testament, we may wonder who the *me* refers to. But Luke leaves no doubt.

B. The Message (vv. 1b, 1c)

^{1b} because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,

Per the above, Jesus is clearly the one who is *anointed* to do all the things listed here. The words *good news* are directed in this case *to the poor*. The prophet sets "the needy" and "the humble" parallel with "the poor" in [Isaiah 11:4](#); [29:19](#); such people are the ones who humbly acknowledge their destitution apart from God's aid.

Their poverty may include both material and spiritual aspects (compare [Matthew 11:4, 5; 5:3](#)). The reference to *the brokenhearted* calls to mind a portion of David's words of repentance: "My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise" ([Psalm 51:17](#); compare [34:18](#); [143:7](#)).

^{1c} to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,

The task *to proclaim freedom* is rooted in the regulations of the year of jubilee, described in [Leviticus 25:8-55](#). Specifically, [verse 10](#) describes the return of and to land that had been sold during the previous 49 years, as it reverts back to original owners. *To proclaim freedom* in [Luke 4:18, 19](#) foreshadows what Jesus will do by means of his death and resurrection. In those acts he makes possible the return of human beings to their rightful owner (the Lord) by freeing them from the *darkness* of sin, death, and Satan ([Hebrews 2:14, 15; 9:15](#); see also [Romans 6:18; 8:2](#);

Revelation 1:5b, 18).

What Do You Think?

What has God equipped you to do for the advancement of his kingdom? How can you better accept this challenge?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Considering “lessons learned” from lost opportunities

Considering your mentor and/or protégé role in relation to others similarly equipped

Other

C. The Time (vv. 2a, 2b)

2a. to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor

This task may again reflect an aspect of the year of jubilee, mentioned above. However, one should not think in this case of a specific 12-month period, but of a general extent of time (compare “day of salvation” in [2 Corinthians 6:2](#)).

2b. and the day of vengeance of our God,

When Jesus reads [Isaiah 61:1, 2](#) in the Nazareth synagogue, it is noteworthy that he stops just before this phrase ([Luke 4:18-20](#)). Jesus does not come to earth the first time to condemn, as he himself says ([John 3:17](#)). *The day of vengeance* will occur when Jesus returns ([2 Thessalonians 1:7-9](#)).

D. The Impact (vv. 2c-4)

2c. to comfort all who mourn,

**3a. and provide for those who grieve in Zion—
to bestow on them a crown of beauty
instead of ashes,
the oil of joy
instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise
instead of a spirit of despair.**

The prophecy returns to a more encouraging tone. The words *mourn* and *mourning* call to mind Jesus’ promise in the Beatitudes that those who mourn shall be comforted ([Matthew 5:4](#); compare [Luke 6:21](#)). The opportunity to exchange *ashes* (used along with sackcloth in Old Testament times to express mourning; see [Esther 4:1, 3](#); [Jeremiah 6:26](#)) for *beauty* emphasizes the transformation that will take place.

Receiving *the oil of joy* in place of *mourning* adds further emphasis. Oil (olive oil in this case) is associated in Scripture with prosperous surroundings ([Deuteronomy 8:7, 8](#); [Jeremiah 31:12](#)). It is used in anointing ceremonies ([Psalm 45:7](#)) and in welcoming guests into one’s home ([Luke 7:46](#)). Furthermore, a completely new wardrobe is provided: *a garment of praise* in exchange for *a spirit of despair*. All of this amounts to quite a “makeover”!

What Do You Think?

What spiritual impact should we hope to have on those within our sphere of influence?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In terms of new things embraced

In terms of old things discarded

**3b. They will be called oaks of righteousness,
a planting of the LORD
for the display of his splendor.**

The prophet’s imagery changes. In an earlier description of coming judgment, Isaiah had said of God’s people, “You will be like an oak with fading leaves, like a garden without water” ([Isaiah 1:30](#)). Things are different, however, thanks to the work of the master arborist (compare [Isaiah 60:21](#); contrast [Matthew 15:13](#)).

MIGHTY TREES, SMALL ACORNS

When I was a child, it was a treat to get away from the daily routine of the farm and go shopping in the nearby city. Along the way, the

intriguing message on a certain roadside billboard would always catch my attention.

And just why was it so intriguing? I suppose the odd phrasing of its message was one reason: “Tall oaks from little acorns grow.” People did not talk that way; it sounded like something out of a poetry book. But that phrase stayed with me as I thought about what it could mean. My childhood mind wondered why it was significant enough to warrant a billboard.

