

Isaiah's Songs of the Servant
Part 2:

The Commission of the Servant in Isaiah 49:1-13

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In the first Servant song (Isa. 42:1-9) Yahweh conveyed a distant prophecy of His Servant who will bring salvation and establish a proper order on the entire earth.¹ The passage introduced the Servant and predicted His faithfulness in accomplishing the mission to which He was divinely called. Scarcely a hint was given of the pathway of suffering to be trodden by the Servant on the way to His completed mission. The task itself involved mediating a New Covenant with Israel and causing a just order to prevail on the whole Gentile world.

The second Servant song (Isa. 49: 1-13) brings out the same basic concepts as the first poem, though the establishment of a worldwide righteous order is not stressed. Instead greater emphasis is placed on the physical and spiritual restoration of the nation Israel. The primary new feature in the second song is the apparent initial failure of the Servant in His mission to Israel which brings about an expanded commission from Yahweh to bring salvation to the Gentiles.

The second Servant song begins a new division (49:1-57:21) in Isaiah's Book of Comfort (chaps. 40-66). It is noteworthy that this division also contains the remaining Servant songs (50:4-11; 52:13; 53:12). Contrary to much critical opinion,² the Servant songs seem to form the backbone of the structure of this division. Each song begins a cycle that culminates in a powerful message of salvation.³ For example, the

second song culminates in the proclamation of salvation to Israel regarding future restoration (49:14-26).

The message of the second song is that the rejected Servant will bring salvation to the Gentiles and ultimately will restore Israel to the land and to Yahweh. The passage emphasizes not only the Servant's expanded commission to the Gentiles but also His ultimate success in fulfilling His initial mission to Israel. Whereas Yahweh was the speaker throughout the first song (42:1-9), the initial strophe of the second song (49:1-6) is a prophetic report by the Servant, followed by two proclamations of salvation (v. 7; vv. 8-12) in which Yahweh addresses the Servant, climaxed by an eschatological hymn by the prophet (v. 13). The second Servant poem includes these facts: (1) The Servant reports to the nations that Yahweh has expanded His ministry to the Gentiles in view of his rejection by Israel (49:1-6). (2) Yahweh promises His Servant that He will bring to completion both the Gentile and Jewish aspects of the Servant's mission (49:7-12). (3) The prophet calls on all creation to praise Yahweh who thus comforts His people (49:13).

**The Servant Reports His Expanded Mission
to the Gentiles (49:1-6)**

¹Listen to me, you islands;
 here this you distant nations:
 Before I was born the LORD called me;
 from my birth he has made mention of my name.
²He made my mouth like a sharpened sword,
 in the shadow of his hand he hid me;
 he made me into a polished arrow
 and concealed me in his quiver.
³He said to me, "You are my servant,
 Israel, in whom I will display my splendor."
⁴But I said, "I have labored to no purpose;
 I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing.
 Yet what is due me is in the LORD's hand,
 and my reward is with my God."
⁵And now the LORD says—
 he who formed me in the womb to be his servant
 to bring Jacob back to him
 and gather Israel to himself,
 for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD
 and my God has been my strength—
⁶he says:
 "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant
 to restore the tribes of Jacob

and bring back those of Israel I have kept.
I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,
that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the
earth.”⁴

The Servant reports to the nations His expanded commission by Yahweh to minister to them in view of His rejection by Israel. Whybray thinks that the literary genre of this paragraph belongs to the “general category of the prophetic call narrative ...in which the prophet seeks to authenticate his claim to speak on God’s behalf”⁵ (cf. Amos 7:14-15). Muilenburg lists several points of similarity between the prophetic call of Jeremiah and this call of the Servant⁶ (cf. Jer. 1:5). Melugin, however, holds that “the poem does not make it clear whether it is the commissioning of a prophet or of a king or of some other kind of official.”⁷ Even if it can be demonstrated that the genre of the passage is the report of a prophet, Whybray is incorrect in maintaining that the Servant is “Deutero-Isaiah” himself.⁸ Rather, it must be contended with Blocher that:

...apart from the third Servant Song [Isa. 50:4-11], and the kindred prophecy of Isaiah 61, this kind of I-discourse is found nowhere else in the entire book of Isaiah. When the prophet tells us about events in his own life...the style, mood, and situation are altogether different. The kind of I-discourse which we have in the second Song is found only when God is the speaker. God—and the Servant.⁹

The development of the paragraph (49: 1-6) indicates that: (1) the Servant directs attention to His call, preparation, preservation, and commission by Yahweh (49:1-3); (2) the Servant makes reference to His past confession of apparent failure and to His past (or present?) affirmation of trust in God (49:4); and (3) the Servant relates the enlargement of His call to bring salvation to the Gentiles (49:5-6).

