

Isaiah's Book of Consolation (Isaiah 40-55)
(#16) God Assures His People that He will Save Them unto Himself (49:14-26)

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

Let us turn to Isaiah 49. Today we will give our attention to verses 14-26.

Last Lord's Day we considered the prophecy of the Second Servant Song of Isaiah 49:1-13. This Servant is the Lord Jesus.¹ God raised up Jesus as His Servant to do what his servant, the nation of Israel, had failed to do. Jesus Christ would bring the light of God's glory of salvation to the Gentile world (49:6). But further, God raised up His Servant to do for Israel, what Israel could not do for itself. Israel could not save itself from sin. God raised up Jesus Christ to be His faithful Servant—the true Israel—who would redeem a remnant of lost and condemned Israel, restoring His people unto Himself. But again, 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 Gentile 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 "call upon the Lord and be saved", for God intended to bless greatly His Servant with a people comprising believers from every tongue and nation. Thus we see this "Servant of the Lord", the Messiah, who is also called "Israel", fulfilling what the nation of Israel had failed to do. Through His Church, which is the Israel of God, Jesus Christ, the Servant of the Lord has shown forth the glory of God to the Gentile world, His kingdom encompassing people all nations. Through Jesus Christ all the nations of the earth are blessed.

In the passage before us today, Isaiah 49:14-26, we read of God's love for His people, in which He promises to restore them unto Himself, gathering them who were scattered throughout the world. Here "Zion" first speaks in verse 14. Then God responds with His promise to redeem and restore "Zion" unto Himself. In this passage God reassures His people who had not yet experienced the coming of the Messiah, that He cared for them and that He was committed to save them. Let us read our passage:

¹⁴But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me,
And my Lord has forgotten me."

¹⁵"Can a woman forget her nursing child,
And not have compassion on the son of her womb?
Surely they may forget,
Yet I will not forget you.

¹⁶See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands;
Your walls are continually before Me.

¹⁷Your sons shall make haste;
Your destroyers and those who laid you waste
Shall go away from you.

¹⁸Lift up your eyes, look around and see;
All these gather together and come to you.
As I live," says the LORD,

¹ 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.

“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.

²⁰The 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.’

²¹Then 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?’”

²²Thus 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;

²³Kings 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.”

²⁴Shall the prey be taken from the mighty,
Or the captives of the righteous be delivered?

²⁵But thus says the LORD:

“Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away,
And the prey of the terrible be delivered;
For I will contend with him who contends with you,
And I will save your children.

²⁶I will feed those who oppress you with their own flesh,
And they shall be drunk with their own blood as with sweet wine.
All flesh shall know
That I, the LORD, am your Savior,
And your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.”

In our effort to understand this portion of our Lord’s Word, we must at the outset identify the people who are described in our passage. There are varied opinions. Here are a few:

(1) Some argue that these people are to be understood exclusively to be returning Jewish people from Babylon. God is promising restoration to His exiles that they would return to their homeland from their Babylonian

captivity. This would place the fulfilment of these verses in the late 6th BC. The Persian King Cyrus would cause the Gentile nations over which he ruled to assist and finance the return of the Jewish exiles from Babylon to rebuild Jerusalem and its temple.²

(2) There are others who claim this is a prophecy of returning Jewish people to the Lord that will take place in the future, which, they say, will take place after the rapture of the church. They see this as a prophecy of the return of the Jewish people to the land and to the Lord during a future 7 year tribulation. The “kingdom” of the Messiah presented here is the millennial kingdom, a future 1,000 year millennial reign of the Messiah, who rules on David’s throne in restored Jerusalem.

This is the understanding of dispensationalists, who are premillennial in their understanding of the promised Messianic Kingdom. For example, **Charles Ryrie** wrote of this passage:

“The return of such a large group described in verses 9-21 must look beyond the relatively small group that returned from Babylon to the Second Coming of Christ” (Matthew 24:31).³

John MacArthur, for whom I have the greatest respect, also holds this position. He wrote these words on Isaiah 49:19-21 in his study Bible notes,

“After the faithful remnant is regathered in salvation, and Gentiles come to faith in the kingdom (i.e. a future millennial kingdom-Lars) through Jewish witnesses (i.e. Jewish witness during a future tribulation-Lars), millennial Jerusalem will not be large enough to contain all her inhabitants.”

