

God's People Shall Prosper

Isaiah 49:18-23

SS Lesson for 06/19/2022

Devotional Scripture: Ps 1:1-3

OUTLINE

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Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

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Clothed to not gratify the sinful nature (Rom 13:14)

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Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The first readers of the prophecy in today's text understood it as concerning a return from Babylon, for Isaiah had earlier given the dire prophecy about being taken into exile there (Isaiah 39:6-7). When Babylon fell, the Jews would return to Judah and Jerusalem (Isaiah 40-48; Ezra 1:5). At that time Jerusalem would be rebuilt, and the foundation of the temple laid. Jerusalem lost its inhabitants when the Babylonians destroyed the city in 586 BC. Jeremiah wrote that there were only 832 who were taken from the city at that time (Jeremiah 52:29), compared with 10,000 who had been taken earlier (2 Kings 24:14). Those who remained had endured the deprivations and starvation that occurred during the siege. This small remnant was taken away to join others already in Babylon. The city was a desolate ruin for almost 50 years. On the night in 539 BC that soldiers of Darius the Mede captured Babylon, the Babylonian King Belshazzar was having a gigantic banquet that featured vessels from the temple in Jerusalem. The king was a co-regent with his father, Nabonidus, who was frequently absent from the capital. Belshazzar and his guests at the banquet were startled when fingers appeared and began to write on a wall (Daniel 5). Daniel was finally called to interpret the message. The last part of Daniel's message was that the kingdom was given over to the Medes and Persians, that night! Babylon had been considered impregnable, and a large food supply was always maintained in case there was a siege. The Babylonian Empire came to an end following its capture by the Persians and Medes under Cyrus. Cyrus the Great established the Persian Empire, which lasted about 200 years. The famous Cyrus Cylinder contains the decree that all captive peoples could return to their homelands and that they were to take their gods with them. The Jewish people were not specifically mentioned in Cyrus's own edict, though his attention to Jerusalem is recorded in the Bible (2 Chronicles 36:23; Ezra 1:2-3). The biblical account later refers to a separate proclamation that was made for them, and it became very important in the days of Darius the Great when opposition arose to the building of the temple (6:2-3). The Jews did not have gods to take, but they did have many items from the temple (1:6-11). The first wave of exiles returned in 538 BC. It is assumed that the 50,000 people who returned first went to Jerusalem. Then they scattered to find their ancestral homes throughout Judah, as stated in Ezra 2:1.

The previous lesson ended with Isaiah 49:13, and great joy was predicted to be expressed (compare 51:3). Gentiles in all directions would rejoice as the Lord comforted his people. Five verses later is where this study begins. Isaiah prophesied that a virgin would conceive and bear a son (Isaiah 7:14). That passage is cited in Matthew 1:22-23 as fulfilled in the birth of Jesus. The fulfillment was 700 years away. That same child would grow up to fulfill many other prophecies of Isaiah, not least the prophetic expectations linked to a person referred to as the suffering servant. Our text comes from the second Servant Song. The servant is the one who is the speaker for the text of this lesson. The servant is understood to be the Son of God. Some have suggested that the speaker is Isaiah, but the context indicates that the speaker is more than a prophet. The mood changed from exuberance (Isaiah 49:1-13) to a lamentation that the Lord had forgotten his people and Jerusalem. It is easy to imagine Jerusalem stating that God had forgotten the city and the people. Metaphorically, Jerusalem sat in the dust wearing torn clothes or sackcloth and ashes, head bowed with sorrow and hopelessness (compare Lamentations 2:10). The Lord asked rhetorically whether a woman can forget the child she gave birth to and nursed (Isaiah 49:15). Though an unhealthy mother might forget that child, even a mediocre mother cannot. In the same way, the Lord could not forget the people or Zion. To show his attention he assured Zion that the ones who had mistreated his people by taking them away were leaving. This provided opportunity for God's children to hurry to return (49:14-17). God had promised a return, and he also said that Jerusalem and the cities of Judah would be rebuilt (Isaiah 44:26). At least some of the people in captivity were aware of the passages in Isaiah about a deliverer named Cyrus, and that the captivity would last about 70 years (Jeremiah 25:12; 29:10). It is definite that Daniel was aware of the prophecy of Jeremiah (Daniel 9:2).

Key Verse: Isaiah 49:23

Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens, your nursing mothers; They shall bow down to you with their faces to the earth, and lick up the dust of your feet. Then you will know that I am the Lord, for they shall not be ashamed who wait for Me."

