

The Suffering Servant of the Lord – The Coming Messiah

Isaiah 49

Isaiah 49:1-7 - *“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. ² And 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.’*

⁴ *Then 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. ⁶ Indeed 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.”*

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, and princes also shall worship because of the Lord who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel; and He has chosen You.”*

Background Notes

Chapter 49 is not the first time that we have heard about “the servant of the Lord” in the book of Isaiah. In fact, we’ve seen that the term, “the Lord’s servant,” was used in several different ways in the book of Isaiah. It can refer to the nation of Israel, or the godly remnant of the nation, or to an individual that God used – such as Isaiah the prophet, or even Cyrus, the Persian king. But the primary use of the term “servant of the Lord” or “My servant” in Isaiah was in reference to the coming Messiah, the Lord Himself. In each case, the specific context determined the identity of the “servant of the Lord” or “My servant.”

So - who was “My Servant” in Isaiah 49?

Doctrinal Points

1. The Messiah is the Servant of the Lord.

If we were to read only the first three verses, we might jump to the conclusion that the servant of the Lord mentioned in this chapter was the nation of Israel. After all, verse 3 says, ‘*You are My servant, O Israel.*’ The nation of Israel was

certainly brought forth by the Lord, and named by the Lord (v1). The nation of Israel was to speak forth the truth of God (v2), to bring glory to God (v3), and to be a light to the Gentiles (v6).

However, the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 49 cannot be Israel, because the Servant was distinguished from the nation in verses 5-6. So we believe that the Servant of the Lord chapter 49 is the Messiah, the Lord Himself. In fact, this was the second of the four “Servant Songs” in Isaiah – all of them referring to the Messiah. The first Servant Song was in Isaiah 42. This is the second Servant Song.

So the entire chapter of Isaiah 49, including the early verses, referred to the Messiah. The whole world was to know about the coming Messiah. *“Listen, O coastlands, to Me, and take heed, you peoples from afar!” (v1).*

The Messiah was named by God before He was born. *“The Lord has called Me from the womb; from the matrix of My mother He has made mention of My name” (v1).* Do you remember what was revealed to Joseph in Matthew 1:21, before the birth of the Lord Jesus? *“And you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”*

The words of truth that the Messiah spoke would be like a sharp sword: *“And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword” (v2).*

“In the shadow of His hand He has hidden Me, and made Me a polished shaft. In His quiver He has hidden Me” (v2). The Lord’s humble and quiet advent was predicted in verse 2. He did not come to earth with a lot of fanfare and outward show. His deity and glory were largely sealed and hidden.

Then why was the Messiah called “My Servant Israel” (v3)? In the Hebrew language the name “Israel” means “Prince of God”! The Messiah would be the “ideal Israel” - the Israel that God meant the nation to be.

To the human eye, it seemed that the Messiah’s first coming ended in failure. He was rejected and crucified. But with His resurrection, God brought about justice and reward. *“Yet surely my just reward is with the Lord, and my work with my God” (v4).*

The second advent of the once-rejected Messiah was in view in verses 5-7. Israel will be restored, and she will become the light to the Gentiles that she was meant to be (v6). Then the Lord will be exalted and magnified before the whole world. *“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” (v7).* The Messiah is the Servant of the Lord.

2. The Messiah is the Savior of Israel

Isaiah 49:8-13 - *“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, to cause them to inherit the*

desolate heritages. ⁹ That 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. 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"

Verses 8 through 13 continued to look forward to the Messiahs' second coming. "In that day" He will bring salvation to Israel, He will confirm the new covenant with His people, and He will restore them to the land.

The return of the Jewish people from around the world to the land of Israel and the Messiah's kingdom was described in verses 9-12. In verse 12 especially notice that the Jewish people would **return from the west**. When they returned from their Babylonian captivity, they returned from the east - not the west, so the return from Babylon was not in view here.

"Sinim" (v12) may refer to upper Egypt, or maybe even China. In any case, this prophecy has not yet been fulfilled in history. This prophecy should **not** be "spiritualized" and applied to the Church today. This is a prophecy about the return of restored literal Israel in the future to the literal land of Israel, the millennial kingdom of Christ. At that time there will be great rejoicing (v13)!

Isaiah 48:14-26 - "But 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. ¹⁶ See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands. Your walls are continually before Me. ¹⁷ Your sons shall make haste; Your destroyers and those who laid you waste shall go away from you.

¹⁸ Lift 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.

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.

²⁰ The 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.' 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?'"

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 people. They shall bring your sons in their arms, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders. ²³ Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mother. 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."

²⁴ Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the captives of the righteous be delivered? ²⁵ But 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. ²⁶ I 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.”

Verses 14-16 would be especially encouraging to the Jewish people when they would read this prophecy during their Babylonian captivity.

Verses 17-21 certainly looked beyond the return of the Jews from their Babylonian captivity – it looked ahead to the return of the Jewish people to the Land and to the Lord in the far future. The peace and the population explosion described in those verses have never yet come to pass - but they will happen in the future, when Israel is restored.

It's tempting to say that verse 22 has been fulfilled by modern Gentile nations that are pro-Israel and have assisted the Jewish people to return to their ancient homeland - even by airlift. But this is just the beginning of the fulfillment of this prophecy!

When the Lord returns, the times of the Gentiles will be over. Then the tables will be turned (v23). Israel will be exalted and over the nations. *“Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mother. 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.”*

Verses 24-26 promised that the Lord would deliver Israel from the Babylonian captivity - and from **all** their enemies - **past, present, and future**. The Messiah is the Savior of Israel.

Practical Application

Praise the Lord for “the palms of His hands”!

In verse 16 the Lord said to His people, Israel, *“See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands.”* Being inscribed on the palms of the Lord’s hands means both **ownership of His people** and **having His people before Him at all times!** What a wonderful position!

It's hard not think of the nail-scarred hands of our Lord Jesus when we read verses 15-16 – and that’s certainly an appropriate application. His nail-pierced hands remind us of His amazing and sacrificial love for us. Those nail-scarred hands will remind us of what it cost the Lord to save us – **forever!**

Praise the Lord for “the palms of His hands”!