



Highlights From the Book of Isaiah

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Outline of the Book of Isaiah

- I. Warning of Judgment on Israel (1-39)
- II. The Promise of Future Hope in the New Jerusalem (40-66)
 - A. The Announcement of Hope (40-48)
 - B. The Servant Fulfills God's Mission (49-55)
 - C. Everlasting Deliverance and Everlasting Judgment (56-66)

The Mission of the LORD's Servant (49:1-13)

- With this chapter a new section of the book begins.
- While the language of captivity and deliverance continues, neither Cyrus nor Babylon is mentioned again.
- While “*servant*” continues to be a dominant theme, it is no longer the passive servant of chapters 40-48 (i.e., the nation of Israel) whose mere existence is to be evidence of the helplessness of the gods.
- Rather, it is that “*servant*” who was introduced in Isaiah 42:1-9, who will be God’s agent to bring his (new) covenant to the people and his justice to the nations.

The Mission of the LORD's Servant (49:1-13)

- In subtle but nevertheless clear ways the focus has shifted from the *physical* captivity of the Judeans to the *moral and spiritual* captivity of Israel and the whole world.
- God has said that the lives of his servants, Israel, would be the evidence to the world that he alone is the Holy One.
- But how is that possible?
- Will God simply *ignore* the sin that caused the nation of Israel to go into slavery in the first place?

The Mission of the LORD's Servant (49:1-13)

- How will the blind, deaf, rebellious servant Israel be any different just because Cyrus has sent them home?
- The answer is: *the* Servant, *ideal* Israel, will be *on behalf of* Israel what Israel could *never* be on her own.
- God's mighty arm is about to be revealed.
- But instead of being a jackbooted destroyer of the enemies of the nation, *this "servant"* will be a tender shoot (cf. 6:13; 11:1), an apparent failure at first (cf. 49:4), but he will atone for the sins of the nation and of the world.

The Mission of the LORD's Servant (49:1-13)

- I have divided today's text as follows:
 - 49:1-6 – The Servant Speaks of His *Two-Fold* Task to:
 - Restore *Israel*
 - Bring Salvation to the *World*
 - 49:7-13 – Two Further Oracles Concerning the Servant:
 - 49:7 – *This is what the LORD... says...*
 - 49:8-13 – *This is what the LORD says...*

The Servants Two-Fold Task: Israel and the World (49:1-6)

49:1 Listen to me, you coastlands! Pay attention, you people who live far away! The LORD summoned me from birth; he commissioned me when my mother brought me into the world. ² He made my mouth like a sharp sword, he hid me in the hollow of his hand; he made me like a sharpened arrow, he hid me in his quiver. ³ He said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, through whom I will reveal my splendor."

The Servants Two-Fold Task: Israel and the World (49:1-6)

49:4 But I thought, “I have worked in vain; I have expended my energy for absolutely nothing.” But the LORD will vindicate me; my God will reward me.⁵ So now the LORD says, the one who formed me from birth to be his servant – he did this to restore Jacob to himself, so that Israel might be gathered to him; and I will be honored in the LORD’s sight, for my God is my source of strength –⁶ he says, “Is it too insignificant a task for you to be my servant, to reestablish the tribes of Jacob, and restore the remnant of Israel? I will make you a light to the nations, so you can bring my deliverance to the remote regions of the earth.”

The Servants Two-Fold Task: Israel and the World (49:1-6)

- In chapters 41-48, with only one exception, the emphasis was on the servanthood of the *nation of Israel*.
- For the most part, all of those references were encouraging a blind and rebellious Israel to believe that God had *not* cast them off and that God would *use them* as evidence in his case against the idols.
- The *one exception* was the reference to “*servant*” in Isaiah 42:1-9.
- *There* the Servant was announced as the obedient One “*establishing [God’s] justice on the earth*” and who would be “*a covenant mediator for people.*” (42:4,6)
- This Servant was *not* the nation of Israel, but Israel’s ultimate Deliverer, introduced there before focusing again on the more immediate problem of Israel’s captivity in Babylon.