Of 49:22 he wrote,

“The promise will find literal fulfilment as the nations of the world assist the faithful remnant of Israel to their land (14:2; 43:6; 60:4; 66:20). At the outset of the kingdom, when this regathering takes place, all the Gentiles will be believers in Jesus Christ who, by faith, escaped the wrath of the Lamb on the Day of the Lord entered the kingdom. Nations and leaders, that in history oppressed Israel, will humble themselves before the redeemed people of God’s covenant, and Israel will know that waiting on the Lord will not disappoint” (8:17; 40:31).⁴

In my opinion, the passage is a prophecy of God’s work of establishing and expanding the Kingdom of Jesus Christ in this church age. This prophecy of Isaiah foretells the return of the Jewish exiles from Babylon but then it looks forward to the first coming of Jesus Christ, when He established His kingdom upon His resurrection, redeemed a remnant of Jews into His kingdom (cf. Rom. 11:5). It was they, Jewish believers in Jesus Christ, who bore witness to the world resulting in an innumerable number of Gentiles coming to faith in Jesus the Lord, entering His kingdom (cf. Rom. 11:11f; 15:8f). I believe that the dispensational way to interpret this passage and many other messages of the prophets denies and strips God of His glory by passing over this church age as the promised kingdom age. It denies the present role of Jesus Christ ruling as the promised Son of David, which the apostles declared to have come into reality through the resurrection of Christ (cf. Peter’s proclamation on Pentecost in Acts 2). And so, my own view is the third view or understanding of the interpretation of this passage, which is the way that those who are reformed in their theology have understood this prophecy:

(3) There are those of us who understand “Zion” in this passage to refer to the elect of God who are redeemed through the work of the Servant of the Lord, even Jesus Christ, the Promised Messiah. “Zion” is a metaphor for the true people of God, comprised of both a remnant of Jewish people along with numerous Gentiles whom God saves from their sin unto Himself through the Messiah.

² Although we have seen that this is prophesied in Isaiah’s Book of Consolation, the prophet reveals God’s purpose beyond a temporal deliverance of Jewish people to the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom over which Jesus Christ rules.

³ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible*, expanded edition (Moody Press, 1994), p. 1088.

⁴ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson, 1997), p. 1032

This third way of interpreting the passage is reflected in the study notes of the **Reformation Study Bible**. On Isaiah 49:12, the note states that “the salvation of true Israel is in view here.”⁵ What is meant by “true Israel” would be both Jews and Gentiles who are redeemed by Christ. This would be in agreement with the New Testament which teaches that “they *are* not all Israel who *are* of Israel” (Rom. 9:6). “True Israel”, the Israel to whom the promise of salvation is given, are those who are circumcised of heart, the true circumcision (cf. Rom. 2:28f; Col. 2:11), who have the faith of Abraham and are therefore the “children of promise”, true inheritors of God’s promises to him (Gal. 3:29; 4:28). On the words, “too small” in Isaiah 49:19 the same Bible records in its footnote this comment:

The prophecy of vv. 19-21 looks beyond the return at the time of Cyrus. Nehemiah built only a small city. The prophecy is fulfilled in the new Israel, the Church (54:1-3; Zech. 2:4, 5).⁶

On Isaiah 49:23, their footnote reads,

“Nations that formerly oppressed Israel will serve Christ and His Church, the true Israel, and in doing so find salvation” (Gen. 12:3).

The second view, which was identified above--that of dispensationalism—is derived from a hermeneutical principle that they impose upon all of their interpretation of the Bible. They hold the wrong belief that God has two different peoples in history for which God has two different plans. They say that there are the Jews, which they call “Israel” exclusively, and then secondly there is the “church”, the believers of this age which is comprised of believers in Jesus Christ, whether they are Jewish or Gentile. It is believed by them and imposed upon all of their interpretation of the Old Testament passages that the New testament Church is never in view. These prophecies must not be applied to this church age, but rather to a regathered political and geographical nation of Jewish people, who will experience these promises after, they say, the church is raptured out of this world. These promises of the prophets, therefore, do not apply to the people of God in this church age, but to ethnic Jewish people in a future tribulation period and in a 1,000 year earthly Jewish millennium that follows the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. This is wrong, in my opinion. But it is the belief of most evangelicals today.