THE SERVANT SPEAKS OF HIS DIVINE CALL AND COMMISSION (49:1-3)

The Servant announces to the nations His prenatal call by Yahweh (49:1). The Servant introduces the announcement to His prenatal call by Yahweh with a summons to the nations —“Listen to me, you islands; hear this you distant nations” (v. 1a) —for “the servant speaks with absolute authority, commanding the world to listen.”¹⁰ The speaker (“me”) is the “Servant” of verse 6, identical with the Servant of 42:1-9. The

worldwide Gentile audience is addressed as “islands”¹¹ and “distant nations.” The Servant then refers to His prenatal call: “Before I was born the LORD called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name” (v. 1b). The Hebrew employs vivid imagery in speaking of the process of birth. The phrases could be translated literally “from the womb” and “from the belly of my mother.” Young over-optimistically suggests, “It is the reference to ‘my mother’ that makes it clear that the speaker is the Messiah.”¹² Yet it is significant that there is no mention of Messiah’s human father in the Old Testament (cf. Gen. 3:15; Ps. 22:9). The idea of calling before birth clearly indicates sovereign choice, but to say that such calling is equivalent with predestination (i.e., pretemporal, rather than just prenatal choice) is a theological rather than an exegetical conclusion which may or may not be implied in this text. “He has made mention of my name” is literally “He caused my name to be remembered.” It is not so much a naming process as a designating event, pointing to the Servant’s office and vocation.¹³

The Servant affirms His preparation and preservation by Yahweh (49:2). The first and third lines of this verse employ synonymous parallelism to indicate the preparation of the Servant—“He made my mouth like a sharpened sword” (simile) and “he made me into a polished arrow” (metaphor). The connotation of preparation is seen in that Yahweh “made” the Servant these things. Sharpening and polishing also imply a process of preparation. Similarly, it is possible to speak of the Servant’s gifts in terms of His speaking ability. The Servant’s “mouth” is probably a metonymy for his “words” which are described under the figure of a sharpened sword as cutting or effective. The Servant functions as “the mouthpiece of Yahweh,”¹⁴ the sword being a figure for the revelation of God (cf. Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12; Rev. 1:16). North thus maintains that “the ‘sharp’ word [*sic*] of the Servant is the word of a prophet rather than the edict of a king.”¹⁵ Thus “the word of the LORD is a formidable weapon, and it is because the Servant’s task is arduous and dangerous that Yahweh does not send him to it until he has been properly equipped to face it.”¹⁶ The “polished arrow” is a less common figure (cf. Jer. 23:29), but it seems to indicate either the piercing or the far-ranging effect of the Servant’s prophetic word: “God has endowed the Servant’s word with the power to penetrate (a ‘sharp sword’) and to range far and wide (‘a polished arrow’).”¹⁷

The second and fourth lines of verse 2 —“in the shadow of his hand he hid me;...and concealed me in his quiver”—further indicate the Servant’s relationship to Yahweh who prepared Him in terms of preservation by Yahweh. But a question arises as to the purpose of the preservation. Is it a concealment until the proper time? Or does it simply indicate God’s care and protection? If the former, it might refer to the period of over thirty years in Jesus’ preparation for public ministry,¹⁸ or to His present session in heaven during the interadvent period as He awaits the Second Advent (cf. Rev. 1:16, where He is described as having a sharp sword coming out of His mouth). On the other hand “to be hidden by the Lord means to be under his care and protection (cf. Psalms 17:8; 27:5; 31:20; 64:2; Jer. 36:26).”¹⁹ Perhaps both elements—concealment as well as protection—are included in Yahweh’s preservation of the Servant.

The Servant reports His divine commission as the true Israel to glorify Yahweh (49:3). In addition to announcing His divine call, preparation, and preservation, the Servant continues His report to the Gentiles with a rehearsal of the words of divine commission. “He said to me, ‘You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor’” (v. 3). The literary genre appears to move at this point from the call of the prophet to the designation of a king (cf. Isa. 42:1-4; Ps. 2:7). This involves no inconsistency since the promises concerning the Davidic Messiah (beginning in 2 Sam. 7) and the prophet like Moses (cf. Deut. 18:15), which ultimately merge in the person of Jesus Christ, already began to intertwine in Isaiah’s Servant songs.