To adults, its message is obvious: even the largest trees start small. That message has countless applications. For one, it applies to God’s people. The beginning of our Christian journey of faith may not be marked by an emotional avalanche (compare [Isaiah 6](#); [Acts 9:1-19](#)). We may simply wonder what this new life in Christ will mean to us, where it will take us, how we will succeed in pleasing God and enduring the trials we are told will come. But when we allow God to have his way with us, our “acorn faith” will grow into a “big-tree witness,” tall and strong for all to see (compare [Psalms 1:3](#); [52:8](#); [92:12](#)).—C. M. W.

**4. They will rebuild the ancient ruins
and restore the places long devastated;
they will renew the ruined cities
that have been devastated for generations.**

This promise seems to apply to what transpires when God’s people return from captivity in Babylon. However, one must note how this kind of language is used elsewhere in Scripture. For example, the prophet Amos speaks of a time when God will “restore David’s fallen shelter” and “repair its broken walls” and “rebuild it as it used to be” ([Amos 9:11](#)). This too sounds like the prophet is foreseeing a major stone-and-wood building program. But according to James in his address to the Jerusalem Conference, Amos’s words are fulfilled through the inclusion of Gentiles into the church ([Acts 15:13-19](#)). Isaiah uses the language of topographical transformation in [Isaiah 40:4](#), but this is fulfilled in a spiritual sense in the ministry of John the Baptist ([Luke 3:2-6](#)).

Since [Isaiah 61](#) begins with words that Jesus declares fulfilled in himself, it seems best to see the verse before us as describing the impact of his ministry. Just as [verse 3](#) uses word pictures of clothing and tree planting to portray the spiritual transformation accomplished by Jesus, the present verse uses the language of urban renewal to make a similar point. The New Testament describes the growth of the church as a “building” program ([1 Corinthians 3:10, 11](#); [Ephesians 2:19-22](#); [1 Peter 2:5](#)). Further, Paul uses the terminology of planting and building consecutively in [1 Corinthians 3:5-11](#) to explain how the church is to grow.

II. Faithful God

([ISAIAH 61:8-11](#))

In [verses 5-7](#) (not in today’s text), Isaiah continues his stirring account of the coming changes. Instead of serving “strangers” and “foreigners” ([v. 5](#)), as God’s people are to do during the Babylonian captivity, the reverse will happen. However, their relationship toward the “nations” ([v. 6](#)) will not be one of domination as payback. Rather, God’s people are described as becoming “priests of the Lord” and “ministers of our God” ([v. 6](#)). Their exalted position is not one of privilege, but of responsibility to teach the “strangers” the Lord’s way (compare [Isaiah 2:2-4](#)). Thus this portion of the chapter also highlights the future “makeover” of God’s people.

HOW TO SAY IT

Beatitudes Bee-a-tuh-toods (*a* as in *mat*).

Canaan Kay-nun.

Galilee Gal-uh-lee.

Nazareth Naz-uh-reth.

synagogue sin-uh-gog.

A. Covenant’s Endurance ([v. 8](#))

**8a. “For I, the LORD, love justice;
I hate robbery and wrongdoing.**

The word *justice* carries the idea of *righteousness*. Indeed, the two words often occur together as synonyms or near synonyms (examples: [Isaiah 9:7](#); [59:9, 14](#)). The Lord himself is just ([Deuteronomy 32:4](#)), and he requires the same of his people ([Proverbs 21:3](#)), especially of their leaders ([2 Samuel 23:3](#)). As the Lord hates *robbery and wrongdoing*, so must his people.

God makes clear that acts of worship from those who do not follow him wholeheartedly are repulsive, with hypocritical offerings mentioned (examples: [Isaiah 1:10-17](#); [Amos 5:21-24](#)). The Lord intends to bring about dramatic changes in his people; his righteous standards do not change.

What Do You Think?

When considering our response to injustice, how do we make sure not to tread in areas that God

has reserved for himself to handle?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding initiatives as individuals

Regarding initiatives as a church

**8b. “In my faithfulness I will reward my people
and make an everlasting covenant with them.**

These two promises are linked. With the use of the word *faithfulness*, it is clear that God is firmly committed to keeping the promise he is making. The covenant foreshadowed here has been established by the one who affirmed, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” ([John 14:6](#)). The writer of Hebrews does not quote Isaiah’s prophecy, but does quote Jeremiah’s lengthy promise of a new covenant ([Jeremiah 31:31-34](#); [Hebrews 8:8-12](#)). Jeremiah’s “new covenant” is the same as Isaiah’s *everlasting covenant*.