Let us now give our attention to the details of our passage. As we look at this section of Isaiah’s prophecy, we read of God addressing different reasons that His people believe that their case was hopeless, that they would never experience God’s salvation. In its historical context, this message would have been applied to the Jewish exiles in Babylon awaiting their deliverance that God had promised through the Persian King Cyrus, who had not yet come upon the scene. The people had little reason to expect their deliverance, when they considered their present circumstances. Nevertheless God will assure them of His commitment to His people and of His purpose to deliver them from their sin and restore them unto Himself. God promises a glorious future for them, when those who are redeemed by Him will have their kingdom enhanced and expanded by the Gentiles of the world. Again, we would argue that this is a prophecy of the coming of Jesus Christ the Messiah, the Servant of the Lord, who would restore His people, establish His kingdom, and then expand His kingdom throughout the world. We would assert that this has been realized and will continue to be realized until the end of history when Jesus Christ comes to judge the world.

We may discern these three divisions in the message that God gave to His people.

A. These people thought that God had forsaken them and then had forgotten them to a point that remedy was no longer possible. (49:14-18)

B. They had little visible evidence to suggest to them that God would deliver them (49:19-23)

⁵ R. C. Sproul, general editor, *The Reformation Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), p. 1113.

⁶ *Ibid.*

C. They thought themselves beyond recovery for their oppressors were too great (49:24-26)

Through this passage God set forth His Word of promise to His people that He had not forgotten them, that they are precious to Him, and that He would restore them unto Himself. God takes up the concerns of His people and assures them that they are no evidence that He has abandoned them. Although these words were given in the context of God's promise to restore exiled Jews to their land and restore them to a relationship with Him through the Messiah, these words have a broader scope and application. These words are directed to you and me, who may doubt God's favor for us and His purpose to deliver us from our sin. Here is the way in which **Matthew Henry** brought these words to bear upon Christians:

I. Nothing can furnish us with better matter for songs of praise and thanksgiving (v. 13). Let the whole creation join with us in songs of joy, for it shares with us in the benefits of the redemption, and all they can contribute to this sacred melody is little enough in return for such inestimable favours (Psa. 96:11). Let there be joy in heaven, and let the angels of God celebrate the praises of the great Redeemer; let the earth and the mountains, particularly the great ones of the earth, *be joyful*, and *break forth into singing, for the earnest expectation of the creature that waits for the glorious liberty of the children of God* (Rom. 8:19) shall now be *abundantly answered*. God's people are the blessings and ornaments of the world, and therefore let there be universal joy, for *God has comforted his people* that were in sorrow and *he will have mercy upon the afflicted* because of his compassion, upon *his* afflicted because of his covenant.

II. Nothing can furnish us with more convincing arguments to prove the most tender and affectionate concern God has for his church, and her interests and comforts.

1. The troubles of the church have given some occasion to question God's care and concern for it (v. 14). *Zion, in distress, said, The Lord has forsaken me, and looks after me no more; my Lord has forgotten me, and will look after me no more.* See how deplorable the case of God's people may be sometimes, such that they may seem to be forsaken and forgotten of their God; and at such a time their temptations may be alarmingly violent. Infidels, in their presumption, say *God has forsaken the earth* (Ezek. 8:12), and has *forgotten their sins* (Psa. 10:11). Weak believers, in their despondency, are ready to say, "God has forsaken his church and forgotten the sorrows of his people." But we have no more reason to question his promise and grace than we have to question his providence and justice. He is as sure a rewarder as he is a revenger. Away therefore with these distrusts and jealousies, which are the bane of friendship.

Here is a sample of how **John Calvin** applied this message of Isaiah 49 to Christians. These are his comments on Isaiah 49:14, which reads, "But Zion said, Jehovah hath forsaken me":

