



SERMON RECAP

AUGUST 23, 2026

The Prophet of Courage: Elphaba from “Wicked”

Isaiah 49:1-7

Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West is a retelling of familiar characters from Frank Baums *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. It belongs to a genre called Revisionist Fantasy, which became popular in the late 1990s and early 2000s. These stories look again at characters we were always told were wicked and ask if the ones labeled wicked might have been the ones telling the truth all along.

Wicked takes a closer look at the Witch of the West and asks what happens when a person refuses to fit into the roles that power assigns. In *Wicked* the Wizard believes that peace comes through conformity. He thinks magic should be used to control people and to keep Oz predictable and safe for those in power. His vision of order depends on everyone fitting into the roles he assigns. Magic in his mind is a resource to be managed and directed toward his own goals.

Elphaba has a very different kind of magic. Her magic comes from compassion and imagination. It is rooted in community and generosity. She sees what others ignore. She cares for those who are silenced. She wants to use her gift for good. Her nonconformity is not rebellion for its own sake. It is a refusal to let power be used to harm. The Wizard wants magic for his good. Elphaba wants magic “For Good.”

This contrast helps us understand Isaiah 49. Israel also had a kind of magic. Their magic was not literal power. It was their chosenness and their relationship with God. They were called to be a light to the nations. Their identity was meant to bless the world. But some believed that chosenness was a privilege. They thought their relationship with God was meant to secure their own comfort rather than serve the greater good.

We are now in second Isaiah. The exile has happened. The nation has been destroyed. Judah has been conquered, Jerusalem has been besieged, and the Temple has been razed. It is a tragedy of enormous emotional, economic, political, and theological consequence. Second Isaiah begins with a word of comfort (we will get to that next week), but here Isaiah begins to explain how the people will recover, and why



Wicked, with music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz and a book by Winnie Holzman, is loosely based on Gregory Maguire's 1995 novel of the same name, itself a reimagining of L. Frank Baum's 1900 classic *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Since its 2003 Broadway debut, it has run continuously and now stands as the fourth longest-running show in Broadway history. *Wicked* earned ten Tony Award nominations, and Idina Menzel won Best Actress for her performance as Elphaba, though in a memorable upset the musical lost Best Musical to *Avenue Q*.

the suffering has happened. The “Suffering Servant” is an important figure in Isaiah. It is this servant who will lead the people out of exile and back to being God's people. While some may have thought the exile would come to an end through a great show of power, Isaiah presents a shocking alternative in the suffering servant.

The prophet insists that Israel was chosen for service and not for superiority. Their calling was not to dominate but to bless. This is where the figure of the suffering servant appears. The servant is not chosen to suffer. The servant is chosen to be willing to suffer if that is what faithfulness requires. The servant suffers because the world often resists those who work for justice. A culture built on greed and consumption will always push back against anyone who seeks the good of all.

Elphaba shows this clearly. She does not suffer because she is wicked. She suffers because she refuses to use her gift the way the Wizard wants her to. She suffers because she will not conform to a system built on fear. She suffers because she insists that magic is meant to bless and not to control. Her suffering is the cost of her faithfulness.

Israel is called to the same posture. The servant is the one who sees the pain of the world and refuses to look away. The servant carries the burden of hope even when others abandon it. The servant believes that God's light is meant for all nations and not just a few. The servant understands that healing requires courage and sacrifice.

This calling is not only for Israel. It is for us as well. We are invited to reject the Wizard's vision of conformity and control. We are invited to embrace Elphaba's vision of generosity and community. We are invited to live as servants who are willing to suffer for the sake of a greater good. Not because suffering is holy. But because love is. In Isaiah and in Oz the question is the same. How will we use the gifts God has given us. For control or for compassion. For ourselves or for the world God loves.

NEXT WEEK:

The Prophet of Grace: Javert, the anti-hero, from “Les Miserables”