B. Israelites’ Reputation (v. 9)

**9. “Their descendants will be known among the nations
and their offspring among the peoples.
All who see them will acknowledge
that they are a people the LORD has blessed.”**

Again we see poetic repetition, with *their descendants* parallel with *their offspring* and *the nations* parallel with *the peoples* (plural in the Hebrew—“the people groups”). This verse therefore highlights another aspect of the dramatic transformation concerning the ancient Israelites’ reputation.

In their future captivity, the Israelites will be derided by foreigners ([Deuteronomy 28:36, 37](#)); God’s covenant people will become “a reproach” (example: [Jeremiah 29:17-19](#)). But Isaiah pictures a time when that reputation changes to *a people the Lord has blessed*. An important aspect of that state of blessing will be inclusion of the Gentiles. They will be part of the everlasting covenant.

REPUTATIONS: OURS AND GOD’S

Nathaniel Hawthorne’s classic book *The Scarlet Letter* tells the story of a young woman forced to wear a large letter *A*, scarlet in color, on the front of her blouse. Its purpose was to shame publicly the adulterous woman. The punishment revealed the attitude of seventeenth-century Boston toward the woman and her unknown paramour. Once ruined, a reputation was not easily restored in that Puritan context. One might be banished from town or isolated if allowed to remain.

The Bible reveals varied reactions to sinfully shameful behavior. Stonings, by nature, were public ([Leviticus 24:14](#); etc.). By contrast, the “very great” sins of Eli’s sons, which included adultery, went unchallenged except for a weak, private rebuke from their father ([1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22-25](#)) until God himself intervened ([2:34](#); [4:11](#)).

We dare not forget that our reputations communicate something about God to the unbelieving world (see [Matthew 5:16](#); [Romans 2:24](#); [1 Peter 2:12](#); etc.). Christians are blessed because of God’s promises to restore his covenant people. We are blessings to others as we model principles that glorify God ([1 Peter 3:13-17](#)).—C. M. W.

What Do You Think?

What do others see in you that causes them to realize that you are blessed by God?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

What family members see

What friends and acquaintances see

What strangers see

C. Special Clothing (v. 10)

**10. I delight greatly in the LORD;
my soul rejoices in my God.
For he has clothed me with garments of salvation
and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness,
as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.**

Who is the *I* speaking in this verse? The Lord is speaking in [verse 8](#), but the individual in view here says *I delight greatly in the Lord*. To resolve this question, we return to the opening verse of this chapter: “The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me.” This individual is Jesus, as we

have already noted in our comparison with [Luke 4:16-21](#). The reason he delights greatly in the Lord is that he has been *clothed ... with garments of salvation and arrayed ... in a robe of his righteousness*.

Thus let us picture Jesus, having surveyed the impact of his ministry in [Isaiah 61:2-9](#), now concluding his assessment by expressing satisfaction. As God looked on the original creation and declared it to be “very good” ([Genesis 1:31](#)), so Jesus looks at the “re-creation”—the new creation made possible through his everlasting covenant—and concludes likewise.

The analogy involving a *bridegroom* and a *bride* brings to mind the relationship between Jesus and his church ([Ephesians 5:22-33](#)). We may wonder how a bridegroom *adorns his head*. There is a Hebrew noun in this verse, which the NIV does not translate, that can refer to some type of turban, as translated in [Ezekiel 24:17, 23; 44:18](#). That is what a bridegroom in biblical times usually wears.

While recognizing that the language of the verse before us applies to Jesus, we also note that the blessings described are blessings he shares with his followers. [Revelation 19:7-9](#) informs us of the special clothing that awaits those who are part of the “bride” of the Lamb; he prepares us to join him at his “wedding” (compare [21:2](#)).

What Do You Think?

What most influences your level of joy in the Lord? Why?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding positive influences

Regarding negative influences

D. Global Witness (v. 11)

**11. For as the soil makes the sprout come up
and a garden causes seeds to grow,
so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness
and praise spring up before all nations.**

The imagery of a fruitful and abundant *garden* echoes language of “a planting” in [verse 3](#). Isaiah previously had pictured the word of the Lord as producing results similar to what we see in the verse before us ([Isaiah 55:10, 11](#)). Paul uses agricultural language in [1 Corinthians 3:7](#) to acknowledge that the Lord is the ultimate source of church growth. As the church continues to carry out the Great Commission ([Matthew 28:19, 20](#)), *righteousness and praise will spring up before all the nations*.

