

**Share His Story**  
**Session #5**  
**A Light to the Nations – His Story for the Gentiles - Part 1**

By the time we get to a prophet named Isaiah, it has been over one thousand years since God made those promises to Abraham. This would probably be a good time to take inventory of those promises:

- Land – The nation of Israel possesses the land Yahweh had promised.
- Offspring – The nation of Israel probably numbers in the millions.
- Blessing to the Nations – Not so much! Israel, as a nation, has not been a blessing to the nations. In fact, far from being a positive influence on those around her, she has let those around her lead her astray from her allegiance to God.

So, at this point in time, two-thirds of those promises have been fulfilled but one very significant promise remains unfulfilled.

What does this tell you about God’s timing?

How have you experienced in your life the fact that His timing isn’t always ours? Can you think of specific situations?

How will that “blessing to the nations” (nations = goy or gentiles) portion of the promise be fulfilled in biblical history?

This would also be a good time to do a very condensed version of Israel’s history from Abraham to Isaiah.

- Abraham’s descendants, the 12 sons of Jacob and their families, took up residence in Egypt to escape the famine in their land.
- Four hundred years later, God delivered the millions of descendants of those 12 tribal heads from slavery in Egypt—we call it the “Exodus.”
- God sent a series of judges to deliver Israel from her enemies—enemies God had brought up against Israel because she continually turned her back on God and chased after pagan gods.
- After the judges, kings ruled the land of Israel.
  - Saul was the first king.
  - David was the second king.
  - Solomon was the third king.
  - After Solomon, the nation split—“Israel” was the name used for the northern tribes; “Judah” the name used for the south.
- During the vast majority of the time of the kings, Israel and Judah were unfaithful to God, chasing after the gods of their neighbors.
- God sent a series of prophets to call Israel and Judah to repentance. Their pleas were ignored.
- In 722 God used Assyria to destroy the northern Kingdom of Israel.
- After the time of Isaiah—in 587 or 586 BC—God would use the Babylonians to discipline the south (Judah) carrying them into captivity into Babylon.

- In 538 Cyrus the Great, King of Persia, defeated the Babylonians and allowed the Israeli captives in Babylon to return home. Some returned and some had sunk roots in Babylon and stayed.

### **Read Isaiah 42:1-4**

Verses 1-4 of this chapter comprise the first of four “Servant Songs” in the book of Isaiah. While ancient Israel probably saw these verses as applying to herself—the nation of Israel—the New Testament helps us see that they find their fulfillment in Jesus (see Matthew 12:18-21, for example). Verse 1 tells us the servant’s role will be to “bring forth justice to the nations (gentiles).” Verses 2 and 3 tell us His method will be humble service.

How did Jesus exhibit humble service in His life on earth?

Some would equate humble service with weakness. Would you? Why or why not?

Who in your life serves as an illustration of humble service?

### **Read Isaiah 42:5-9**

These verses are not generally understood to be a part of the first Servant Song. However, they do look ahead to God’s deliverance of His people, first from captivity in Babylon and later from captivity to sin. These verses are still Messianic.

Note verse six. In the Old Testament, the phrase “light to the nations” is unique to Isaiah. Why would the Israelites have considered this concept of God’s grace showered on gentiles a radical one?

Note verse nine. What are the “new things” God would do in the lives of His captive nation? What are the new things He has done in your life?

Why is it significant for you that gentiles have been included in this restoration work of God?

Jesus continues to be that “light to the nations” today. Lutheran Hour Ministries takes that Light to the Nations to more than 30 countries—many of which most of us never dreamed would have been open to the Gospel in our lifetimes. What miracles has God performed to open previously closed parts of our world to God’s Word? Which parts of our world today shut out the Light to the Nations? How does God still penetrate those barriers?

**Closing Prayer:** Lord God, Heavenly Father, we thank You for sending that Light to the nations into the darkness of our world and the gloom of our lives to bring light and hope. We thank You that Jesus is that Light to the Nations. Give us the courage, energy, and commitment to be Your instruments so this Light gets carried to the far corners of our community and the distant corners of the earth. In His Name we are bold to approach Your throne of grace. Amen.