In order to magnify his grace the more, God complains that the hearts of the Jews were so narrow and close, that the road was almost shut against him, if he had not overcome their wicked thoughts by his great goodness. Yet at the same time he endeavors to correct this fault, that the deliverance which is offered, and, as it were, set before them, may be received by them with open hearts, and that, as he is willing to assist them, so they, on the other hand, may be prepared to cherish favorable hopes. Now, to us also this doctrine belongs; because almost all of us, when God delays his assistance, are fearfully distressed and tormented; for we think that he has forsaken and rejected us. Thus despair quickly creeps in, which must be opposed, that we may not be deprived of the grace of God. And indeed amidst these doubts our unbelief is manifested and exposed, by our not relying on the promises of God, so as to bear patiently either the chastisements by which God urges us to repentance, or the trials of faith by which he trains us to patience, or any afflictions by which he humbles us. Justly therefore does God remonstrate with the Jews for rejecting by wicked distrust the salvation offered to them, and not permitting themselves to receive assistance. Nor does he limit this accusation to a small number, but includes nearly the whole Church, in order to shew that he will be kind and bountiful toward the Jews beyond the measure of their faith, and that he even strives with them, that by his salvation he may break through all the hinderances by which they opposed him. Let each of us therefore beware of indulging or flattering ourselves in this matter; for the

Lord contends with the whole Church, for uttering speeches of this kind, which proceed from the fountain of distrust.⁷

As we examine in detail our passage, let us first consider:

A. The people thought that God had forsaken them and then had forgotten them to a point that remedy was no longer possible. (49:14-18)

We read **verse 14**,

***But Zion said, “The LORD has forsaken me,
And my Lord has forgotten me.”***

The Lord’s people, although promised a glorious future, nevertheless, felt themselves abandoned. Their land had been overrun by the Babylonians and their cities, including Jerusalem, had been destroyed. Their temple had been destroyed, which they viewed as enabling and assuring the presence and blessing of God for His people. They had been in exile in Babylon for many decades. Babylon seemed to be invincible. They thought that God had abandoned them. Their faith was weak due to the surroundings in which they existed.

But then God assured them in **verse 15**:

***“Can a woman forget her nursing child,
And not have compassion on the son of her womb?
Surely they may forget,
Yet I will not forget you.***

God reassured His people of His concern for them. As a nursing mother could not forget her infant, so God could not forget them. But even if a nursing mother could abandon her own child, which is highly unlikely, God would not abandon His people. *“God’s compassions to his people infinitely exceed those of the tenderest parents toward their children”*⁸

God assures that His (covenant) people are absolutely united to Him and are central to His purposes in history.

***¹⁶See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands;
Your walls are continually before Me.***

Here the Lord is addressing the people whom He purposed to redeem by His Servant, the coming Messiah. In other words, He is addressing those who will be saved from their sin and restored to a relationship with God. These are those of God’s elect, the ones that He has purposed to save. God has bound Himself in history to save unto Himself to be His people.

He employed a metaphor to depict His people. It is a reference to “Jerusalem”, or “Zion.” God was not addressing the physical city of Jerusalem, rather, He was addressing “Zion” as a metaphor for His elect, the ones redeemed by Jesus Christ.

This metaphor of “Zion”, as well as “Jerusalem”, as the representative of the elect people of God is commonly found and easily confirmed by Scripture. Geographically speaking, Zion was the name of one of the three hills on which the ancient city of Jerusalem was built. The other two hills were Ophel and Moriah. In time Zion became equated with the city of Jerusalem itself. But the names of both “Zion” and “Jerusalem” came to be terms used to describe the people of God, those who were in a saving covenant relationship with God. Consider Paul’s use of the term “Jerusalem” to refer to the people of God. We read in Galatians 4

⁷ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah* (Baker Book House, 1993), pp. 29f.

⁸ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*.

²²For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. ²³But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, ²⁴which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar-- ²⁵for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children-- ²⁶but *the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.* ²⁷For it is written:

“Rejoice, O barren,
You who do not bear!
Break forth and shout,
You who are not in labor!
For the desolate has many more children
Than she who has a husband.” (Gal 4:1 NKJ)

The writer to the Hebrews speaks of “Zion” as the people of God redeemed by Jesus Christ. He described those redeemed by Jesus Christ and who enjoy a covenant relationship with God as travelling in faith unto “Zion” the city in which the people of God dwell with God, in other words, heaven.