On the surface, the statement “You are my servant, Israel,” explicitly identifies Yahweh’s Servant as the nation Israel (cf. Isa. 41:8-16; 42:18-25; 43:1-13; 44:1-4; 48:20-21). However, an apparent contradiction then arises in verses 5-6 in which the Servant’s task is to bring Israel back to Yahweh and to the land. This apparent contradiction leads Kelley to exclaim: “The elusiveness of the Servant’s identity is nowhere more apparent than in this second Servant Song.”²⁰

Some scholars remove the problem by removing the term “Israel” from the text in verse 3. Westermann, for example, regards “Israel” as “a later addition” to the text, “the ancient witness to the collective interpretation of the Servant, one gloss among the many that seek to interpret the text.”²¹ But this

view is contradicted by the manuscript evidence which clearly supports inclusion of the term "Israel."²²

Those who retain "Israel" in the text normally follow one of two interpretive paths: (1) "Israel" means the nation which in this passage is pictured corporately under the figure of an individual servant, or (2) an individual servant is here designated by the generic name "Israel." North advocates the first view and says that "Israel [v. 3] could have a mission to Israel [vv. 5-6] very much as we say that the first mission of the Church is to the Church."²³ But, as Leupold responds, "this seems too much like exhorting a nation to draw itself up by its own bootstraps."²⁴ Furthermore, the vivid detail in the description of the Servant as an individual "goes beyond possibilities of metaphor"²⁵ (e.g., the expression, "from the bowels of my mother," v. 1, AV).

The view of Young that "*Israel* then is a description of the true people of God, the whole body of the redeemed as members under the Head, the Messiah,"²⁶ is just as deficient as the similar view of Alexander.²⁷ Birks refuted that view over a century ago as a view "opposed to the plain words of the text.... For the Church is no single person, has no mother, was not named by prophecy before birth, does not restore Israel, is the receiver, not the giver of salvation."²⁸ Thus the view that "Israel" (49:3) is a title of the individual messianic Servant²⁹ harmonizes most satisfactorily with the passage and context.

The glorification of Yahweh is indicated as the ultimate purpose in the commission of the Servant—"in whom I will display my splendor." While the Servant speaks in verse 5 of His honor and success in the eyes of Yahweh, in verse 3 Yahweh directs attention to the Servant's glorification. Westermann avers that it is expected of a servant to glorify his master, not of the master to glorify the servant, and views the glorification as "a hidden and paradoxical one; partly because the lord's [*sic*] purpose is to glorify himself at the hands of the Servant, and partly because only the opposite of glory can be discerned in the Servant."³⁰ The ultimate resolution of this paradox is discerned in the distinction between the Servant's distinct accomplishments at His two advents, the First Advent culminating in "the sufferings of Christ" and the Second Advent manifesting "the glories that would follow" (1 Pet. 1:11). This glorification is manifested in part by the Servant's ultimate acceptance by Gentile kings and princes (Isa. 49:7).

THE SERVANT CONFESSES HIS APPARENT FAILURE BUT AFFIRMS HIS FAITH IN GOD (49:4)

This present acknowledgment by the Servant of His past confession of apparent failure and of His past (or present?) affirmation of trust in God possibly reflects several motifs of the thanksgiving or declarative praise psalm.³¹ Westermann calls it a “lament of a mediator.”³² It is not clear whether the confession of trust (v. 4b) is a part of the past lament (the NIV includes it within the quotation that follows “I said”) or a present statement in contrast with the past lament. In either case the context implies a continuing confidence in God on the part of the Servant.

The Servant reports His apparent past failure (49:4a). The Servant’s affirmation of confidence in God (v. 4b) comes in the wake of His reference to apparent failure regarding the fruitfulness of His mission to Israel (cf. v. 5). “But I said, ‘I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing’” (v. 4a). Though these words may reflect discouragement or despondency on the part of the Servant, they do not reflect doubt or defeat, for the Servant retains His confidence in Yahweh despite difficulties (cf. 42:4; Ps. 22). The adversative “but” contrasts the high calling and remarkable abilities of the Servant (vv. 1-3) with His seemingly disappointing results in carrying out His task (v. 4a). The passage is reminiscent of the situation of Jeremiah, the weeping prophet (cf. Jer., 15:10,18; 20:14-18), and was fulfilled in the death of Christ on the cross.