The Servants Two-Fold Task: Israel and the World (49:1-6)

- But now that the problem of the Exile has been thoroughly dealt with, Isaiah will address the *second* problem, the one that only *the “servant”* can solve.
- We can almost imagine Isaiah’s original readers saying, as they come to the end of what is now chapter 48, “Alright, we’re listening and we believe that God can and will restore us from Babylon by means of Cyrus. But who can restore us to God? That’s the *real* problem.”
- Isaiah’s answer to that question is given in these verses.
- These verses *begin* with a *continuation* of the call to “*Listen*” (cf. 46:3)
- The prophet is continuing to unfold God’s plan, which calls for yet a further obedient, believing response.
- But here it is the Servant *himself* who calls for the *entire world* to listen to what he is going to reveal.

The Servant's Two-Fold Task: Israel and the World (49:1-6)

- The Servant has no doubt of his call (49:1), his divine enablement (49:2-3), or his ultimate vindication (49:4).
- He has been “*summoned... from birth... commissioned... when [his] mother brought [him] into the world*” (49:1) – so his task was no afterthought.
- When I read this, I can’t help but think of what it says about Christ’s [i.e. *the servant’s*] birth in the book of Hebrews:
 - *So when [Jesus] came into the world, he said, “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me. Whole burnt offerings and sin-offerings you took no delight in.” Then I said, “Here I am: I have come– it is written of me in the scroll of the book– to do your will, O God.”* (Heb 10:5-7)

The Servant's Two-Fold Task: Israel and the World (49:1-6)

- Furthermore, the servant is *perfectly suited* for the task God has given him.
- Like a “*sharp sword*” or a “*sharpened arrow*” (49:2) he will accomplish *exactly* what God wants at the appointed time.
- There is no hint of blindness or rebellion in *this* Servant.
- Even though his servanthood *at first* seems futile: “*But I thought, ‘I have worked in vain’*” (49:4), he knows that ultimately God will not fail him: “*But the LORD will vindicate me; my God will reward me.*” (49:4)

The Servants Two-Fold Task: Israel and the World (49:1-6)

- The contrast between *the “servant”* and the *nation of Israel* as “*servant*” is obvious here.
- But if that is so, why in 49:3 is the Servant *called “Israel”*?
 - *He said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, through whom I will reveal my splendor.*
- This question has raised a great deal of controversy, among commentaries.
- In general, there are *three* options. Either the “*servant*” here is:
 - The *actual* nation of Israel,
 - A prophet (most likely Isaiah or perhaps some other prophet),
 - An *ideal* Israel – what the nation *should* have been but never *could* be.

The Servants Two-Fold Task: Israel and the World (49:1-6)

- As we have already noted, the descriptions given here of *the* servant do not match what is said of the *nation of Israel*.
- But if there is any further doubt that the “*servant*” spoken of here does *not* refer to the nation of Israel, verses 5-6 settle the issue:
 - *his servant... did this to restore Jacob to himself, so that Israel might be gathered to him... Is it too insignificant a task for you to be my servant, to reestablish the tribes of Jacob, and restore the remnant of Israel?* (Isaiah 49:5-6)
- If the servant *restores* Israel to God, then the servant can't *be* Israel.

The Servants Two-Fold Task: Israel and the World (49:1-6)

- As far as the servant being one of the prophets (like Isaiah), the language is far too sweeping to be applied to any ordinary human being.
- This leaves only the third option: the Messiah will be “Israel” as Israel was *meant* to be.
- He will “*reveal*” the Lord’s “*splendor*” (49:3) as an obedient Israel might have done, and in so doing, he will be the One who will “*restore the remnant of Israel*” to the Lord.