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

The previous nine-chapter section (chaps. 40-48) dealt mainly with Cyrus and his mission in the Jews' restoration. These nine chapters (49-57) deal primarily with the Servant-Messiah fulfilling His ministry of restoring the covenant people to the land just before the Millennium will begin. Neither person would fail in his mission. Because of the similarity of their missions, several of the same expressions and figures of speech are used in the two nine-chapter sections. Chapters 49-57 may be divided into four parts: (1) The Servant, being rejected by His people, will take salvation to the Gentiles (chaps. 49-50). (2) The believing remnant will be exalted (51:1-52:12). (3) The Servant, however, will be abased and then exalted (52:13-53:12). (4) Salvation through the Servant will come to Jews and Gentiles in the Millennium (chaps. 54-57).

49:1-3. God's **Servant** (vv. 3, 5-6) is the speaker in verses 1-5; God addressed Him in verse 6. Like **the LORD**, He called on the **islands** (see 41:1) and the **nations** to **listen** (see 46:3) to Him because of His special "calling" from the Lord. His **mouth** was **like a sharpened sword**, that is, it was a weapon to destroy the disobedient (cf. 1:20; also note Heb. 4:12; Rev. 1:16; 19:15). He was also likened to a sharp **arrow**. The Servant was to **display** God's **splendor** (Isa. 49:3; cf. 60:21; 61:3). Why is the Servant here called **Israel**? This cannot refer to the nation because the Servant is to draw that nation back to God. The Messiah is called Israel because He fulfills what Israel should have done. In His person and work He epitomizes the nation.

49:4. The Servant saw little visible reward for His service. No change was evident in the nation by which the Servant could claim He had accomplished what He set out to do (cf. John 1:11). However, this did not bother Him for He trusted that in due time **God** would **reward** Him.

49:5-6. **Formed... in the womb** as God's Servant (cf. v. 1), the Messiah's commission is to restore **Jacob** and **Israel** (see 40:27) to **the LORD**. With **God** as His **strength**, He would also be **a light for the Gentiles** (cf. 42:6; Luke 1:79) so that **salvation** from the Lord would extend to people in **the ends of the earth** (see Isa. 5:26).

49:7. **The LORD** assured the Servant—**despised and abhorred by** His people—that He would succeed in His ministry to the Gentiles. **Kings** and **princes** will bow down to Him because He has been **chosen by the LORD**. In His first coming Jesus Christ was rejected by His own people (John 1:10-11), but at His second coming all will **bow** before Him (Phil. 2:10-11).

49:8-12. In the Millennium, here called **the time of God's favor** and **the day of salvation**, the Lord will enable the Servant to **be a covenant for the people** (cf. 42:6; i.e., to fulfill God's covenant promises to Israel; see Jer. 31:31-34 on the New Covenant). When **the land** is restored **the captives** will return to the Promised Land from various places around the world (Isa. 49:9; cf. v. 12). The land will be fertile with **pasture** (v. 9) and **water** (v. 10) and **mountains** and valleys will be changed (v. 11). As in 40:3-4, this may signify a change in the people's lives. The location of **Sinim** is uncertain, but many think it is the Aswan region of Egypt (NIV marg.).

49:13. As the prophet spoke, he called on nature, personified, to **rejoice** (on the **mountains** rejoicing see 44:23). The reason for rejoicing is that **the LORD comforts** and has **compassion** (cf. 49:10) on those who need help, including Gentiles.

49:14-16. In verses 14-21 the prophet recorded a dialogue between Israel and God. **Zion** (i.e., the people in Jerusalem) felt as if God had **forgotten** her (v. 14). But God replied that He certainly had **not** forgotten Israel. He could not possibly do so because He is like **a mother** to the nation. Furthermore, the nation was inscribed, as it were, on His **palms**. Therefore whenever He, figuratively speaking, lifts up His hands He sees the nation's name which reminds Him of her.

49:17-21. Judah's captors will **depart** (v. 17) and **be far away** (v. 19) and Judah's **sons** will begin to return (vv. 17-18). This will brighten up the nation as **a bride** enjoys **ornaments**. This return will be so great that the land (personified by **you** and **your**, vv. 19-21) will not be large enough for all the inhabitants, called its **children**. But when the people returned from the Babylonian Captivity they were a comparatively small, struggling band. The return mentioned in verses 19-21 seems to be much larger and therefore probably refers to Israel's return at the beginning of the Millennium.

49:22-26. When Israel returns to the land in the future **the Gentiles** will worship before **the LORD** and will be friendly toward Israel. In fact the Gentiles will even help transport Israelites to Palestine. Gentile leaders will be subservient to Israel, which will cause her to realize that **the LORD** really is in control of the world (v. 23). It is unusual for **captives** to be **rescued**, but God will see that it is done for Israel. Israel's enemies

will be destroyed, which will cause the whole world to acknowledge that **the LORD** is Israel's God and her **Savior** (cf. 42:11), **Redeemer** (cf. 41:14), and **the Mighty One of Jacob** (cf. 60:16).

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Prospering through God's Promises (Isa 49:18-21)

18 Lift up your eyes, look around and see; all these gather together and come to you. As I live," says the Lord, "You shall surely clothe yourselves with them all as an ornament, and bind them on you as a bride does.

19 "For your waste and desolate places, and the land of your destruction, will even now be too small for the inhabitants; and those who swallowed you up will be far away.

20 The children you will have, after you have lost the others, will say again in your ears, 'The place is too small for me; give me a place where I may dwell.'

21 Then you will say in your heart, 'Who has begotten these for me, since I have lost my children and am desolate, a captive, and wandering to and fro? And who has brought these up? There I was, left alone; But these, where were they?'"

Promise of God's clothing (18)

Clothed with salvation (Isa 61:10)

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 righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

Clothed with Jesus Christ (Gal 3:27)

27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

Clothed to not gratify the sinful nature (Rom 13:14)

14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Clothed with immortality (1 Cor 15:54)

54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

Promise of God's delivering (19)

Deliverance through redemption (Rom 8:23)

23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Deliverance through transformation (Phil 3:20-21)

20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Deliverance through trust (2 Cor 1:10)

10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,

Deliverance through righteousness (Ps 34:19)

19 A righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all;

Deliverance because God knows how to deliver (2 Peter 2:9)

9 if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.

Promise of adequate shelter (20-21)

Shelter from trouble (Ps 32:7)

7 You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.

Shelter of God's tabernacle (Ps 27:5)

5 For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock.

Shelter of God's presence (Ps 31:20)

20 In the shelter of your presence you hide them from the intrigues of men; in your dwelling you keep them safe from accusing tongues.

Shelter in the shadow of God (Ps 91:1)

91 He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

Prospering through God's Blessings (Isa 49:22-23)

22 Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I will lift My hand in an oath to the nations, and set up My standard for the peoples; They shall bring your sons in their arms, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders; 23 Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers; They shall bow down to you with their faces to the earth, and lick up the dust of your feet. Then you will know that I am the Lord, for they shall not be ashamed who wait for Me."

Blessing of sustainment (22)

God sustains by upholding those who fall (Ps 37:23-24)

23 If the Lord delights in a man's way, he makes his steps firm; 24 though he stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand.

God sustains from birth (Ps 71:6)

6 From birth I have relied on you; you brought me forth from my mother's womb. I will ever praise you.

God sustains through a willing spirit (Ps 51:12)

12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

God sustains because He will never forsake His own (Ps 55:22)

22 Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall.

God sustains because He promised to do so (Ps 119:116)

116 Sustain me according to your promise, and I will live; do not let my hopes be dashed.

God sustains because He always finishes what He starts (Phil 1:6)

6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Blessing of honorable hope (23)

Hope because God is the God of hope (Rom 15:13)

13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Hope because God is faithful (Heb 10:23)

23 Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

Hope because that is what faith is all about (Heb 11:1)

11 Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Hope because we have a living hope (1 Peter 1:3)

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

Hope because of belief in God (1 Peter 1:21)

21 Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Thomas Constable

Verse 13

Isaiah concluded by calling on the whole created universe to rejoice because the Lord had comforted His people (cf. Isaiah 40:1; Isaiah 47:6) and had shown compassion on His formerly afflicted nation (cf. Isaiah 42:10-13; Isaiah 44:23; Isaiah 45:8; Isaiah 52:8-9; Isaiah 55:12-13). This is rejoicing over deliverance from sin, not just exile. When the Servant completes His work of salvation, the whole creation, not just humankind, will experience liberation from the effects of the Fall (cf. Romans 8:19-22). This pericope focuses on God's salvation of the Israelites through the future ministry of the Servant. Isaiah used the figure of Zion being the wife of Yahweh to present the Lord's relationship with His chosen people. "The Lord assures them of His love by comparing Himself to a compassionate mother (Isaiah 49:14-23), a courageous warrior (Isaiah 49:24-26), and a constant lover (Isaiah 50:1-3)." [Note: Wiersbe, p. 55.]