The Servant affirms His confidence in God (49:4b). The Servant’s apparent failure does not abort His expression of confidence in God. “Yet what is due me is in the LORD’s hand [lit., “my right is with Yahweh”], and my regard is with my God” (v. 4b). The word translated “what is due me” (NIV) or “my judgment” (AV) is מִשְׁפָּטִי the word so significant in the first Servant song.³³ It is tempting to translate and interpret מִשְׁפָּטִי here in a sense identical with its usage in 42:1,3,4 (referring to the Servant’s activity in establishing a just order on the whole earth).³⁴ Yet it is probably “best to preserve the judicial sense of מִשְׁפָּט that the verdict of Yahweh on the service of the Servant will be a favorable one.”³⁵ Thus “vindication” (or “just reward”) would be an appropriate translation. The parallel with פָּעֻלָּתִי, meaning “reward” or “recompense” (i.e., the fruit or re-

sult of His labor; cf. Lev. 19:13; Prov. 10:16; 11:18; Isa. 61:8), supports this meaning. In further support of this view, Pieper points out that “the suffix [the pronoun “my” in English] shows that this right is a personal prerogative of the Servant.”³⁶ In contrast with the apparent failure of His mission, the Servant voices His deepest trust that Yahweh will confirm and vindicate His work by granting His Servant ultimate success (cf. Isa. 50:8; 53:11-12). Although the dark shadow of the Cross apparently blacks out the accomplishment of God’s purpose, the brilliant splendor of the crown reflects the ultimate success of the Servant.

THE SERVANT RELATES HIS ENLARGED CALL TO BRING SALVATION TO THE GENTILES (49:5-6)

Rather than resulting in the discontinuation of His mission, the apparent failure of the Servant leads on to an enlargement of His mission to include all nations. While the Gentile mission of the Servant is an advancement in the task of the Servant to glorify God and follows on His rejection by the Jews (cf. Acts 13:47), the enlarged task neither annuls nor changes God’s purpose for Israel to be fulfilled through the Servant.

The Servant affirms Yahweh’s purpose to restore Israel spiritually through Him (49:5). Before rehearsing the enlarged call (“And now the LORD says...”) concerning the Gentile mission, the Servant recapitulates and evidently reaffirms Yahweh’s initial calling and purpose to bring salvation to Israel. “He who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel again to himself, for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD and my God has been my strength” (v. 5). Westermann justifiably calls verse 5 “a longish introduction” to the new commission in verse 6.³⁷ This emphasis on the originally revealed purpose of God through the Servant is not to introduce its nonfulfillment but rather to reaffirm its ultimate fulfillment. The Servant was born to accomplish a certain divine purpose and the power of God through the Servant will not fail in the accomplishment of that purpose. MacRae’s suggestion that the phrase “formed me in the womb” possibly refers to the virgin birth³⁸ must be evaluated in the light of one’s conclusion regarding the birth process in verse 1.

The purpose of the Servant’s mission as stated in this verse is *spiritual* —to bring Israel back to God Himself (cf. Isa.

55:7; Jer. 4:1), not to bring them back from Babylon.³⁹ The Hebrew text (i.e., Kethiv) has the negative אֵל, “not” (AV), which has the same sound as the לֵא, “to himself” (NIV and other modern translations). לֵא is probably to be preferred, having the support of IQIs^a and some other manuscripts and versions. The resulting synonymous parallelism between “bring back to him” and “gather to himself” also gives a smoother understanding of the passage. However, if אֵל is correct, then the verb probably has the sense of “sweep away”—“that Israel might not be swept away.”⁴⁰

The verse concludes with an assurance of the Servant’s vindication before Yahweh, probably anticipating His ultimate success in His mission to Israel.

The Servant affirms Yahweh’s enlarged call (49:6). The Servant affirms Yahweh’s enlarged call not only for the Servant to restore Israel physically to the land but also to bring salvation to the Gentiles spiritually. The Servant first quotes Yahweh’s commission to Him regarding an enlarged mission to the Gentiles. Yahweh answers the Servant’s “discouragement” (v. 4a) with a call to greater responsibility (cf., Jer. 12:5; 15:19-21; 1 Kings 19:9-18). The enlarged task is related to the initial task regarding Israel—“It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept” (v. 6a).

The phrase “tribes of Jacob” implies political organization and so a political task, that is, restoring the tribes of Jacob back to the position of dignity they do not now enjoy.⁴¹ As verse 5 identified the spiritual aspect of the Servant’s task toward Israel—to bring Israel back to God—so this verse indicates the physical/political aspect of the mission—to bring Israel back to the land. Yet even this is “too small a thing,” that is, it is insignificant in comparison with the greater task of bringing salvation to the whole world. This neither belittles nor annuls the Servant’s mission to Israel, but enlarges it. “The greater task...does not exclude the lesser.”⁴² Yahweh promises the Servant success in both His Jewish and Gentile missions (49:6-12).

