

Isaiah's Book of Consolation (Isaiah 40-55)
(#15) The Second Servant Song (49:1-13)

(The outline of Isaiah 40-55 is placed at the end of these notes.)

Today we arrive to the 49th chapter of Isaiah's prophecy. Here we read Isaiah's second of four Servant Songs in this "Book of Consolation." Some say that this Servant Song should be limited to the first 7 verses.¹ Others see the Song contained in the first 13 verses of this chapter.² Let us read the first 13 verses of this chapter:

"Listen, O coastlands, to Me,
And take heed, you peoples from afar!
The LORD has called Me from the womb;
From the matrix of My mother He has made mention of My name.
²And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword;
In the shadow of His hand He has hidden Me,
And made Me a polished shaft;
In His quiver He has hidden Me."

³"And He said to me,
'You are My servant, O Israel,
In whom I will be glorified.'
⁴Then I said, 'I have labored in vain,
I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain;
Yet surely my just reward is with the LORD,
And my work with my God.'"

⁵"And now the LORD says,
Who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant,
To bring Jacob back to Him,
So that Israel is gathered to Him
(For I shall be glorious in the eyes of the LORD,
And My God shall be My strength),
⁶Indeed He says,
'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant
To raise up the tribes of Jacob,
And to restore the preserved ones of Israel;
I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles,
That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

⁷Thus says the LORD,
The Redeemer of Israel, their Holy One,

¹ As presented in *The New Reformation Study Bible*, pp. 1096, 1111.

² *ESV Study Bible*, pp. 1315, 1330; *The MacArthur Study Bible*, 1017, 1030.

To Him whom man despises,
To Him whom the nation abhors,
To the Servant of rulers:
“Kings shall see and arise,
Princes also shall worship,
Because of the LORD who is faithful,
The Holy One of Israel;
And He has chosen You.”

⁸Thus says the LORD:

“In an acceptable time I have heard You,
And in the day of salvation I have helped You;
I will preserve You and give You
As a covenant to the people,
To restore the earth,
To cause them to inherit the desolate heritages;
⁹That You may say to the prisoners, ‘Go forth,’
To those who are in darkness, ‘Show yourselves.’”

“They shall feed along the roads,
And their pastures shall be on all desolate heights.
¹⁰They shall neither hunger nor thirst,
Neither heat nor sun shall strike them;
For He who has mercy on them will lead them,
Even by the springs of water He will guide them.
¹¹I will make each of My mountains a road,
And My highways shall be elevated.
¹²Surely these shall come from afar;
Look! Those from the north and the west,
And these from the land of Sinim.”

¹³Sing, O heavens!
Be joyful, O earth!
And break out in singing, O mountains!
For the LORD has comforted His people,
And will have mercy on His afflicted.

Within Isaiah’s “Book of Consolation” which encompasses chapters 40 through 55, there are four discernible “songs” in which the Servant of God is the subject. We examined the first of these some weeks ago, which is Isaiah 42:1-7. The Second Servant Song is before us here in Isaiah 49.

The first question that must be faced, which is a difficult one to answer, concerns the identity of the Servant. *Who is this servant?* There are a number of different suggestions. Prior to this point in Isaiah’s prophecy, Isaiah had used the term, “servant”, to refer to several different persons or entities. For example, **Isaiah himself** was identified as God’s servant in Isaiah 20:3, “Then the LORD said, ‘Just as My servant Isaiah has walked...’” God referred to a **political leader** of Judah as His servant in 22:20, “Then it shall be in that day, that I will call My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah...” **King David** was God’s servant when God said of the city of David, Jerusalem, “For I will defend this city, to save it For My own sake and for My servant David’s sake” (Isa. 37:35). God called **the physical descendants of Abraham** His servants in 41:8f:

“But you, Israel, are My servant,

Jacob whom I have chosen,
The descendants of Abraham My friend.
9You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth,
And called from its farthest regions,
And said to you, ‘You are My servant,
I have chosen you and have not cast you away...

And we have already seen Isaiah referring to the promised **Messiah** as His Servant in 42:1:

“Behold! My Servant whom I uphold,
My Elect One in whom My soul delights!
I have put My Spirit upon Him;
He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.”

