

ISAIAH

Chapter 49

The Servant of the LORD

Listen to me, O coastlands, and give attention, you peoples from afar. The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name. 2 He made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow; in his quiver he hid me away. 3 And he said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.” 4 But I said, “I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my right is with the LORD, and my recompense with my God.” 5 And now the LORD says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him—for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD, and my God has become my strength—6 he says: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” 7 Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nation, the servant of rulers: “Kings shall see and arise; princes, and they shall prostrate themselves; because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.”

With vivid accuracy Isaiah 41-48 foretells the end of captivity in Babylon and Cyrus’ redemption of Israel. Now, beginning with chapter 49, Isaiah’s prophecies become more concerned with Israel’s spiritual captivity to sin the solution through Yahweh’s Suffering Servant. (CC)

The Second Servant Song in 49:1-6 shares the following characteristics with other texts. First, the Servant’s address to the coastlands and distant peoples in 49:1a-b suggests a court speech, much like 41:1; 48:14. Second, much like Jeremiah (1:5), the Servant is called while still in his mother’s womb. Third, Is.49:3 appears to be much like Ps. 2:7-9 and therefore suggests something like the Servant’s commission. And fourth, in 49:4-6, the Servant recalls an earlier peril followed by Yahweh’s salvation, much like Psalms 32; 116; and 118. Following this Second Servant Song is an epilogue (Is. 49:7-13). In like manner, the other three Servant Songs have postscripts: 42:1-4 (42:5-9; 50:4-9 (50:10-11); 52:13-53:12 (chapter 54). (CC)

49:1–6† (or 1–7 or 1–13) The second of the four servant songs. The speaker in vv. 1–6 is the servant of the Lord, the Messiah. (CSB)

49:1 *listen to me* – Jesus is saying “listen to me” have something important to say. Reminds one of Transfiguration where the Father says “listen to him.”

The Speaker, unnamed as in 48:16, is the Servant (vv 3, 5–6), who now explains why “the Lord GOD has sent” Him. (TLSB)

Much has happened since the First Servant Song (42:1-4). Cyrus was introduced (44:28, 45:1), Babylon is envisioned as already fallen (chapter 46-47), but Israel remained deaf and blind through it all (42:19). The people still embraced their plaint that Yahweh did not see and therefore disregarded their cause (40:27). Therefore, in chapter 48, Israel is admonished to leave its headstrong way and depart from Babylon (48:20, with the threat that those who remain will have no peace (48:22). Israel according to the flesh has been a rebel from conception (48:8). (CC)

The big issues of the history of mankind are to be weighed. What men should become aware of first is that the unique person who is under consideration has been destined by the Lord Himself, even before birth, to a task of incomparable magnitude and importance. God's plans are not improvised as He goes along. They are distinctively made long in advance. (Leupold)

We too are commanded to listen. The words are God's, and they reveal the great truths of His love for all the world. (PBC)

Shama – to hear intelligently (often with implication of attention, obedience, etc.; cause to tell. (Strongs)

YOU have heard that the prophet Isaiah and all other prophets deal with two things: First, they teach, terrify, console, and instruct their people and correct the rebels, and for that reason it was necessary to inculcate the issues of faith and good works. The second part was to give them direction concerning the coming Christ. Having completed the first part, the prophet proceeds to the second. (Luther)

From this chapter to the end there is nothing but Christ, and although the prophet at the same time occasionally corrects and rebukes, the scope of this treatise has to do with Christ, with the calling of the Gentiles, and with the rejection of the Jews. For Christians the following will be easy to understand; at all events, let us receive it with a burning spirit! In the eyes of the world the Word of Christ is always foolishness, as we experience today and as the Jews experienced with their magnificent promises. Beyond these they cannot comprehend the Gospel and are soon offended by the lowliness of the Word, since they are accustomed to the priceless pearls of their own promises. Hence these words do not refer to a physical kingdom. We must open our heart and receive the promises through the Word and faith alone. In the eyes of the world these words cannot be convincing, because their meaning becomes clear only by faith. You will hear great promises. (Luther)

coastlands. In 42:4 the islands “put their hope” in the servant's law. (CSB)

Distant lands to the west, the farthest extent of the known world. (TLSB)

While the Lord chose a specific nation through whom He would send “His Servant,” He made it crystal clear in His call to Abraham that His concern was for the entire world. Listen to Paul in Gal. 3:8 “The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the Gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’” (LL)

If by now the Spirit has removed some of the scales off of our eyes, we will begin to see the correlation between world events and the spread of the Christian church. A classic example is World War II. No single event did more to bring the Gospel to the “islands” and “distant lands” than this war, especially to the islands of the Pacific. For example the planting of the Christian church in the highlands of New Guinea is a direct result of the witness of Christian men and women in the Armed Forces of the USA who were stationed there. (LL)

One more example from recent history. Why is it that throughout all of Asia with one exception the Christian church numbers less than two percent of the population? And that exception? South Korea, where the Christian church claims almost 20 percent of the South Korean population. There can be no question as to the real reason why US troops were so heavily involved in the

Korean War and why US troops have been stationed there ever since. (Largest Christian church in the world is in Seoul.) (LL)

The islands and distant nations represent the farthest corners of the earth. (PBC)

Galatians 3:8 “The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.”