Verse 14

Having heard the promises that precede, promises that God will bring the whole world to Himself, Israel, personified as Zion, complained that the Lord had forgotten about her. What about the special relationship that He had promised she would always have with Him? That appeared to be over. Isaiah often used Zion when he spoke of Jerusalem or the Israelites in the future, as here. "The sense of anticlimax at Isaiah 49:14 could hardly be stronger. Reminiscent of the 'Why do you say, O Jacob?' of Isaiah 40:27 after the assurances of Isaiah 40:1-26, the complaining voice of Zion contrasts sharply with the world song over the work of the Servant [Isaiah 49:13]." [Note: Motyer, p. 392.]

God had not forgotten Israel. Even though He would leave her for a time, He would re-gather all her children from all over the world to Himself. Therefore she should continue to trust in Him.

Verse 15

God's response to His "wife's" complaint was to assure her of His unfailing commitment to her. Human mothers may possibly neglect the children they cared so much for that they nursed, though this is unnatural. They may even stop showing compassion to the children they carried in their wombs for nine months, though this is inconsistent. Yet Yahweh would never, ever forget (abandon) His chosen people (cf. Psalms 27:10). "This is one of the strongest, if not the strongest expression of God's love in the Old Testament, and is often compared with Jeremiah 31:20." [Note: Young, 3:285.]

Verse 16

Some servants inscribed the names of their masters on their hands in Isaiah's day, but masters did not write the names of their servants on their hands. Yet Yahweh had written (lit. engraved, cf. Ezekiel 4:1) the name of Zion on His palms so that He would not forget her, but be reminded of her frequently. The profile (skyline) of the city was constantly in His thoughts.

Verse 17

Isaiah saw the builders of Jerusalem's breached walls hurrying to rebuild them after their destroyers had departed. In other words, Jerusalem would not be in a vulnerable condition for very long, relatively speaking. The builders were the sons that Zion thought had been denied her. The Hebrew word translated "builders," *bonayik*, is almost identical to the word translated "sons," *banayik*, and may have been deliberately ambiguous to communicate both ideas. Originally only the consonants, which are identical, appeared in the text.

Verse 18

Zion was to look around her. Her builder-sons would gather around her. They would be to her as jewels are to a bride, her prized glory and adornment. The Lord swore on His life that this would be so. Only a relatively few Israelites responded to Cyrus' edict and returned to rebuild Jerusalem. The majority decided to stay in Babylon. Thus this prediction must be looking into the future.

Verse 19

Jerusalem's waste and desolate places would one day be full of people. Her destroyers would be gone and in their place would be so many inhabitants that the land would overflow with people. "The city's growth is cited as an unmistakable sign of Yahweh's grace." [Note: Watts, Isaiah 34-66, p. 189.]

Verse 20

The Israelites who had once been far away would return, but would complain about the difficulty of finding room to live, because so many other Israelites would have returned.

Verse 21

Zion would then say to herself: "Where in the world did all these children of mine come from? I thought all my children were dead and gone and that I was an old, forsaken widow. But now my children surround me." Her many children will not simply be the product of her own fertility, but a supernatural gift from God (cf. Genesis 18:12-14; Ruth 4:13-17).

Verses 22-23

Sovereign Yahweh further promised that the Gentiles would be responsible for ushering many of the Israelites back into their land. Even Gentile kings and princesses would carry Hebrew children back to their ancestors' homeland. An amillennial interpretation follows: "We are not to look for a literal fulfillment of this promise. It rather refers to a conversion of the Gentiles, who as converted bring to Zion [heaven, in his view] the converted sons of Israel." [Note: Young, 3:290.]

God would raise His hand and an ensign (banner, signal), Messiah, to summon the nations to do this (cf. Isaiah 5:26; Isaiah 11:10; Isaiah 11:12; Isaiah 13:2; Isaiah 30:17; Isaiah 62:10). They would show an uncharacteristic concern for the welfare of the Israelites and would even bow down before them in submission. Young interpreted this as follows: "Even the highest and most powerful rulers of the heathen nations will reverence the Church [the new Israel, in his view] and devote to her all their wealth and power." [Note: Ibid., 3:291.]

Previously the Israelites had to bow before the Gentiles. The "times of the Gentiles," the times of Gentile supremacy over Israel in the world, will have ended (cf. Zechariah 12:2; Zechariah 14:2-3; Luke 21:24; Revelation 11:2; Revelation 19:17-19). The times of Gentile supremacy in the world began when Nebuchadnezzar removed Israel's sovereignty, in 586 B.C., and will conclude when Jesus Christ returns at His second advent and restores Israel's sovereignty, in the Millennium. This will prove that Yahweh is the true God since He predicted this reversal of Israel's fortunes and will bring it to pass. Those who believe His promises will not be embarrassed or disappointed, because He will fulfill them. "All the nations are flowing to Jerusalem to bow at her feet, yes, to beg mercy for the wrongs done, and yes, to bring back with apology those who had been dragged away, but also to try to learn something of this amazing God who has been able to lift his people from barren widowhood to being the laughing grandmother of nations." [Note: Oswalt, The Book . . . 40-66, p. 310.]