In Isaiah 43:10 God refers to “My servant” as all of the **elect Gentiles** whom He saves unto Himself

“You are My witnesses,” says the LORD,
And My servant whom I have chosen,
That you may know and believe Me,
And understand that I am He.
Before Me there was no God formed,
Nor shall there be after Me.”

God identified the pagan Persian king Cyrus as His servant in Isaiah 44:26:

Who confirms the word of His servant,
And performs the counsel of His messengers;
Who says to Jerusalem, ‘You shall be inhabited,’
To the cities of Judah, ‘You shall be built,’
And I will raise up her waste places...

And so we see that God refers to anyone or any group of people that He uses to accomplish His purposes in history, whether they be individuals, kings, or peoples. When God declares one(s) to be His servant, it conveys the idea that God is employing that one to accomplish His will, either to bring forth His judgment or His salvation. And so we should understand the role or purpose of God’s Servant in this context of Isaiah 49:1ff.

But who or what is the identity of God’s Servant in this Servant Song of Isiah 49:1-13? There are different opinions. Some argue that the servant should be understood as...

1) **The nation of Israel**

Isaiah on many occasions identified “Israel” the nation as God’s servant.³ For this reason some have tried to argue that the nation of Israel itself is the servant of the Lord in these Four Servant Songs. But this is clearly wrong. Look at Isaiah 49:5, which reads,

“And now the LORD says,
Who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant,
To bring Jacob back to Him,
So that Israel is gathered to Him...”

³ Here are the references: 20:3; 41:8f; 43:10; 44:1, 2, 21; 45:4; 48:20.

We read in this verse that the Lord commissioned the “Servant” to restore “Jacob”, that is, Israel. The nation of Israel does not save itself. God had originally called Israel in order to show forth His glory to the world. Of course, Israel failed miserably to live up to its calling. And so, God raised up another Servant who would accomplish what Israel had failed to do. He, the faithful Servant, would bring forth the light, which is the knowledge of God, to the Gentile world and He would bring justice to the earth.

2) The Lord Jesus

We would affirm, of course, that this Servant is none other than the Lord Jesus.⁴ God raised up Jesus as His Servant to do what Israel had failed to do—be a light to the Gentiles (49:6). But further, God raised up the Servant to do for Israel, what Israel could not do for itself. Israel could not save itself from sin. We read in the New Testament that our Lord was the Servant that God had sent into the world. Of our Lord Jesus it was said, “*For although He existed in the form of God, He did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant*” (Phil. 2:6). It was Jesus Christ, Whom God raised up to be His faithful Servant—the true Israel—who would redeem a remnant of lost and condemned Israel, restoring His people unto God.

3) The church

Some have argued that the “Servant” should be identified with the church.⁵ Some would immediately respond to this suggestion that to take the passage as prophetic of the church is to spiritualize the text well beyond propriety. But before this view is dismissed too quickly, consider their argument. Again, we read **Isaiah 49:6** that records the work of the “Servant”:

⁶Indeed He says,
‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant
To raise up the tribes of Jacob,
And to restore the preserved ones of Israel;
I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles,
That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’”

And then consider the Apostle Paul’s statement regarding the church in Acts 13:

On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. ⁴⁵But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. ⁴⁶Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷For so the Lord has commanded us:

***‘I have set you as a light to the Gentiles,
That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.’”***

⁴⁸Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. (Act 13:44 NKJ)

Here we read that the apostle Paul applied Isaiah 49:6 to be a prophecy of the church bringing the gospel to the Gentiles. Now, not only is Paul’s use of this verse being applied to the New Testament church of Jesus

⁴ That this is to be understood as speaking of Jesus Christ as the Faithful Servant who was to perform where Israel had failed is clear from the consideration of several passages: Exodus 4:22; Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2:14, 15 and Matthew 12:15ff.

⁵ E.g. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha*, pp. 883f.

Christ a proof text that the New Testament Church is eschatological Israel, but it also shows the church to be in close association, or even in identity with the “Servant” in this Second Servant Song of Isaiah 49. In the light of Paul’s inspired application of this verse, I believe that it is best not to see the Servant as either the Lord Jesus or the Church exclusively, but rather, it speaks of the Lord Jesus and what He accomplished through His Church, that is to bring the light of the knowledge of God in the Gospel to the Gentile world. And so, we may first consider the servant as Christ, but second, with some application to the church and its mission.