Young sees this work of restoration as first alluding to the return from exile and finally referring to “the spiritual restoration of [spiritual] Israel [i.e., in the church] accomplished by Christ.”⁴³ His conclusion that “nowhere does the Bible teach that the entire physical Israel will be saved”⁴⁴ cannot be harmo-

nized with a proper understanding of Romans 11:26-27. At the Second-Advent judgment on living Israelites (described in Matt. 25:1-30; Ezek. 20:37-38; Mal. 3:2-3, 5), the unbelievers will be purged out of Israel through physical death, leaving on earth a regenerate nation Israel (along with regenerate Gentiles) at the beginning of the millennial kingdom.⁴⁵

The enlarged mission to the Gentiles climaxes the Servant's commission from Yahweh—"I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth" (v. 6b). "Light" is here parallel with "salvation" (cf. Isa. 42:6). Yahweh's initiative is clearly indicated in the verb ("I will also make you"), as seen by Young, "God has appointed the servant to this work and determined that he should carry it out."⁴⁶

Yahweh Promises a Completely Fulfilled Mission to the Servant (49:7-12)

⁷This is what the LORD says—
the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel—
to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation,
to the servant of rulers:
"Kings will see you and arise,
princes will see and bow down,
because of the LORD, who is faithful,
the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

⁸This is what the LORD says:
"In the time of my favor I will answer you,
and in the day of salvation I will help you;
I will keep you and will make you
to be a covenant for the people,
to restore the land
and to assign its desolate inheritances,

⁹to say to the captives, 'Come out,'
and to those in darkness, 'Be free!'
They will feed beside the roads
and find pasture on every barren hill.

¹⁰They will neither hunger nor thirst.
nor will the desert heat or the sun beat upon them.
He who has compassion on them will guide them
and lead them beside springs of water.

¹¹I will turn all my mountains into roads,
and my highways will be raised up.

¹²See, they will come from afar—
some from the north, some from the west,
some from the region of Sinim."

The speaker in this unit is Yahweh (cf. v. 7a), the person addressed is the Servant (cf. v. 7b),⁴⁷ and the subject is the ultimate success of the Servant with respect to both Israel and the Gentiles. Yahweh promises to His Servant that He will fulfill both the Gentile and Jewish aspects of the Servant's mission—that the Gentiles will worship Him (v. 7) and that Israel will be restored by Him (vv. 8-12). This twofold fulfillment of the Servant's mission (Gentile and Jewish aspects) corresponds with the literary genre of the passage which consists of two oracles or announcements of salvation—one concerning the worship of the Gentiles (v. 7) and the other regarding the restoration of Israel (vv. 8-12). Thus the development of the unit is twofold: (1) Yahweh promises His despised Servant that the Gentiles will worship Him (v. 7) and (2) Yahweh promises His Servant that at the appointed time He will restore Israel in safety from all over the earth (vv. 8-12).

YAHWEH PROMISES HIS DESPISED SERVANT THAT THE GENTILES WILL WORSHIP HIM (49:7)

The messenger formula that introduces this announcement of salvation is expanded (cf. 42:5) with two divine titles: “This is what the LORD says—the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel” (v. 7a). These two titles are often combined by Isaiah (cf. 41:14; 43:14; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5). The term **לְיֹאֵל** (“Redeemer”) customarily referred to a “near kinsman” who protected a distressed relative in various circumstances (e.g., Lev. 25:47-49; Num. 35:19; Ruth 3:11-13). Isaiah often uses it figuratively of Yahweh's intimate and binding relationship to Israel. The title “Holy One of Israel” indicates that the God who judges Israel (cf. Isa. 1:4) is the same God who redeems Israel.

Yahweh addresses the Servant in words which show the completeness of Israel's rejection of Him: “to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers” (v. 7b). The NIV translation incorporates the term **שְׂנֵאָה** into the verb. “Despised of soul” could mean “despised in regard to his soul,” that is, deemed unworthy to live, or “despised from the soul,” that is, heartily despised.⁴⁸ If **שְׂנֵאָה** is taken to mean “people” (cf. Gen. 17:14), then the translation “despised of men” would parallel both Isaiah 53:3 and the parallel phrases here in 49:7 (“abhorred by the nation” and “servant of rulers”). The word **יָאֵל** probably does not refer to “the human race generally,”⁴⁹ but rather to the nation Israel. The “rulers” could

refer to both Jewish and Gentile leaders who reject Him before the ultimate Success of His mission.