Conclusion

A. It’s Our Move

Following the Israelites’ conquest of Canaan and allotment of the land, we read this summary: “So the Lord gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their ancestors, and they took possession of it and settled there. ... Not one of all the Lord’s good promises to Israel failed; every one was fulfilled” ([Joshua 21:43, 45](#)). Yet we read earlier that various locations in the promised land had not been conquered by the Israelites; such areas remained in the hands of the peoples who lived there ([13:13; 15:63; 16:10](#)). We reconcile these passages by recognizing that God had done all he promised to provide victory for his people, but they were responsible to finish the task. The promised land would be fully theirs only as they exerted the effort and trust required by the Lord.

Today’s text records some profound blessings on God’s people. Yet we may look around us and wonder, “How can this ever happen? When will it take place?” In many nations, followers of Jesus are persecuted intensely, even to death. Why does “righteousness and praise” not “spring up before all nations” ([Isaiah 61:11](#))?

It’s at this point that the church should take a close and painful look in the mirror. Are we dedicated to fulfilling the Great Commission, or has it become the Great Omission? God has done his part in giving his Son to establish his “everlasting covenant” ([Isaiah 61:8](#)), but are we failing on our end like Israel of old? The fields are still “ripe for harvest” ([John 4:35](#)). It’s our move.

B. Prayer

Father, help us see the tasks in our Scripture today as our service in a broken world. May we see ourselves as your coworkers so that righteousness and praise may “spring up before all nations.” We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

We are partners with God in the greatest undertaking in history.



Visual for Lesson 4. Point to this visual as you ask, “In what ways do you find this image to be a good representation of your new life in Christ?”

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Into the Lesson

On the board write the following words: *Contracts, Agreements, Promises*. Ask students to think about a time when someone disappointed them in one of these areas. Encourage students to share their stories, but without mentioning anyone by name. Ask, “What excuses did the person or company make for not fulfilling their commitment?” Then say, “Today’s lesson is about an ‘everlasting covenant’ that God has made with his people. And with God we can be absolutely sure that he will do what he has promised.”

Alternative. Write the following quote on the board: “A promise means everything; but once it is broken, *sorry* means nothing” (author unknown). Direct learners’ attention to the quote, and ask, “What is the person trying to convey about the importance of promises? Do you agree with the sentiment expressed?” After a few minutes of discussion, state, “Today’s lesson contains many promises that God made to his people. We will see how all of them were kept through his Son, Jesus Christ.”

Into the Word

Have your students open their Bibles to [Isaiah 61](#). Introduce this passage by saying, “Today’s text from Isaiah is a messianic prophecy, which was fulfilled 700 years later. Listen to the account of the day Jesus read from this passage.” Have someone read [Luke 4:16-19](#) aloud, and then

ask, “How were the words of Isaiah fulfilled in Jesus’ life?” Learners may mention such things as Jesus’ bringing the good news of salvation, comforting those that mourn with hope for the future, and setting free those who were captives to sin.

Divide the class into two groups. The first group will work on the *God’s Promises* assignment. Use [Isaiah 61:1-4](#) to answer the following questions: “When God’s ‘anointed’ one came, what were some of the good things he would do for God’s people? Make a list of them.” “In what way would the promises to ‘those who grieve’ be especially comforting?” “When the Israelites were later carried off into Babylonian captivity, how might these promises encourage them?” The second group will work on *God’s Faithfulness*. “[Hebrews 8:6](#) states, “The covenant of which [Jesus] is mediator is superior.’ In what ways was the old covenant inferior to the new covenant?” “Why would the garments provided by God make his people ‘delight greatly’?” “According to [verses 9 and 11](#), how will the attitude of the nations toward Israel change because of God’s blessings?” Allow time for groups to answer the questions; then ask for volunteers to share their answers. Make the point that because of God’s true and faithful nature, we can be assured that he will keep all the promises in his eternal covenant.

Option. Distribute copies of the “Promises Fulfilled” activity from the reproducible page, which can be downloaded. Encourage students to give reasons for their Scripture matches. Put the emphasis on how Jesus fulfilled these promises in his ministry and through his death and resurrection.

Into Life

Write the following scenarios on index cards: (1) Parents are brokenhearted because their son is a drug addict; (2) a young woman struggles with clinical depression and anxiety; (3) a middle-aged man has endured months of unemployment; (4) an elderly woman has had money stolen by a relative. Give one card to each of four small groups, and ask them to select one or more verses from today’s text that they could use to counsel the people described. Encourage them to remind the people that Jesus is the source of help and comfort as promised in these verses.

Option. Distribute copies of the “Praise Expressed” activity from the reproducible page. Ask for volunteers to share how some of those promises have been fulfilled in their lives.