We live in the time of the greatest immigration surge in the history of our country. For every white English speaking person who dies, 1 is born or immigrates here. For every African American who dies, 3 are born. For every Hispanic who dies, 12 are born. For every Asian who dies, more than 20 are born. (Bob Scudieri – “The Mission Field Called North America”)

called me from the womb.† Cf. v. 5. The language is similar to that of the call of the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 1:5) and of the apostle Paul (Gal 1:15). – Before Jesus’ human birth. It was also a plan from eternity. (CSB)

Chosen or appointed. *from the womb.* As God’s spokesmen (such as Jeremiah, John the Baptist, and Paul) were chosen for their task before they were born (Lk 1:15; Gal 1:15), so the Servant was called and equipped to bring His message of salvation to a worldwide audience before He became incarnate in a virgin’s womb. (TLSB)

A new Servant cryptically speaks in 48:16d. This new Israel, also called from the womb (49:1), will be everything the first Israel was not – for us and for our salvation! The Servant is preeminent among servants who were set apart for God’s purposes even before birth (e.g., Jer. 1:4-5; Lk. 1:13-17; Gal. 1:15). The expression “from the womb” (49:1) links the Servant with Yahweh’s choice of the nation (e.g., 43:1; 44:1), as well as with Isaiah’s prophecy of Immanuel (born of a virgin [7:14] and other texts that reference the Messiah’s birth (Gen. 3:15; Is. 9:6; Micah 5:3; Ps. 22:9). These are fulfilled in the Gospels (Mt. 1:18; LK. 1:26-38; 2:1-7) when Jesus “was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made man” (Nicene Creed). The eternal Son of God assumed a fully human (but without sin) at the moment of his conception (Athanasian Creed, verses 27-35). Because the preexistent Servant was set apart to be our Savior, we have likewise been elected before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless (Eph. 1:4-5). (CC)

What has this to say to us Gentiles? This great promise is empty, so to say. The prophet makes it, however, for the purpose of boasting, driven by necessity, because Christ and His Word was folly and scandal to the Jews and Gentiles and is nothing to all of them. So also today in the whole world we are like dregs and poison; we are devil-possessed. So foolish, and even pernicious and demonic, are the things we say. This is the constant experience of the godly, and this was Christ’s experience when He began to govern by the Word. Because of this extreme and most stubborn scandal of the whole world He boasts here that He did not come of Himself but was sent and called by God and by divine determination. “He did not call Me on the basis of any preceding merits nor when I was 30 years old, no, when I was in My mother’s womb, He designated Me a Preacher.” Thus the boasting of the godly is necessary, not for their own sake but for the sake of others, to prepare them and make them attentive listeners and to prevent the offense of the Gospel, which is totally overwhelmed by scandals. (Luther)

my name – He is thinking not only of Jesus Christ, but of Savior, Redeemer, King, Priest, etc. All of them are comprehended in “My name.” (Luther)

Several OT passages speak about the mother or the birth of the Messiah (cf Gn 3:15; Ps 22:10; Is 7:14; Mi 5:2). Jesus was named while still in His mother's womb (Mt 1:21–23). (TLSB)

But not only was this person divinely appointed before His birth to perform an unusually high task, He was also equipped with the requisite gifts to achieve His divine purpose. (Leupold)

49:2 What they hear has the cutting edge of a sharp sword and hits its mark with the penetrating force of “a polished arrow” (cf Jer 1:10; 23:29). Nothing can blunt these words, for God's hand hides them in His scabbard and quiver. This Servant's weapons come from His mouth, i.e., His words (cf Eph 6:17; Rv 2:12, 16; 19:15). (TLSB)

my mouth like a sharp sword. See Eph 6:17; Heb 4:12; Rev 1:16; 2:12, 16. In 11:4 a powerful rod comes from the mouth of the Messiah. (CSB)

Unlike Cyrus, who waged war with his military forces (e.g., Is. 41:25); 45:1-3; cf. 2 Cor. 10:3), Yahweh will conquer the world and free it from its captivity to sin by means of his lowly Servant, whose chief weapon is his mouth, that is, his preached Word. His mouth is “a sharpened sword,” which is also how the apostle John sees it in Rev. 1:16; 2:12; 19:15 (cf. Heb. 4:12). His Word is efficacious and accomplishes Yahweh's purpose (cf. 55:10-11). “In a world in which the rise and fall of nations appears to be determined not by prophetic pronouncements but by imperial armies, this may seem like a feeble piece of equipment.” For those who preach the Gospel, however, “the weapons of our warfare are not freshly, but are empowered by God for the destruction of strongholds” (2 Cor. 10:4). (CC)

“My kingdom consists of the Word. He gave Me a mouth, not a sword. But He gave Me a mouth to take the place of a sword.” The sword denotes power in its comprehensive sense, the civil government. Here, however, He says, “For Me government is not a matter of external arms.” There is the distinction between kingdom and kingdom. The reign of Christ consists in and is exercised by mouth and word. The laws of the jurists also have a mouth, but they are linked with the sword so that the criminals might be held in check. However, this mouth and word is beyond every sword, teaching as it does the forgiveness of sins gratis. (Luther)

