

FPFWC Christian Development



God Delivers and Restores

June 2022

Summer Quarter

June 11, 2022

Lesson #2 – God Foretells Redemption

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Isaiah 49:1-13

ICE BREAKER –

1. *How do you keep your eyes on the big picture of God’s plan during times of disappointment?*
2. *How can you participate in extending to the world the invitation to experience God’s blessing?*
3. *What encourages you to trust in God when you feel you lack what you need?*

Key Verse: Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages.—Isaiah 49:8

LESSON BACKGROUND

In the book of Isaiah, there are four poems about the Messiah (Isaiah 42:1–9; 49:1–7; 50:4–9 [or through 50:11]; and 52:13–53:12). They are called “Servant Poems” or “Servant Songs.” A fifth passage, Isaiah 61:1–4, is sometimes added to the list because its content is very similar to the others, even though the word *servant* is not used in it. Our text today is from the second Servant Song. It is more than a poem about a servant. It is a prophecy about the work of Jesus, the Messiah. It is He who is the servant in the Servant Poems.

This Servant Song begins and ends with an appeal, not only to Israel but also to the nations of the world. The last three verses of Isaiah 48 exhort the people to flee from Babylon, and assurance is given that God will care for them as they travel. What’s next?

LESSON COMMENTARY

When the book of Isaiah was written, Israel was facing the gloom of anticipated captivity. In this section the prophet seeks to give encouragement to Israel, emphasizing the coming deliverance and restoration of Israel. The first part of that encouragement pertains to the Servant-Messiah’s roles in God’s plan for Israel and the nations.

(1) The Servant’s Roles (49:1–13)

Three sections comprise Is 49:1–13. The first depicts the Servant’s call to go to Israel (49:1–4); the second reveals the expansion of the Servant’s ministry to

the Gentile nations (49:5–7); and the third indicates the Servant’s ultimate deliverance of Israel (49:8–13).

49:1–4. There has been some debate concerning the identity of the speaker in 49:1–13. The first view is that there are multiple entities called in chap. 49. Beginning with servant (vv. 1–4), the speaker shifts to servant Darius in vv. 5–6 and then to a herald (vv. 7, 13), the Lord (vv. 8–12, 15–21), and Zion (v. 14) in the rest of the chapter (Watts, *Isaiah 34–66*, 182–84). The identification of the various speakers is based on a reconstruction of the passage’s alleged historical background rather than specific elements in the text. A second view is that it was written by an individual prophet (Oswalt, *Isaiah 40–66*, 289). Yet the depiction of the speaker is too exalted to be a human prophet. A third possibility identifies the Lord as the speaker based on the similarities between the exhortation to **listen to Me** (v. 1) and the similar exhortations in other parts of Isaiah (46:3, 48:1, 12, 14, 16; Goldingay, *The Message of Isaiah 40–55*, 365).

It appears that the first half of v. 1 (**Listen to Me, O islands, and pay attention, you peoples from afar**) represents a direct exhortation from the Lord to pay attention to the message that will be spoken. The exhortation is universal in scope, thus emphasizing the scope of the Servant’s vocation. Beginning with the second half of v. 1 (**The Lord called Me from the womb; from the body of My mother He named Me**), a new speaker, identified as **My Servant, Israel** (v. 3), describes His calling. That the speaker is identified as **Israel** has caused some to suggest that the nation of Israel collectively is the servant of the Lord in view here. More likely the servant in this context is not the nation as a collective, but that the servant is the representative of Israel, the epitome of all that Israel was to be (see below for a defense of this view).

The **Servant** begins by describing His own calling to Israel. Using the first person, the Servant initially describes His preparation by God. First, God predestined His ministry, calling Him from the womb (v. 1). Second, God also equipped the Servant for ministry to Israel (v. 2) in two ways: (a) God enabled Him to speak effectively, making His mouth **like a sharp sword**. (b) God made the Servant like **a select arrow**, with the ability to penetrate the spiritual heart of the nation with His message. Third, God preserved the Servant for His ministry to Israel, with the Servant saying of God **in the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me** and **He has hidden Me in His quiver**. Both of these expressions are used of the care and protection of the Lord (cf. Ps 17:8; 27:5; 31:20; 64:2; Jr 36:26). Fourth, God proclaimed that the Servant would be the epitome of Israel that would glorify the Lord (v. 3). What Israel corporately was designed to do, the Servant will do for her, without, however, eliminating a future role for corporate Israel.

Calling the Servant by the name **Israel** has caused some to maintain that the Servant should be identified as the nation of Israel. This is unlikely because then the nation of Israel would have a mission to itself (see vv. 5–6). Moreover, the Servant is described as one who is “abhorred by the nation” (v. 7), indicating that He cannot be the nation. Therefore, the Servant-Messiah is called “Israel” because He is the true King of Israel and the epitome of what Israel ought to have been. He will succeed in all the ways that Israel the nation failed.

