

v16 “The shift is not difficult because throughout chs. 49–55 the Servant stands in the background of every address of the Lord to the people. It is as though the Lord is speaking to the people with the Servant looking on. But at this point the Lord turns to address the one who is never just an onlooker, but is himself the participant, God with us” (Oswalt 348-49).

v17 “If she lies sprawled out on the ground now, it is not because of the overwhelming power of her enemies but because of the justice of God. Therefore the enemies are powerless to prevent Zion from responding to God when he now bids her arise” (Oswalt 1998: 352).

v17 “Wake yourself, wake yourself. In v. 9, the people think God needs to be awakened to action; but in reality, they need to wake themselves. It was God, not their Babylonian captors, who force-fed Jerusalem the cup of wrath (cf. Ps. 75:8; Rev. 16:19). Now God invites his people to rise up from their stupor of despair” (ESV Study Bible).

vv21-23 “God promises that they will not have to drink any longer from this cup, but no explicit reason is given to explain why this change will take place. There is no hint that Jerusalem has earned God’s grace or that they have repented of their sins in this verse” (Smith 2009: 414).

v23 “This verse expresses the final element in the prophetic program, which has four elements: (1) Israel will be punished unless they repent; (2) the surrounding nations will be God’s instrument of punishment; (3) after punishment God will restore the remnant; (4) the nations that arrogantly believed they were serving themselves and their own purposes in oppressing Israel will be punished by God” (Oswalt 1998: 356).

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

What evidence of God’s faithfulness to you in the past should strengthen your confidence that he will fulfill his promises to you in the future?

Do your priorities reflect the impermanence of this world and the permanence of your salvation?

SOURCES CITED

John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66*, NICOT, 1998.
Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 40–66*, New American Commentary, 2009.
Barry G. Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*, The Bible Speaks Today, 1996.

ISAIAH 51: DO NOT FEAR, FOR THE LORD WILL SAVE

STRUCTURE OF ISAIAH 49-55

Servant song (#2)	49:1–13
Salvation for Zion	49:14–50:3
Servant song (#3)	50:4–11
Salvation for Zion	51:1–52:12
Servant song (#4)	52:13–53:12
Salvation for Zion	54:1–17
Conclusion	55:1–13 (adapted from Smith 2009: 337)

OUTLINE OF ISAIAH 51

- I. God will surely save his people (51:1-8)
 - A. God has been faithful in the past (1-2)
 - B. God has made promises for the future (3-6)
 - C. Therefore, do not fear (7-8)
- II. Who are you to fear? (51:9-16)
 - A. God has been faithful in the past (9-10, 15-16)
 - B. God has made promises for the future (11, 14)
 - C. Therefore, do not fear (12-13)
- III. God will remove the cup of wrath from Jerusalem (51:17-23)
 - A. Jerusalem’s punishment recalled (17-20)
 - B. Jerusalem’s punishment removed (21-23)

NOTES

“As is true throughout the book, and especially in this part of it, any attempt to organize the material is made difficult by the continuing repetition of themes and motifs, all subtly altered and enhanced” (Oswalt 333).

“vv1-8 “The last two paragraphs (50:4–11 and 51:1–8) describe two situations in which a special Servant of God, plus other believers who emulate the Servant’s commitment to God, face some level of opposition or persecution. Although the persecution is much severer in the case of the Servant of the Lord in 50:4–11, both passages contain some threats from others (51:7). The central theological hope for all those who find themselves in similar situations is found in the known character and promises of God” (Smith 2009: 399).

“People in every age have to make a choice either: (a) to put their undying trust and confident hope in God’s everlasting salvation and righteousness, which implies a commitment to a life of pursuing righteousness based on God’s instructions in this *Torah*; or (b) to not accept God’s instructions in the *Torah*, distrust his promises and help, reject his servant, and give up any hope of surviving God’s future judgment” (Smith 2009: 399).

v1 “These are people who are earnestly trying to do what is right according to God....But even more importantly, they are not merely seeking righteousness, a quest that can diminish to mere self-justification; they are seeking God. Such persons will eventually come to know that the only righteousness they can ever produce is that which is given to them as a gift by the God they seek” (Oswalt 1998: 334).

vv1-2 “Where else in the ancient world are persons called on to reflect on a god’s involvement in unique, nonrepeatable elements in that people’s history, indeed in the lives of specific individuals in that history, in order to learn the realities of life? The answer is: nowhere” (Oswalt 1998: 334).

v3 “For those who do believe God, who are seeking him, hope deferred can be a hard trial. To them God offers his *comfort*, a comfort rooted in the evidence of history” (Oswalt 1998: 333).

vv4-6 “It is unclear who is speaking these words because God, or possibly the Servant of the Lord, could be proclaiming the good news in 51:4–5 (most of the actions conforms to the role of the Servant in chap. 42)” (Smith 2009: 393-94).

vv4-6 “This is what the prophet said earlier the Servant would do (42:1–4; 49:6), and before that what the Messiah would do (9:6 [Eng. 7]; 11:4; 16:4b–5; see also 55:3–5). Now it is God who does it. This should say something about the identity of the Servant/Messiah” (Oswalt 1998: 336).

vv4-6 “We long for someone who is both strong enough and good enough to *rule ... in justice*” (Oswalt 1998: 336-37).

v5 “Verse 5 makes plain that the deliverance being talked about here is much more than the deliverance from Babylon. Why should *the islands* (the ends of the earth) wait (cf. also 60:9) for that deliverance? Why should they hope for that? Nonetheless, if God is going to use his Servant to deliver the world from the clutches of sin, just as Cyrus was to deliver the Israelites from the clutches of Babylon, that is a salvation that does indeed have implications for the whole world” (Oswalt 1998: 336).

v6 “This is very reminiscent of the ideas expressed in 24:1–3, 18–23 where the very foundation of the earth shakes, the earth is split asunder, only a few people are left on earth, and God punishes all the powers in the heavens and on earth. This is a warning that people on earth should not assume that the things that are so important to their daily life and pleasures are permanent. One day God will cause all of this to disappear. In stark contrast to the temporal and unstable nature of this present world, God’s salvation is a sure hope that will last forever” (Smith 397).

v8 “The Servant of the Lord in 50:8–9 maintained his confidence in God’s vindication because he knew that God was just, knew that God would help him, and knew that God will cause his accusers to be like a moth-eaten garment (v. 9b). So, too, these righteous people should realize that all those people who will try to condemn them with insulting words will end up being destroyed just like a garment is destroyed when a moth eats it or a wool cloth is destroyed when a “worm” eats it (50:6)” (Smith 2009: 398).

v9 “Isaiah did not doubt either his ability or his will. But there was what we might call a ‘holy impatience’ about this great man of faith. ‘Do it now,’ he cries in effect, ‘Do it now’ (9-10). The Bible itself ends with a very similar cry. It should be our cry too (Webb 1996: 202-3).

“51:9b–10 must refer to the great deeds God did at the time of the exodus, not at the time of the creation of the world. The slaying of the “monster, dragon” (*tannîn*) refers metaphorically to the defeat of Egypt (as in Ps 74:13–14; Ezek 29:3; 32:2)” (Smith 2009: 404).