Let us begin to work through our passage. First, we may consider:

I. The Calling of the Servant (49:1)

*“Listen, O coastlands, to Me,
And take heed, you peoples from afar!
The LORD has called Me from the womb;
From the matrix of My mother He has made mention of My name.*

The Servant addresses the Gentile lands regarding God’s plan to use Him to bring them salvation. The Servant announces to the Gentiles—“O coastlands”, that God’s purpose for this servant, one ordained from old, is to bring them to salvation. It is suggested here at the outset that the Gentiles, who are far from Jehovah, strangers of the commonwealth and the covenants, are going to have a part in God’s plan for His Servant’s work.

The close relationship of the Servant with the Father is seen, and the unique purpose for the Servant is suggested—“The LORD called me from the womb.” Even from the birth of the Servant, God had His purposes centered in Him. It was God that had named Him, in other words, God’s favor was upon Him from the beginning and He was regarded as a Son by God Who had named Him. The Gentiles should listen to this Servant because He stands in unique relationship with God almighty and God had called Him to bring His blessing of salvation to them.

II. The Equipping of the Servant (49:2)

*²And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword;
In the shadow of His hand He has hidden Me,
And made Me a polished shaft;
In His quiver He has hidden Me.”*

Here we read further reasons that the Gentiles should listen to this Servant:

1. He is equipped with authority to execute judgment-- “*And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword.*” What the Servant says is true and final. No process of appeal can be made after He renders a verdict. His Word goes forth with power, which none can resist or thwart. What He says may not be pleasant to the hearers. It may cut like a sword cuts -- piercing, dividing, flaying, laying bare thoughts and intents of the heart. “There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him” (Heb. 4:12). His word will overcome all obstacles, as a mighty battle sword in that “it cuts asunder the bonds which unite his enemies against Him.” This metaphor speaks of His unlimited and sovereign power. What He decrees, comes to pass. When He wields the sword of His Word, He accomplishes His purposes. With His “sword”, or His “Word”, He brings forth judgment upon His enemies, particularly those who would afflict His people, and His Word as a sword thereby delivers His people from their captivity and misery (in sin).

This imagery of His mouth like a sharp sword is applied to the risen and glorified Lord Jesus in the New Testament. We read of the apostle John seeing Jesus on the island of Patmos:

¹⁰I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, ¹¹saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea." ¹²Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. ¹⁴His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; ¹⁵His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; ¹⁶He had in His right hand seven stars, *out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword*, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. (Rev. 1:110-16)

We also read of the description of our Lord's Second Coming in Revelation 19:

¹¹Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. ¹²His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. ¹³He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. ¹⁴And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. ¹⁵*Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations.* And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. ¹⁶ And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. (Rev. 19:11-16)

And so, we see that this Servant is equipped with **authority to execute judgment.** **But we also see that...**

2. He is protected by God Himself in His work -- *"In the shadow of His hand He has hidden Me."* The Servant is the object of God's favor and delight. God sees to it that His servant will prosper in His work. It is God the Father who is assuring that His will would be accomplished through His Servant. To be in the shadow of God's hand indicates that God is watching over and protecting His Servant even while He is accomplishing the work that God had given Him.

3. But further, the Servant is the instrument of God Himself -- *And made Me a polished shaft; In His quiver He has hidden Me.*" This speaks of the fact that God has His Servant in reserve to bring Him out as He would draw an arrow when needed. He is as a "shaft" in a quiver, one that is available to God to be drawn at will to accomplish His purpose. It is an arrow with a "polished" shaft. It is an arrow which will fly straight, pierce deeply, accomplishing all for which that God sends it.

4. He is ready to be used of God in God's own time -- *"In His quiver He has hidden Me."* And so we see that the Servant has an understanding that He is held in reserve until the appropriate time, when He will fly forth from Jehovah's bow to vanquish His enemies. In God's own time God Himself uses His servant as a weapon to bring forth success and victory to His cause, that being the judgment of His enemies and the salvation of His people.

III. The Mission of the Servant (49:3-6)

1. The Servant commissioned (49:3)

³*"And He said to me,
'You are My servant, O Israel,
In whom I will be glorified.'*

Some say that the servant must be the nation Israel based on this verse. But we have already seen that the Servant is distinguished from the nation Israel in verse 5. The Lord Jesus is here named "Israel" in the sense that He, as a Prince, is one who has prevailed with God. We read that this is the meaning of the name, "Israel" when God renamed Jacob, Israel. Here is the account:

Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. ²⁵Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. ²⁶And He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks."