Besides His preparation, the Servant also describes His own frustration (v. 4). He felt He **toiled in vain**, reflecting His disappointment at Israel's failure to receive His ministry. All His labor appeared to be wasted (**for nothing and vanity**).

49:5–7. In light of Israel's rejection of the Servant, the Servant next declares the expansion of His calling to the Gentiles. In so doing, the Lord began by reaffirming the Servant's ministry to Israel. Despite Israel's rejection, the Servant is still called **to bring Jacob back to the Lord** (v. 5). But this was **too small** a task for one as glorious as this Servant. Not only will He **raise up the tribes of Jacob and ... restore the preserved ones of Israel**, but He will also be **a light to the nations** (v. 6). This is so the **salvation** provided by God would not be limited to Israel but **reach to the end of the earth**. As a response to the previous frustration of the Servant (v. 4), the Lord reassured the Servant of His ultimate success. Although **despised** and **abhorred by the nation** of Israel, the Servant will be worshiped by the Gentile nations—**kings will see and arise, princes will also bow down** (v. 7). The word **despised** is the same root as used in the fourth Servant Song (53:3). He would be **abhorred** (which means "to be rejected as unclean or an abomination") by the nation (i.e., Israel; Hb. *goy*, when used in the singular as here, usually refers to Israel; see Gn 12:2; Ex 19:6; Dt 4:6; Mc 4:7; Zph 2:9). God's faithfulness will cause the Gentile nations (**kings, princes**) to worship Him.

49:8–13. Despite Israel's prophesied rejection of the Servant in vv. 4–6, this final part of the Servant's call looks to the more remote future when Israel will ultimately believe in Him and experience redemption. At the appointed time, God will make the Servant **a covenant of the people**. This is the same expression used in the first Servant Song, meaning that the Servant would be a covenant-mediator for the people of Israel. The phrase is a figure of speech (metonymy of effect [covenant] for cause [mediator]) for "covenant-mediator" (see a more full discussion at 42:5–7). This refers to the "new covenant" which includes both spiritual and material elements (Jr 31:31–34).

Associated with the new covenant are the restoration of the land of Israel and the granting of tribal allotments (v. 8). The servant will also free prisoners (v. 9). The reference to **those who are in darkness** is also likely a reference to the dispersed of Israel being kept in dungeons as it is in parallel with **those who are bound** referred to in the first line of v. 9. Those who are set free will experience the fruit of God's blessing of the Servant's work (vv. 9–11). God, through the Servant, will provide food and water for the people as they travel from exile back to the land of promise, as well as a safe, easy passageway on which the people may travel. God's provision of sustenance is elsewhere associated with flocks of animals (Is 17:2; 40:10–11; 63:11), but, in this case, there are no flocks in mind, suggesting that God will provide for their needs and those of their animals, as they return to the Holy Land. Verse 10 describes God's gracious provision of water and the protection of God's people from the heat and sun. This restoration is linked to the Servant's work and therefore does not refer to the return from Babylon (539 BC) but looks forward to the end-of-days restoration of Israel in the messianic kingdom.

The intended result of the Servant's work now comes to fruition as those who have been freed **come from afar and from the north and from the west**, indicating that this is a worldwide restoration (v. 12). The location of **Sinim** is debated, and the ancient versions give a variant reading here using the word "Syene." The Masoretic, or Hebrew Text, reads **Sinim**, but the location of the **land of Sinim** is unknown. The name "Syene" is found in the copy of Isaiah among the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran. Several modern versions have adopted "Syene" in the translation of v. 12 (e.g., ESV; NIV has "Aswan"), whereas the NASB, the NET, and the HCSB retain **Sinim**. Syene is a town in Egypt near modern Aswan in southeastern Egypt. Those who come from afar should be identified as God's people, given the reference to them in v. 13. God's comfort of Israel is to be met with the praises of all creation represented in the sky, earth, and mountains (v. 13).

This Servant Song presents in prophetic form what Paul described in Rm 11. Israel (in part) rejected the promised Servant-Messiah, then God gave the message of Messiah to the Gentiles, of whom many received Him; but in the end, God will open the hearts of Israel so as a nation they will believe in Messiah Jesus and experience all the covenant promises. "Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!... For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?" (Rm 11:12, 15; see the comments there).

LESSON NUGGET – Jesus Christ is God's Servant and weapon to conquer the enemy (Isaiah 49:1-2) (Hebrews 4:12) (Revelation 1:16) (Revelation 19:15) and to bring salvation to the nations. He is God's Israel (Isaiah 49:3), accomplishing what the nation failed to accomplish, namely, bringing God's salvation to the Gentiles.

He is the light (Isaiah 49:6) to guide the Gentiles to God (Luke 1:79) (Acts 13:47); and He is the covenant of God (Isaiah 49:8), fulfilling all the promises God made to the fathers (Isaiah 42:6) (Romans 15:8-13) (2 Corinthians 1:20). The nation's return to the land was a picture of their final return when Messiah comes (Isaiah 49:8-13).

Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, Wiersbe Study Bible and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary*