

# GOD OFFERS DELIVERANCE

## BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 51

## A VERSE TO REMEMBER

Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness, you that seek the LORD.

Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. (Isa. 51:1)

1. Jeffrey M. Jones, "U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time," *Gallup* (March 29, 2021), [bit.ly/TPWchurch](https://bit.ly/TPWchurch), accessed June 6, 2021.

*Note:* [bit.ly](https://bit.ly) web addresses are case sensitive.

## Daily Bible Readings

<b>M</b>	June 20	Isa. 50:4-9	God Will Vindicate God's Servant
<b>T</b>	June 21	Isa. 51:9-16	Remember God's Mighty Deeds
<b>W</b>	June 22	Isa. 51:17-23	God Defends Israel's Cause
<b>Th</b>	June 23	2 Cor. 1:7-14	God Rescues Us from Peril
<b>F</b>	June 24	1 Thess. 1:6-10	Jesus Rescues Us from Wrath
<b>Sa</b>	June 25	Ps. 3	Deliverance Belongs to the Lord

## STEPPING INTO THE WORD

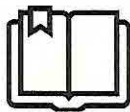
"Listen up!" This favorite phrase of one of my high school teachers signaled that we better pay attention. The material about to be presented was sure to be on the next test, or was a linchpin that linked concepts, or connected the present to past and future. And so, we engaged with our ears and eyes and took notes. With luck, we managed to put the pieces together, to connect the dots.

This lesson continues to connect the dots in the story of God's deliverance and restoration told through the lens of Second Isaiah. The destruction of Babylon in retaliation for its harsh treatments of the exiles and God's promises of future redemption, followed by prosperity for Israel, bring us to the next step: deliverance. We do not step into the rest of the story cold, however. We revisit some of the previous themes with an ear for how they fit together to tell the story of God's faithfulness in Israel's spiritual history and with a heart for how these inform our spiritual story.

As church members, we are a dwindling population. A Gallup poll in March 2021 reported that, for the first time since the question was first asked in 1937, the number of Americans who are members of a church, mosque, or synagogue dropped below 50 percent of the population. In 1937, the number was 73 percent.<sup>1</sup> Christians today are not

uniformly highly regarded. We do not help our own cause when we engage in vicious attacks directed at those whose faith differs from our own or when we fail to stand up for justice. It is important to “listen up” as we seek to understand how God’s promises of deliverance and restoration continue to give us hope for the present and future, whether or not our membership numbers increase.

*God, you have been with us in the past. You are with us now. Open our ears to learn the lessons of your strength, comfort, steadfast love, and deliverance so we know the signs and remember that you are the strong foundation upon which we build our faith. Amen.*



## SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 51:1–8

**51:1** Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness,  
you that seek the LORD.

Look to the rock from which you were hewn,  
and to the quarry from which you were dug.

<sup>2</sup>Look to Abraham your father  
and to Sarah who bore you;  
for he was but one when I called him,  
but I blessed him and made him many.

<sup>3</sup>For the LORD will comfort Zion;  
he will comfort all her waste places,  
and will make her wilderness like Eden,  
her desert like the garden of the LORD;  
joy and gladness will be found in her,  
thanksgiving and the voice of song.

<sup>4</sup>Listen to me, my people,  
and give heed to me, my nation;  
for a teaching will go out from me,  
and my justice for a light to the peoples.

<sup>5</sup>I will bring near my deliverance swiftly,  
my salvation has gone out  
and my arms will rule the peoples;  
the coastlands wait for me,  
and for my arm they hope.

<sup>6</sup>Lift up your eyes to the heavens,  
and look at the earth beneath;

for the heavens will vanish like smoke,  
the earth will wear out like a garment,  
and those who live on it will die like gnats;  
but my salvation will be forever,  
and my deliverance will never be ended.

<sup>7</sup>Listen to me, you who know righteousness,  
you people who have my teaching in your hearts;  
do not fear the reproach of others,  
and do not be dismayed when they revile you.

<sup>8</sup>For the moth will eat them up like a garment,  
and the worm will eat them like wool;  
but my deliverance will be forever,  
and my salvation to all generations.

*Note:* Find Scripture  
Notes for this  
reading on the  
final page of the  
lesson.

### **LISTEN! LOOK! HEED!**

Isaiah 51 moves us closer to the full restoration of Jerusalem described in Second Isaiah. The use of imperative verbs—LOOK! LISTEN! AWAKEN!—compel us to pay close attention to what Isaiah is trying to tell us. Is it a message of rebuke or condemnation, as other passages with strong imperatives so often are (see Isa. 1:2; 1:10; 7:13; 28:14, 23)? No. The message of the day for exiles, then and now, is one of comfort. The promises of Isaiah 49 are now being delivered. We are reminded to look to the foundational stories of our faith for the ongoing assurances that God’s divine lessons are as full of hope and promise today as they were in the time of Second Isaiah’s writing.

Today’s key verse calls our attention to the foundations of our faith and God’s liberative activity throughout history. Addressed to “you that pursue righteousness” and who “seek the LORD,” this invitation is to those who are serious about matters of faith, who desire to be in right relationship with God and to do what is right. While the overarching theme is comfort, it takes effort to cut solid rock into smaller pieces, to be brought out of a pit and fashioned into service.

In verses 1–8, we must listen and look because God has done marvelous things, beginning with the exiles’ ancestors, Abraham and Sarah. God will continue to do so, bringing forth a new Eden and opportunities for joyful celebrations. God’s teaching applies now as it did for former generations, lighting the path for justice into all corners of creation. God’s deliverance is never thwarted.