But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!"

²⁷So He said to him, "What *is* your name?"

He said, "Jacob."

²⁸And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed." (Gen. 32:24-28)

We read in Isaiah 49:3 that the Servant's mission is ultimately to bring glory to God, to be one in which the glory of God is displayed. God declared:

*'You are My servant, O Israel,
In whom I will be glorified.'*

In the Servant and His work the greatness of God is seen. And in Christ, of course, all of God's attributes are seen, for "it pleased God that in Christ should all the fullness of the godhead dwell bodily." And in Christ all of the attributes of God are manifested to His people in bringing them salvation--His love, goodness, meekness, mercy, but also is wisdom, power, justice, and His wrath. All of the divine perfections are seen in Christ.

2. The Servant's frustration, yet expressed confidence in Jehovah (49:4)

*⁴Then I said, 'I have labored in vain,
I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain;
Yet surely my just reward is with the LORD,
And my work with my God.'*

Some believe that this must refer to the prophet Isaiah as God's servant, rather than the promised Messiah. For it seems to describe a sense of helplessness and discouragement on the part of the servant. But how can this be said of our Lord Jesus? But I would say that we have before us here a verse that speaks very graphically of the heart of our Lord Jesus when he ministered in the days of his flesh. There were great victories, people were healed, saved, delivered from Satan's power. But there was much cause of frustration for our Lord--rejection, persecution, ignorance and failure on the part of his followers. It was largely a time of sowing, not reaping. Many of the successes were of ephemeral nature, apparent gains, which seemed to have reverse effects.

We will see that a theme will be emerging that success in bringing about God's plan involves going through suffering. Here is the first hint of that. Suffering precedes glory. Our Lord was a "man of sorrows acquainted with grief." Our Lord exercised much patience in His waiting on the Father's timing for harvest. We see here the confidence and patience of our Lord expressed.

This should be an encouragement to all of the Lord's servants. Today may be the day of sowing. Today we have the need for patience and faith, as we wait on God's timing for when the harvest will come. The need for the day is faithfulness, both to one's calling and to the Word of God.

IV. The Servant's Work (49:7-13)

In this section we see the reconciling work of the Servant detailed. The themes of the first six verses are expanded here.

1. The Servant will be served (49:7)

*Thus says the LORD,
The Redeemer of Israel, their Holy One,
To Him whom man despises,
To Him whom the nation abhors,
To the Servant of rulers:
“Kings shall see and arise,
Princes also shall worship,
Because of the LORD who is faithful,
The Holy One of Israel;
And He has chosen You.”*

God addresses His Servant. Here we see that His Servant that He is God’s choice Servant. God would assure that His Servant would gain total victory over the nations. God is speaking here, “Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, their Holy One.” God is described as:

- 1) “*Redeemer of Israel*”, which emphasizes the work of salvation that God achieves through His servant;
- 2) “*The Holy One*”, emphasizing the judgment that He performs. He redeems His people, but He judges those who are not His people.

By the way, people generally want to hear about the first title of God, but they would just as soon not here about the second. “It is too harsh, too negative, too exclusive, too divisive to speak of God as holy. But it’s here. God has a two-fold title. He is the Redeemer of Israel and the Holy One.

God addressed the Servant—“*To Him whom man despises, to Him whom the nation abhors.*” It would seem that nothing testifies so clearly to the utter depravity of man than their hatred of the One who is the object of God’s supreme favor. He is adored by the Father, but abhorred by the nation. He comes to save people, they hate Him when He comes. Nevertheless God would cause His Servant to ascend above the kings and kingdoms of the world. We read, “*Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel; and He has chosen You.*” Upon the resurrection and ascension of our Lord He was exalted above the kings of the earth. They all are subject to Him. One day they all will come and bow the knee and confess that this is so.

2. The Servant will be Assisted (49:8-9)

⁸*Thus says the LORD:*

*“In an acceptable time I have heard You,
And in the day of salvation I have helped You;
I will preserve You and give You
As a covenant to the people,
To restore the earth (“land” in the ESV),
To cause them to inherit the desolate heritages;
⁹That You may say to the prisoners, ‘Go forth,’
To those who are in darkness, ‘Show yourselves.’*

Again, God addresses the Servant. God stands with and assists His Servant in the task of bringing salvation to His people. The Servant had cried out to God, and God heard Him. cf. Heb. 5:7; John 11:42.