The Servant will ultimately be recognized and worshiped by Gentile kings—“Kings will see you and arise, princes will see and bow down” (v. 7c). This recognition of the Servant for what He actually is anticipates 52:15. The reversal of the Servant’s circumstances (from rejection to recognition in worship) depends on the faithfulness of Yahweh—“because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you” (v. 7d).

YAHWEH PROMISES TO RESTORE ISRAEL AT THE APPOINTED TIME (49:8-12)

Yahweh’s promise to restore Israel through His Servant is perplexing to some scholars such as North, who says, “This looks very like the political task which Yahweh had said he no longer requires of the Servant.”⁵⁰ The solution does not lie in the deletion or transposition of certain lines of the text, as done by North,⁵¹ but rather in the recognition that God is not through with Israel as a nation even though she was involved in the initial rejection of the Servant.

Yahweh promises His Servant help in restoring Israel (49:8). The keynote of the paragraph is struck as Yahweh (“This is what the LORD says”) promises His Servant help in restoring Israel at the appointed time. “In the time of my favor I will answer you, and in the day of salvation I will help you; I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people, to restore the land and to reassign its desolate inheritances” (v. 8). The verbs (“answer” and “help”) probably imply a previous lament by the Servant (as alluded to in v. 4a; cf. Ps. 22:19-21). The temporal nouns (“time” and “day”) indicate not the time limits but the certainty of the events to be accomplished. Whybray regards the clause, “I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people,” as a later addition from 42:6 (where he thinks it refers to Cyrus). He suggests as evidence for this view that since the context (49:8-12) is “wholly concerned with the restoration of Israel,” the phrase “a covenant for the people” is unfitting in this context.⁵² But this argument presupposes the conclusion that “the people” (אֲנֹכִי) are Gentiles rather than Israel. It was indicated in the previous article in this series that the phrase “a covenant for the people” refers to Yahweh’s New Covenant with His people Israel which He will

establish through His Servant-Messiah.⁵³ The same truth is repeated here in the context of Israel's future restoration to the land, thus combining the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant for Israel with the physical blessings of her restoration to the land.

Leupold approaches the promise of restoration differently by limiting the fulfillment of this promise to the period of Jewish restoration from Babylon: "This means that the Restoration from Captivity in particular will be brought about by the Messiah. Strangely, before his Incarnation he brings blessings to his people."⁵⁴ It is better, similar to the view of Delitzsch,⁵⁵ to view the Incarnation of the coming messianic Servant as imminent (but unfulfilled) during the period of the return from Babylon. Young asserts concerning the restoration in verse 8, "The picture refers primarily not to the return from exile, but to the reestablishment of the Davidic kingdom under the Messiah, when all the true seed of Abraham will receive their promised inheritance."⁵⁶ Unfortunately, Young intended the phrase "all the true seed of Abraham" to identify believers during the present age of the church. If the phrase is taken to identify those regenerate Jews at the Second Advent to whom the New Covenant will be fulfilled (cf. Rom. 11:26-27), it is an excellent statement of the meaning of this passage. The "desolate inheritances" relate to the physical land of Israel (cf. 1:7; 6:11; 17:9; 54: 1; 61 :4; 62:4; 64:9). Thus the promise of Israel's final and permanent restoration to the land (cf. Amos 9:11-15) awaits fulfillment following the return of the Servant-Messiah.

Yahweh promises that the Servant will regather His captive people (49:9a). Yahweh's promise to help His Servant restore Israel at the appointed time (v. 8) includes the promise that the Servant will regather Yahweh's captive people—"to say to the captives, 'Come out,' and to those in darkness, 'Be free!'" (v. 9a). While the language of this promise may be taken from the Exile, the ultimate fulfillment in the context relates to the future day when the messianic Servant will establish the New Covenant with Israel at His return (cf. Isa. 42:7).

Yahweh promises that the Servant will shepherd His needy flock (49 :9b-10). The imagery of the promise indicates that the Servant will shepherd Yahweh's needy flock. "They will feed beside the roads and find pasture on every barren hill. They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat upon them. He who has compassion on them will

guide them and lead them beside springs of water” (vv. 9b-10). The language is reminiscent of the Exodus and was appropriate and potentially could have been fulfilled if the Servant had come at the time of the return from the Babylonian Captivity. When the Messiah did come, it could have been fulfilled in the Herodian period of the first-century Roman Empire, but the rejection of the Servant has delayed its fulfillment (from the human perspective) until the Second Advent.