The Servant's Two-Fold Task: Israel and the World (49:1-6)

- Just exactly *how* that will be done is not spelled out here – but it will be a few chapters from now.
- Here we see that the servant's work will be so far-reaching that it will reach to "*the nations*", including even the "*remote regions of the earth*" in its scope (49:6).
- Specifically, the servant will "*bring [God's] deliverance to the remote regions of the earth*" (49:6) which means he will bring the *divine order* into the world that God intended
- And for God to bring about that divine order it is necessary for him to *save* the world from the bondage that sin holds over it.

Two Oracles Concerning the Servant

The *First Oracle* (49:7)

49:7 This is what the LORD, the [Redeemer] of Israel, their Holy One, says to the one who is despised and rejected by [the nation], a servant of rulers: “Kings will see and rise in respect, princes will bow down, because of the faithful LORD, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen you.”

The First Oracle (49:7)

- This oracle further explains the earlier message concerning the “*servant*”.
- This message is spoken by the LORD who is called the “*Redeemer of Israel*” and “*their Holy One*”, two titles that reflect God’s intimate relationship to his people.
- The oracle is directed **to** the “*servant*”, who is described in terms of several **seemingly** contradictory statements:
 - He was “*despised and rejected*” by “**the nation**” [singular] of Israel, but “*kings*” and “*princes*” from **other** nations will honor him;
 - He is said to be a “*servant of rulers*”, and yet “*kings will see and rise in respect*” and “*princes will bow down*” to him.

The First Oracle (49:7)

- The phrase the “*servant of rulers*” does not seem to fit with the rest of the sentence: if kings and princes will show him *honor*, how can he be a *servant* to them?
- This is one of the puzzling aspects of the servant.
- He will serve and aid leaders, but *not* in a way they would expect: he will serve them by dying for their sins, as we will see later in 53:4-9.
- God has chosen the servant to accomplish his goals.
- He will succeed and be honored by the nations because of the LORD’s faithfulness.
- This promise is confirmed by the LORD, “*the Holy One of Israel*”, who is “*faithful*”.
- Therefore Israel need not fear that their deliverance *will* take place.

Two Oracles Concerning the Servant

The Second Oracle (49:8-13)

49:8 This is what the LORD says: "At the time I decide to show my favor, I will respond to you; in the day of deliverance I will help you; I will protect you and make you a covenant mediator for people, to rebuild the land and to reassign the desolate property. ^{9a} You will say to the prisoners, 'Come out,' and to those who are in dark dungeons, 'Emerge.'

Two Oracles Concerning the Servant

The Second Oracle (49:8-13)

49:9b They will graze beside the roads; on all the slopes they will find pasture.¹⁰ They will not be hungry or thirsty; the sun's oppressive heat will not beat down on them, for one who has compassion on them will guide them; he will lead them to springs of water.¹¹ I will make all my mountains into a road; I will construct my roadways."

Two Oracles Concerning the Servant

The Second Oracle (49:8-13)

49:12 Look, they come from far away! Look, some come from the north and west, and others from the land of Sinim. ¹³ Shout for joy, O sky! Rejoice, O earth! Let the mountains give a joyful shout! For the LORD consoles his people and shows compassion to the oppressed.

The Second Oracle (49:8-13)

- In this *second* oracle, which opens again with the familiar phrase “*This is what the LORD says...*”, the LORD assures the servant that his mission will be successfully accomplished *with divine assistance*: “*I will help you... I will protect you*” (49:8).
- This future time when the LORD will “*protect*” the servant and “*help*” him accomplish his mission is referred to here as a “*time*” when the LORD will “*show [his] favor*” (49:8).
- This future “*time*” of the LORD’s favor is **further** described here as “*the day of deliverance*” which could **also** be translated “*the day of salvation*”
- During this time of the LORD’s favor, this day of salvation, we are told that the servant will, among other things:
 - “*rebuild the land and reassign the desolate property*” (49:8)
 - “*say to the prisoners, ‘Come out’ and to those who are in dark dungeons, ‘Emerge.’*” (49:9a)

The Second Oracle (49:8-13)