**Share His Story**  
**Session #6**  
**A Light to the Nations – His Story for the Gentiles - Part 2**

Review the historical outline from the previous lesson. Isaiah’s words in the Servant Songs in chapters 42 and 49 were written long before Jerusalem fell to Nebuchadnezzar and Israel went into captivity in Babylon. However, it seems very likely those words were read often and probably committed to memory by those captives in Babylon more than a century after they were written. It appears that, for the most part, the captives weren’t mistreated horribly in Babylon. In fact, many put down business roots, opened shops, and thrived in their new home-away-from-home. It also appears many prospered enough that when the opportunity came to go back to Jerusalem in 538, some returned to Jerusalem but many stayed in their new Babylonian home. But, for many of those captives, no matter how things worked out in Babylon, it wasn’t home—it wasn’t *Jerusalem*—and they longed for the day they could return.

**Read Isaiah 49:1-6**

This is the second of four Servant Songs in Isaiah.

Note that the “servant” is identified as Israel. Jesus is often called “Israel reduced to one.” How is Jesus what Israel should have been and never was?

The parallels between Jesus and Old Israel may be most obvious in the opening chapters of Matthew’s Gospel. Note the following:

- Old Israel (Jacob’s family) had their roots in the land of Israel - Jesus was born in the land of Israel.
- Old Israel went down to Egypt to escape danger in Israel - Jesus went down to Egypt to escape danger in Israel.
- Old Israel was called out of Egypt - Jesus was called out of Egypt.
- Old Israel passed through water as they began their journey - Jesus passed through water (Baptism at the Jordan) as He began His ministry.
- Old Israel spent 40 years in the wilderness and was tempted to forsake her God - Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness tempted by Satan to forsake His mission.
- God gathered Old Israel around a mountain to explain to them what it meant to be His people (Sinai) - Jesus gathered His people around Him to tell them what it means to be His people (Sermon on the Mount).

Do you think this is all coincidence? If not, why would God repeat the history in this way? Does this shed more light on Jesus as God’s new Israel?

What words of comfort for a captive people do you see in this Servant Song? What words of comfort do you see for people today?

God expected His people to draw gentiles to the God of Israel—to tell His Story to the world. Where do you see that expectation in this Servant Song? Why do you think it doesn't happen much in the Old Testament?

Israel expected a Messiah who would restore the nation to its rightful place of prominence among the nations. Israel looked for a Messiah who would save Israel.

In light of that fact, which verses would most Israelites find incomprehensible?

What is the Good News here for Israel?

What is the Good News here for the other nations?

What is the Good News here for you?

Have any members of your study group experienced the Gospel being proclaimed to people of other nations or other ethnic groups? What did that look like? Describe the experience.

Lutheran Hour Ministries uses a variety of methods (radio, TV, print media, street dramas, text messages, Internet, Facebook, etc.) to Tell His Story in more than 30 nations—to introduce all races of people to the Light to the Nations. What challenges do you think might be encountered in proclaiming the Gospel in other cultures?

**Closing Prayer:** Light to the Nations, we recognize that our world is a dark place—a place that frequently turns away from the Light of Your love and forgiveness. We recognize that without You, we would live in that same kind of darkness. We thank You for being our light. Lead us to be the light of the world that You call us to be, boldly telling the Gospel story. Amen.

**Share His Story**  
**Session #7**  
**A Reluctant Witness - Part 1**

Pyramids made out of skulls, temples decorated with human hide, the bodies of the conquered ground to bits with threshing sledges, live captives impaled on spears in pagan temples as a sacrifice to the gods, fishhooks in the noses of captives so they could be tied together and hauled away—it all sounds like something out of an Indiana Jones movie. But these phrases describe a fierce and bloodthirsty nation of people that ruled the world in the early years of Isaiah’s prophetic career. These Assyrians with their capital at Nineveh were not the kind of folks you’d like to have for neighbors. In fact, you’d probably prefer they didn’t even inhabit the same planet with you. But they did. And they not only inhabited the same planet with Israel, they were her neighbors and they were her rulers. Both Israel and Judah paid tribute (protection money) to Assyria. In return, Assyria agreed not to attack Israel and do horrible, unspeakable things to her people.

This was Jonah’s world—probably just before the time of Isaiah. (Even though the book of Jonah comes after the book of Isaiah in the Bible, Jonah’s career preceded Isaiah’s. The prophetic books aren’t in chronological order.) Jonah was a prophet and a prophet had a very simple job description—go where God tells you to go; do what God tells you to do; say (and/or write) what God tells you to say (and/or write). Now that’s not so difficult, is it?

**Read Jonah 1**

Why would God send a prophet to Nineveh?

Nineveh is probably northeast of where Jonah was at the time. Where is Tarshish? Why do you think Jonah doesn’t want to go to Nineveh?