¹⁸For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, ¹⁹and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. ²⁰(For they could not endure what was commanded: “And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow.”) ²¹And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.”) ²²*But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God,* the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, ²³ to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, ²⁴to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel. (Heb. 12:18-24)

We see it all coming together in the Book of Revelation which presents “Jerusalem” as the church, that is, the city in which the redeemed of all of history, dwell with God in the new heavens and the new earth. We read in **Revelation 22:1ff** the vision that John saw:

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. ²Then I, John, saw *the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.* ³And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” (Rev 21:1 NKJ)

Notice that the “New Jerusalem” is depicted as a “bride”, which is of course a common emblem of the church. By the way, it should be noted that when we speak of the “church”, we are referring to all of the elect, both the Old Testament saints as well as New Testament Christians. All who are redeemed by Christ are in the Church. All true believers throughout all history are in His Church. We reject the common teaching that God has two peoples, Israel and the Church, for which God has two different destinies. God has had one plan of salvation, one promised kingdom, over which His Son reigns. All who will ever be in His kingdom are in His Church.

The identity of the Church as comprised of all the redeemed humanity throughout all of history is a stated doctrine of our statement of faith, the **Confession of Faith of 1689**:

The catholic or universal church, which (with respect to the internal work of the Spirit and truth of grace) may be called invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be

gathered into one, under Christ, the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

Our Lord taught that Gentile believers would have the same place of blessing as the Jewish patriarchs of the Old Testament. Our Lord said this upon the exercise of faith of a Roman centurion:

“Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! ¹¹And I say to you that *many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.* ¹²But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matt. 8:10-12)

Now it is true that the Church came into realization upon the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It had been a “mystery” in that the one body of Jewish redeemed and Gentiles redeemed would have a part. Paul wrote of this in Ephesians 3:1ff

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles-- ²if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, ³how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, ⁴by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), ⁵which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: *⁶that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body*, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel... (Eph. 3:1-6)

The Gentiles were not to be heirs of a different sort than the Jews, but heirs of the same body as the Jews. It was God’s promise in Christ through the gospel that brings them together into one body of the redeemed. Paul had stated this truth earlier in **Ephesians 2:11ff**.

¹¹Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh-- who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands-- ¹²that *at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise*, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off (i.e. Gentiles) have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

¹⁴For He Himself is our peace, *who has made both one*, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, ¹⁵having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. ¹⁷And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. ¹⁸For through Him *we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.* ¹⁹Now, therefore, *you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God*, ²⁰having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, ²¹in whom *the whole building*, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²²in whom *you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.* (Eph. 2:11-22)

This truth that the Church is comprised of all true believers may be confirmed when we look once again to the description of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 22. Again, the vision of John:

⁹Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, “Come, I will show you *the bride*, the Lamb’s wife.” ¹⁰And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, ¹¹having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. ¹²Also *she had a great and high wall with twelve gates*, and twelve angels at the gates, *and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:* ¹³three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west.

¹⁴Now *the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*

Here we see the one city, the New Jerusalem, which is identified as “the Bride”, which is a metaphor for the Church. The city has its gates named after the 12 tribes of Old Testament Israel. The city’s foundations are named after the New Testament 12 apostles. Here we see that the city of the New Jerusalem is the abiding place of both the Old Testament saints and the New Testament Christians.

When we consider what have just read, it is no difficulty for us to understand that when “Zion” as the people of God is set before us in Isaiah 49, that it refers to the people redeemed by the Servant, the Church. This is reasonable to conclude when the prophecy of the Servant of the Lord is set forth in verses 1 through 13, in which it is said that He would bring forth the light of god’s glory to the Gentiles (49:6), which the apostle Paul declared was fulfilled through taking the gospel to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 13:47).

That the prophecy of “Zion” of Isaiah 49 applies to the “Church” is also confirmed by considering what Peter wrote concerning the Old Testament prophets:

¹⁰Of this salvation (i.e. salvation through Jesus Christ) the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of *the grace that would come to you*, ¹¹searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. ¹²*To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven--* things which angels desire to look into. (1 Pet 1:10-12)

All of what we have said was to underscore the fact that the promises of God contained in Isaiah 49:14-26 are to be understood as God’s Word to you and me as Christians. The concern that God possessed and expressed in these verses was for you; you were on His heart, if you have been redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, as we look at Isaiah 49:14ff, we read that “Zion” is precious to the Lord. It is as though the name “Jerusalem” was carved into the palm of His hands. As one might, say, tie a thread about a finger to bring remembrance of a matter, it is as though God has carved your name in the palm of His hand, in that He will never forget you but always have you in mind with your best interests on His heart.