- I believe this same future time period is described *again* a little *later* in the book of Isaiah where we see much of the same wording that we saw in Isaiah 49:8-9 (with some minor differences):
 - *the LORD has... commissioned me [i.e. the servant] to... decree the release of captives, and the freeing of prisoners, to announce the year when the LORD will show his favor...* (Isaiah 61:1-2)
- This future time being prophesied by these two texts in Isaiah was also *foreshadowed* in the Law by the “*Year of Jubilee*” (Lev 25:8ff.) – that time every 50 years when the slaves in the nation of Israel were freed, and inheritances restored to the rightful tenants under God’s ownership.
- So when is this future time (or year) of the LORD’s favor, this day of salvation, this year of jubilee?
- Well, at one level, in the immediate context of Isaiah, it would be referring to that future time when the Israelites were freed from Babylonian exile and restored to their land in Palestine.
- But we have at least two New Testament passages that give us the *ultimate* fulfillment of this day of the LORD’s favor.

The Second Oracle (49:8-13)

- In Luke 4 we see where Jesus reads this very text from Isaiah 61:1-2. Notice what *he* says about it:
 - *Now Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written [in Isaiah 61:1-2]:*
 - *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and the regaining of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*
 - *Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to tell them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled even as you heard it being read."*
(Luke 4:16-21)
- So according to Jesus, Isaiah 61:1-2, which is an **echo** of Isaiah 49:8-9, was fulfilled during his earthly ministry.

The Second Oracle (49:8-13)

- Likewise, in 2 Cor 6:2 the Apostle Paul quotes a significant portion of Isaiah 49:8, almost verbatim, and goes on to interpret the “*day of deliverance*” or “*day of salvation*” spoken of there as the New Testament age in which he was living:
 - *Look, now is the acceptable time; look, now is the day of salvation!* (2 Cor 6:2b)
- As we continue to work our way through this oracle we will see many descriptions given of what the “*servant*” will do for the nation of Israel on the “*day of deliverance*” when he delivers them from the Babylonian captivity.
- But just as we saw in the *first* portion of this text, the physical descriptions given in this section are *ultimately* fulfilled *spiritually* by what the servant will do in delivering Israel *and the nations* from their bondage to sin.

Next Time

I plan for us to *continue* working our way through “The Mission of the LORD’s Servant” in **Isaiah 49:1-13**, picking up where we left off in 49:8.

When we finish working our way through the text, we will then take a look at several New Testament passages that give citations from this section of Isaiah:

- **A Light to the Nations** (Isaiah 49:6 cited in Luke 2:32, 24:47, and Acts 13:47)
- **At That Time, in the Day of Deliverance** (Isaiah 49:8 cited in 2 Cor 6:2)

Class Discussion Time



Class Discussion Time

- Do you find it exciting when to see in just **one** verse (Isaiah 49:8) an example of how **everything** in the Old Testament, while it served an important historical purpose in its own day, **ultimately** points to Jesus?
- In this case:
 - One of the requirements given in the Law of Moses (to set free the slaves and give back the land every 50 years in the Year of Jubilee) points to how we, who were in bondage to sin, have been set free by Christ's death on our behalf, and how he has won back the paradise that was lost by Adam and replaced it with a **heavenly** land.
 - The freeing of the Jewish exiles from captivity and their subsequent return from far-away Babylonia to the land of Israel points to how we Gentiles who once were exiled "*from the commonwealth of Israel... having no hope and without God in the world [and] who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*" (Eph 2:12-13)

Class Discussion Time

- I believe we live in a nation today that is badly in need of deliverance from the clutches of the evil Leftist political class.
- It is my desire that God would raise up another Cyrus, perhaps even someone who does not know God in a saving way, to lead us out of this mess.
- Are you with me on this?
- At the same I believe that, as in the days of Israel's Babylonian captivity, the **root** cause of our problem as a nation stems from the fact that the people of this nation have, in large numbers, **turned away** from God and need to **repent** and receive the provision God's servant, the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Are you with me on **that**?
- If so, what do **we** need to do to facilitate this desperately needed change on the part of so many living around us?