Yahweh promises to regather His people from all over the earth (49:11-12). The promise concludes that Yahweh’s people will be marshalled from great distances and all directions on the earth. The figure appears to be changed from that of a shepherd and his sheep to that of a great people on the march. “I will turn all my mountains into roads, and my highways will be raised up. See, they will come from afar—some from the north, some from the west, some from the region of Sinim” (vv. 11-12). An ancient interpretation links “Sinim” to China—a view which still has many adherents.⁵⁷ Whybray represents many modern scholars who identify it as modern Aswan, a district on the southern frontier of ancient Egypt.⁵⁸

Regardless of the exact location of this area, the thrust of the promise is that Yahweh will remove all obstacles that hinder the return of His people Israel to their land from all over the earth.

Isaiah Calls on All Creation to Praise Yahweh (49:13)

¹³Shout for joy, O heavens;
rejoice, O earth;
burst into song, O mountains!
For the LORD comforts his people
and will have compassion on his afflicted ones.

The Prophet Isaiah has communicated the Servant’s report of His expanded mission to the Gentiles (vv. 1-6) and Yahweh’s promise to the Servant that the Servant will completely fulfill His mission, not only in the expanded Gentile aspect (v. 7) but also in the originally stated purpose of the spiritual and physical restoration of the nation Israel (vv. 7-12). Therefore Isaiah now calls on all creation to praise Yahweh who thus delivers His people, because when the nation Israel is properly related to Yahweh, then all creation will rejoice (cf. Isa.. 42: 10-12; 52:9; 55:12-13).

THE CALL TO PRAISE (49:13a)

Isaiah follows the normal structure of the hymnic genre (cf. Ps. 117) by introducing the cause for praise (v. 13b) with a preceding call to praise (v. 13a) —“Shout for joy, O heavens; rejoice, O earth; burst into song, O mountains!” The verbs are characteristic of the vocabulary of praise found in the Psalter.⁵⁹ Isaiah’s synonymous parallelism characteristically draws the whole universe into singing Yahweh’s praise.

THE CAUSE FOR PRAISE (49:13b)

Yahweh is worthy of all praise because of His infinite greatness and grace. In this case the cause for praise is His grace toward His people Israel in redeeming them and restoring them to the land. “For the LORD comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones” (v. 13b). The context suggests that the verbs relate to the future when Yahweh will “have compassion on his afflicted ones” as manifested in His redeeming acts, and thus He will comfort His people Israel.

Conclusion

Yahweh’s called and gifted Servant is rejected at first by His own people Israel, but in a future day of grace He will ultimately succeed not only in fulfilling an expanded mission to bring salvation to the Gentiles, but also in restoring Israel both to the land (physically and politically) and to Yahweh (spiritually), thus eliciting universal praise to Yahweh, the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel.

Notes

- 1 Cf. the preceding article in this series, “The Call of the Servant in Isaiah 42:1-9, Part 1 of Isaiah’s Songs of the Servant,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 139 (January-March 1982):12-31. In this article it was concluded that the anonymous Servant of Isaiah 42: 1-9 can be none other than the royal Davidic Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will cause a right order to prevail on the earth following His second advent at the time of the fulfillment of the promised New Covenant for the nation Israel. This introduces the millennial kingdom in which worldwide spiritual and physical blessings will extend not only to Israel but also to the Gentiles.
- 2 Cf. Claus Westermann. *Isaiah 40—66: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), pp. 20-21, 29.
- 3 Robert B. Chisholm, “Toward a Form Critical/Structural Analysis of Isaiah,”