We read that the “walls” of Jerusalem were always in the thoughts of God. When Jerusalem was rebuilt after the Babylonian captivity, it was rebuilt by a remnant that God had caused to return from exile. We read in **verse 17**:

*¹⁷Your sons shall make haste;
Your destroyers and those who laid you waste
Shall go away from you.*

The Lord reveals His design for her. She shall be built. Those who would destroy her will be removed.

The Lord then tells His people to look at these (Gentiles) who had formerly sought to destroy them, but now we read of them in **verse 18**:

*¹⁸Lift 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.*

Here Jerusalem is likened to a bride upon which all focus their gaze. She will be the envy of all others for she will have herself a preeminent place in God’s heart.

B. But His people had little visible evidence to suggest to them that God would deliver them (49:19-23)

Their land lay in waste and the inhabitants are few. It is as though they thought, “It’s too late, I’ve forfeited any chance of recovery.” We read in **verses 19 and 20**:

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.
²⁰The 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.’*

Because the land was in such a desolate state, they would not be comforted, so God said to them that that they will once again be greatly populated, and those who formerly decimated their population, would be removed far away. The idea of being “too cramped for the inhabitants” from today’s perspective is seen as a curse, for them, it was a sign of God’s blessing.

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?’”**

There will be amazement at their prosperity as a people. Given their former condition, how could anyone have imagined that this could have happened?

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;*

God will see to it that they are redeemed from the nations. “My standard” would be a signal flag set on a hill through which a commander would issue directives to his troops as they are waging warfare in the valley. The nations will turn back the remnant of Israel to their own land. This was a prophecy of the return to the land of the Jews from Babylon and the salvation that they would experience upon their return. The very nations that had sought to separate them from the land will be the ones bringing them back.

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.”*

They would be the honored people of the world. All will do obeisance to them. The kings of other nations will become their protectors. It will be such a state of things that are in contrast to what they were

currently experiencing, that they would have to attribute it to none other than the Lord Who worked on their behalf.

C. They thought themselves beyond recovery for their oppressors were too great (49:24-26)

We read in **verse 24**:

***²⁴Shall the prey be taken from the mighty,
Or the captives of the righteous be delivered?***

The people provide yet another possible objection as to why they could anticipate God's blessing upon them. They are currently held captive by powerful and hostile forces which have no intention of letting them go. We then read in **verse 25**:

²⁵But thus says the LORD:

***“Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away,
And the prey of the terrible be delivered;
For I will contend with him who contends with you,
And I will save your children.***

But God promises their rescue. God Himself will take it personally and come to fight against those ones who would afflict His people.

***²⁶I will feed those who oppress you with their own flesh,
And they shall be drunk with their own blood as with sweet wine.
All flesh shall know
That I, the LORD, am your Savior,
And your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.”***

They shall be utterly defeated. Again, it will be done in such a way that the people of God will see that it was His hand that brought it to pass. God, their Redeemer, had intended to redeem them from slavery. He would see to it that His purposes are fulfilled.

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen. (Heb 13:1 NKJ)

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

I. The Book of the Consolation of Israel (Chs. 40-55)

- A. The Prophet is to Announce God's Coming (40:1-11)
- B. The Creator of the Universe (40:12-31)
- C. God Promises to Deliver His People from Babylon (41:1-29)
- D. The First Servant Song (42:1-9)
- E. Sing to the Lord a New Song (42:10-13)

- F. God declares His resolve to battle on behalf of His people (42:14-17)
- G. Israel, the Blind and Deaf Servant of God (42:18-25)
- H. God's Commitment to Save His People by His Grace (43:1-7)
- I. The Servant Israel is the Lord's Witness (43:8-13)
- J. The Redemption and Restoration of Israel from Babylon (43:14-44:8)
- K. Satire against Idolatry (44:9-20)
- L. Israel is Forgiven and Redeemed (44:21-23)
- M. God Commissions the Persian Emperor Cyrus to Deliver His People (44:24-45:13)
- N. The Conversion of the Nations (45:14-25)
- O. Worthless Idols vs. the Living God (46:1-13)
- P. The Defeat and Humiliation of Babylon Predicted (47:1-15)
- Q. Israel Refined and Redeemed (48:1-22)
- R. The Second Servant Song (49:1-13)
- S. God's Restoration of "Zion"--His People—Who are Redeemed by His Servant (49:14-26)
- T. God Assures His People that He will Save Them unto Himself (49:14-26)