What lack of understanding on Jonah’s part does verse three illustrate?

What events in chapter one illustrate that it is difficult (actually, impossible) to run away from God?

What events in this story illustrate how badly Jonah wanted to avoid going to Nineveh?

What events in chapter one show God’s persistence?

Why do you think Jonah waits until the lot falls on him before he tells them he is the problem here?

Apparently, Jonah would rather drown than go to Nineveh. Why do you think God won’t just let him have his way?

See verse 16. How is Jonah a missionary in spite of himself? What does this tell you about God? Have you ever been a missionary in spite of yourself—where God worked through you when you weren't even trying to be His instrument? If so, tell the story to your group.

Is the fish salvation for Jonah or just one more problem? Why?

### **Read Jonah 2**

Most Bible scholars see this chapter as Jonah's confession of sin and thanksgiving for deliverance. A few see it as thanksgiving and resignation, as in "I give up. I can't even run away from You!" How do you see this prayer?

The New Testament sees Jonah's experience as a type of Jesus' death and resurrection. See Matthew 12:38-41. What are the points of comparison?

What is the story that Jonah has told at this point in the story and to whom has he told it?

What is the story you have to tell the world? How do you tell it? How do you tell it through your congregation? Through Lutheran Hour Ministries? Through your synod?

**Closing Prayer:** Father in Heaven, You created all people. You love all people. You sent Your Son to redeem all people. Teach us to love all people. Empower and equip us to tell Your story to all people. And enable us to encourage each other with that same story of Your love and forgiveness in Jesus. In Your Son's Name, we pray. Amen.

**Share His Story**  
**Session #8**  
**A Reluctant Witness - Part 2**

The Sunday school lessons always ended with Jonah 2. But there is a “rest of the story.” And in Part 2 (Chapters 3 and 4), the reluctant prophet is still reluctant but grudgingly obedient, and he is still successful in spite of himself.

**Read Jonah 3**

Compare 3:2 to 1:2. What, if anything, has changed for Jonah?

Read Jonah’s sermon. How long is it? How do you think he said it? Do you think there was more to it than that? Is it Law or Gospel or both?

Why do you think the people of Nineveh responded to Jonah at all?

Where do you find Gospel in this chapter? Why wasn’t it on Jonah’s lips?

Are there people in your life you would rather just not tell the Good News to? How would you feel if God sent you to go preach to the Taliban in Afghanistan? Or to Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda? Would you be more interested in their salvation or their destruction?

Read Jonah 4. This chapter reveals so much about Jonah’s reason for not wanting to preach to Nineveh. It wasn’t that he feared his mission would be unsuccessful. It wasn’t that he feared the Ninevites. It wasn’t even that he loathed these people and didn’t want to be anywhere near them. The reason he ran . . . the reason drowning was preferable to mission work was ***he feared the mission would be successful!*** The same God who would one day send His only Son to redeem lost humanity—including you and me and Jonah—showed this same kind of grace and mercy to save a whole city. And Jonah wanted fire and brimstone, not mercy to rain down on Nineveh.

Chapter 4 is the picture of a pouting Jonah. What characteristics of God really make him angry at this point in the story?

This is the second time he’s been ready to die in this story. Why does he find death so inviting at this point?

Jonah doesn’t give up easily. You can’t fault him for a lack of persistence! Why does he sit down outside the city? What does Jonah want to see happen?

How does God further make His point with Jonah?

The “20,000 persons who don’t know their right hand from their left” no doubt refers to young children. Why does God make the point that the city holds so many young children and cattle? How does this illustrate God’s grace and mercy? How does He show that same kind of grace and mercy to us?

We don't know any more about Jonah. Do you think he learned anything from this series of events?

In your life and your community, which people groups do you find it difficult to tell His story to? Which groups has your congregation struggled to encompass into the Christian family? Why?

Jonah's story is really God's story—His story. From chapters 1-4 list all of the events that are God's action—things caused by Him.

In what ways is the story we have to tell really His story? How has He made His story your story? What is the story you have to tell about His work in your life? Tell that story to each other right now.

**Closing Prayer:** Gracious and loving Heavenly Father, You poured out Your mercy on that great city, Nineveh. In place of fire, You brought forgiveness. In place of punishment, You brought love and mercy. You've done that in our lives, too, through Your son, Jesus Christ. Teach us to tell that story to the loveable and the unloveable; to friends and enemies; to those near and far. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.