- paper submitted for course 158 Old Testament Theology III, Dallas Theological Seminary, Fall 1980, pp. 62-63.
- 4 All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version (NIV) unless designated otherwise.
 - 5 R. N. Whybray, *Isaiah 40—66*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1981), p. 137.
 - 6 James Muilenburg, "The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, 12 vols, ed. George R. Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), 5:566.
 - 7 Roy F. Melugin, *The Formation of Isaiah 40-55* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1976), p. 143.
 - 8 Whybray, *Isaiah 40—66*, p. 135.
 - 9 Henri Blocher, *Songs of the Servant* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), pp. 35-36.
 - 10 Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: The English Text, with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965, 1969, 1972), 3:268.
 - 11 "Islands" refer to "the distant shores of the West, representative of all remote areas of the then-known world" (H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Isaiah* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971], 2:63).
 - 12 Young, *Isaiah*, 3:268.
 - 13 Ibid.
 - 14 Whybray, *Isaiah 40—66*, p. 137.
 - 15 Christopher R. North, *The Second Isaiah: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary to Chapters XL-LV* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 187.
 - 16 Ibid.
 - 17 Westermann, *Isaiah 40—66*, p. 208.
 - 18 T. R. Birks, *Commentary on the Book of Isaiah* (London: Rivingtons, 1871), p. 250.
 - 19 Page H. Kelley, "Isaiah," in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, 12 vols. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1971), 5:330; cf. Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, p. 208.
 - 20 Kelley, "Isaiah," p. 329.
 - 21 Westermann, *Isaiah 40—66*, p. 209.
 - 22 Cf. North, *Second Isaiah*, pp. 187-88.
 - 23 Ibid., p. 189.
 - 24 Leupold, *Isaiah*, 2:175.
 - 25 Whybray, *Isaiah 40—66*, p. 136.
 - 26 Young, *Isaiah*, 3:270.
 - 27 Alexander interpreted "Israel" as a "complex subject including the Messiah and his people," i.e., the Christian church (Joseph Addison Alexander, *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1953], 2:226).
 - 28 Birks, *Isaiah*, p. 250.
 - 29 The words of Delitzsch are significant at this point: "Israel was from the very first the God-given name of an individual. Just as the name Israel was first of all given to a man, and then after that to a nation, so the name which sprang from a personal root has also a personal crown" (Franz Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, *Commentary on the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973], 2:260). Payne concludes, "Verse 3 entitles this coming Servant 'Israel' who will bring glory to God, in marked contrast to the historical Israel" (David F. Payne, "Isaiah," in *The New Layman's Bible Commentary*, ed. G. C. D. Howley, F. F. Bruce, and H. L. Ellison [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979], p.805).
 - 30 Westermann, *Isaiah 40—66*, pp. 209-10.

- 31 For example, the declarative praise psalm reports a past lament before declaring God's delivering actions. See Claus Westermann, *The Praise of God in the Psalms* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1965). pp. 102-16.
- 32 Westermann, *Isaiah 40—66*, p. 210.
- 33 Isaiah 42:1, 2, 4; cf. Lindsey, "The Call of the Servant," pp. 12-31.
- 34 Cf. Allan A. MacRae, *The Gospel of Isaiah* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), p.106.
- 35 Scott Rae, "An Exegetical and Theological Study of Isaiah 49:1-13," Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1981, p. 37; cf. North, *Second Isaiah*, pp. 188-89.
- 36 August Pieper, *Isaiah II: An Exposition of Isaiah 40—66* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1979), p. 355.
- 37 Westermann, *Isaiah 40—66*, p. 211.
- 38 MacRae, *The Gospel of Isaiah*, p. 106.
- 39 Young, *Isaiah*, 3:273-74; Young correctly notes that the Servant rather than Yahweh is the subject of the infinitive (*ibid.*, p. 273, n. 10).
- 40 Whybray, *Isaiah 40—66*, p. 139; North, *Second Isaiah*, pp. 185-86.
- 41 But contrast Young, *Isaiah*, 3:275.
- 42 *Ibid.*
- 43 *Ibid.*
- 44 *Ibid.*
- 45 Cf. John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973), pp. 186-93.
- 46 Young, *Isaiah*, 3:276.
- 47 The "Servant" in 49:7-12 is not Israel (*contra* Westermann, *Isaiah 40—66*, p. 214; Whybray, *Isaiah 40—66*, p. 140), although North asserts that this passage has been claimed as a Servant song less often than 42:5-9 (*Second Isaiah*, p. 191). The view taken in this series of articles is that both 42:5-9 and 49:7-12 are developments within their respective Servant songs.
- 48 So Whybray, *Isaiah 40—66*, p. 141; Young, *Isaiah*, 3:276-77.
- 49 Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, 2:264.
- 50 North, *Second Isaiah*, p. 191.
- 51 *Ibid.*
- 52 Whybray, *Isaiah 40—66*. p. 141.
- 53 Lindsey, "The Call of the Servant," pp. 23-25.
- 54 Leupold, *Isaiah*, 2:181.
- 55 Delitzsch views the Prophet Isaiah as foreseeing Yahweh's Servant in the time of the Assyrian oppressions, "rising up in the second half of the captivity, as if born in exile, in the midst of the punishment borne by his people, to effect the restoration of Israel" (*Isaiah*, 2:258-59).
- 56 Young, *Isaiah*, 3:279.
- 57 MacRae, *The Gospel of Isaiah*, pp. 110-11.
- 58 Whybray, *Isaiah 40—66*. p. 142.
- 59 Ronald Barclay Allen, *Praise! A Matter of Life and Breath* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1980), pp. 64-69.

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