The prophet now turned from emphasizing the children who will return, to the oppressors who will be destroyed.

Verse 24

Isaiah addressed an objection that some in his audience evidently entertained. Is it possible that Yahweh could really overturn the power of the mighty nations that scattered the Israelites and kept them from their land? Of course! God had already rescued Israel from one mighty man at the Exodus. Typically, mighty men and tyrants tenaciously cling to their prey and captives. The Masoretic Text presents the tyrants as righteous. If accurate, the meaning would be: "Can a captor who has every right to his captives be deprived of them?" The answer (Isaiah 49:25) would be: "The Lord will do what is right to redeem His people as well as exercise His power to do so."

Verse 25

Yahweh replied that He would indeed save the Israelites' descendants from their tyrannical captors even though that would be humanly impossible. He is stronger than they.

Verse 26

The Lord would cause these Gentile oppressors to consume one another, "reduced to their last extremity." [Note: Michael Dahood, "Textual Problems in Isaiah," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 22 (1960):404-5.] This will happen when the nations fight one another at Armageddon. Jesus Christ will return from heaven, the assembled armies will turn on Him, and He will defeat them with a word from His mouth. This will open the way for Israel to return to her land as the honored of the earth in the Millennium (cf. Daniel 11:40-45; Revelation 16:14; Revelation 19:19-21). These events will demonstrate to everyone that Yahweh is Israel's Savior, Redeemer, and the Mighty God of Jacob. Are these descriptions just impressionistic pictures of Gentiles coming to Christ for salvation, or should we look for a more literal fulfillment of these promises? Amillennialists say they are figurative descriptions of Gentiles coming to salvation through Christ. Premillennialists say they describe a literal return of Israelites to their land with an accompanying exaltation of the physical descendants of Jacob in the earth. One of the cardinal rules of hermeneutics is that if the interpreter can understand something literally it should be taken that way unless other indications in the text or context point to a non-literal interpretation. Amillennialists concede that it is possible to take these prophecies literally, and that if one does, he or she will come out a premillennialist. But they say that a literal fulfillment was not intended, and that these predictions are being fulfilled spiritually through the church. Premillennialists view this chapter, and most of chapters 50-57, as revealing Messiah's restoration of Israel to her land at the beginning of the Millennium.

(Adapted from URL: <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/dcc/isaiah-49.html>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

At the right time, God sent Jesus to earth to offer salvation to all who accept him as Lord and Savior (Romans 5:6-8; Galatians 4:4-5). The call is to those who are in our families and communities and also in far distant villages we will never visit or even know exist. Our responsibility in the time of salvation is twofold: to proclaim the good news to all (Matthew 28:18-20) and to worship God with all creation. We are comforted, and we experience mercy. Therefore sing to God! And spread the good news throughout the earth.

Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary

Gather - The later chapters in Isaiah aroused a significant difference of opinion among interpreters. In this particular chapter, Isaiah called for several gatherings: first, to see the Babylonian exiles return and rebuild the ruined city of Jerusalem; second, to observe the Gentiles becoming believers; and finally, to take note of the kings and princes honoring and referencing the true God.

Rebuild - The exiles returning from Babylon come home to ruins, a land the Babylonian military had destroyed. But Isaiah offered hope; one day, the city and temple will flourish, and it did. The people eventually rebuilt their communities and the temple. But some scholars believe the author is also referring to the end times because so many are coming to know the true God and a vast multitude of believers is returning to Israel.

Enjoy - Throughout history, God has invited the Gentile nations to enjoy His blessings and be a part of the true religion (Isa. 11:11). The picture is of God's acceptance of the Gentiles and waving a high flag to Israel to come over here and bring your children. God is beckoning to people in distant nations and the Jewish believers alike to come to the true and living God. Together they come, establish friendships, and worship the true God.

Rest - Although this chapter is complicated, Isaiah wants to convey an important message from the Father. When the heavens appear quiet, and the Father God seems inattentive, do not be discouraged. The Father hears all cries. He has stationed an active but unseen army of angels all around. His activities may not always be understood by us, but His invisible hand is always moving with great power, bringing to pass His plans and purposes.