Here we see that “Servant” Himself is the covenant of the people. In other words, the Servant stands as the basis on which God would have a relationship with His people. So Jesus Christ is our covenant. “This is the covenant in my blood.” said the Lord Jesus.

But the question might be asked of **verse 8**, “If this speaks of the Servant restoring the ‘earth’ or the ‘land’, why did not the Lord restore the land? It must be speaking of a future millennium.” This is a difficult issue, admittedly, but the meaning of the “land” is a complex one. Consider the various ideas conveyed by the term “land”:

- 1) The Promised Land was the place where God met with His people, like He did in Eden.
- 2) The Israelites being promised salvation and a renewed covenant would not have been able to conceive of such a thing apart from the Promised Land. To raise their hopes and expectations of salvation the “land” would have to be brought into view.
- 3) The land in the NT “becomes” the whole earth (cf. Heb. 11)
- 4) The New Heavens and earth become the “Promised Land” and restored “Eden” in the eternal state.
- 5) One of the great theological difficulties the early church had to work through was the role of the land. Stephen was stoned over it, and Paul was persecuted.
- 6) Because salvation itself is “spiritualized” in the OT, so is the entire idea of journey to the Promised Land--heaven. Christians are currently journeying to the New Jerusalem.

We next read that the Servant will affect the “release” or deliverance of His people from bondage. Here we have a metaphor, couched in terms of a return of God’s people from exile in Babylon (6th c. BC), in which the salvation of the Servant’s people is depicted. This is what our Lord Jesus did for us when He brought us to experience His salvation. Here is **Isaiah 49:9a**:

*That You may say to the prisoners, ‘Go forth,’
To those who are in darkness, ‘Show yourselves.’*

The Servant both announces and brings salvation to His own. His people are as slaves being delivered from captivity. There we see the full salvation in the work of the Lord Jesus on behalf of His people.

3. The Servant’s people will be assisted (49:9b-13)

*Along the roads they will feed,
And their pasture will be on all bare heights.*

¹⁰*They shall neither hunger nor thirst,
Neither heat nor sun shall strike them;
For He who has mercy on them will lead them,
Even by the springs of water He will guide them.*

¹¹*I will make each of My mountains a road,
And My highways shall be elevated.*

¹²*Surely these shall come from afar;
Look! Those from the north and the west,
And these from the land of Sinim.”*

¹³*Sing, O heavens!
Be joyful, O earth!
And break out in singing, O mountains!
For the LORD has comforted His people,
And will have mercy on His afflicted.*

We see in verse 9b a description of their “return” to the Lord. The people of God are on their pilgrimage to return to Mount Zion where they would be join with all of God’s people before their Savior. (Cf. Hebrews 12:ff).

We see in **verse 10** that the Servant leads His people as a shepherd leads his flock back to the fold. He assures their journey will be successful. He will care for them throughout their journey. So our Good Shepherd guides us even in this fashion today, directing us to glory.

In **verse 11** we see that because God is the Lord of the earth, He is able to assist them in their journey unto Him. He can speak of the mountains as “My mountains.” He will see to it that the creation will assist His people in making their destination.

And then in **verse 12** we read that their return is described as they coming from all quarters. Again, a hint of Gentiles participating in this gathering. Sinim may be a region in the extreme south of Egypt.

In verse 13 we read that all of creation is to rejoice over the salvation of God’s people. God has comforted His people and He will yet comfort them. He has released them from their bondage and He will yet bring them to their destination.

And so, in this Servant Song set before us, we are made privy to the purpose of God for calling and equipping the Promised Messiah. God had called Him not only to save a mere remnant of Jews through His Servant, but God purposed to expand the work of His salvation to encompass the world. Because of the Servant’s faithfulness to do all the will of God, God promised to establish His Kingdom that would encompass many Gentiles from all over the world. These Gentiles, too, would “all upon the Lord and be saved”, for God intended to greatly bless His Servant with a people comprising believers from every tongue and nation.

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,
And to present you faultless
Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,
To God our Savior, Who alone is wise,
Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power,
Both now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24f)

Outline of Isaiah 40-66 SECTION THREE: ORACLES OF REDEMPTION AND CONSUMMATION

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