His mouth is His Word, His Gospel, sharply spoken to the unrepentant and gently spoken to those in distress. (LL)

The instrument with which He works is the Word, spoken by His mouth which spoke words that were to be startlingly effective (sword), which is kept in such a way that its sharp edge will not be blunted, but be ready for effective use. (Leupold)

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews says that “the Word of God” generally “is sharper than any two-edged sword piercing even dividing asunder of soul and spirit: (Heb 4:12). Christian experience testifies that this keen, searching, cutting power attaches in an especial way to the sayings of Jesus, which pierce the heart as no other words can do, and rankle in the soul, which is quite unable to forget them. The imagery recurs in Revelation (1:16; 2:12, 16; 19:15, 21). (PC)

Rhema – God's utterance as an utterance going forth out of God's mouth (Matthew 4:4). When we use it in our battle we are to use it only as God uttered it. We must also use it unaltered, just as God uttered it. Any alteration takes the power and edge off of this sword.

The Word is such that it is not preached in vain. It is not empty like a human law, which brings nothing perfect. Rather, it is a sharp sword. The Gospel penetrates and has power. Consider how

powerful it has been today against the papacy and how it continues to strike through. It cuts off righteousness, holinesses, and religions. “He will convince the world of sin” (John 16:8), of the sin of unbelief, of the idea of holiness, destroying all high places and fortifications of human knowledge against God. This is the sword of the Spirit which not only drives out gross sins, as the law of Moses does, but it is double-edged and effective against human thoughts. (Luther)

In 11:4 the Word is like a rod coming out of His mouth to judge and destroy the wicked. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 9, Part 1)

Ephesians 6:17 “Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

Hebrews 4:12 “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”

shadow of his hand. Descriptive of protection (see 30:2–3; 51:16). – The Lord hid His Servant’s divine glory and power in the form of the Son of Man, a Servant. (CSB)

Yahweh hides his Servant in his hand. This is a safe place to be, for no one can snatch from Yahweh’s hand (Deut. 32:39; Jn. 10:28-29). Secure in this hand, the Suffering Servant is “the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24; cf. 2 Cor. 5:16). A seemingly insignificant itinerant Preacher accomplishes the most significant event in human history; the salvation of sinners through his death and resurrection (Is. 53:8-12). (CC)

Here He acknowledges protection, from which it follows that He was greatly troubled. For it is impossible: The whole world lies in ambush for one who has fought against Satan with this sword; it taunts you and consigns you to death. The word of the Gospel is the cause of strife because the factious will fight against it. Therefore He says here that His service will not only be effective but steady and lasting and abiding to eternity, because it is under the shadow of His hand. Consider well this passage about the fortune of the Word. Although according to the flesh it would seem to have been blotted out by the tyrants, it nevertheless endures under the shadow of God’s hand. Consider how it has endured in this decade against every tyranny and cares nothing about the persecution and counsels of princes. It converts monks and nuns, because it is a sharp sword, that is, it is efficacious and safe under the shadow of His hand. It will endure forever. This is so because it sets souls and consciences free from force and from Satan. It possesses a power which wisdom itself does not possess. (Luther)

polished arrow. Arrows are used of God’s judgment in Dt 32:23, 42, of the deadly words of the wicked in Ps 64:3–4 and of Satan’s schemes and temptations in Eph 6:11, 16. (CSB)

The ministry of the man in question apparently is calculated to wound men for their own good. His ministry to men may involve pain and suffering on their part; it will have deep-going effects. (Leupold)

This is a selected arrow, without any fault, that accomplishes its purpose. This is nothing but a boasting about the ministry of the Word. It is a Hebraism. The sons of Ephraim were made into a deceitful bow (cf. Ps. 78:57). The kingdom of Ephraim was supposed to be God’s bow, that is, His kingdom. Even so we can say that the princes and magistrates are the bows and arrows of God, as the psalm says (Ps. 127:4), “Like arrows in the hand of a warrior.” So He says here, “I am not a useless and deceitful arrow but an effective one. (Luther)

quiver – This says the same as the above, “in the shadow of His hand He hid Me.” Here in two comparisons you have the Word of God, efficacious and safe. So the church is powerful and safe. In the eyes of the world, however, the opposite seems to be the case. The Word and the church seem to be extremely weak and then also turbulent. (Luther)

49:3 *my servant, Israel.* “Servant” here cannot mean literally national Israel, since in v. 5 this servant has a mission to Israel. Rather, the Messianic servant is the ideal Israel through whom the Lord will be glorified. He will succeed where national Israel failed. (CSB)

God redeemed Israel, His disobedient servant, from the Babylonian exile in order to be glorified (60:21; 61:3). Yet if God was to be glorified, He needed a sinless Israelite, a Servant who “according to the flesh” was of the race of Israel (Rm 9:5), yet “separated from sinners” (Heb 7:26). Nothing but the perfect service and obedience God demanded would rescue a world of sinners, including Israel. To the Servant capable of this deliverance, God said: “You are My Son” (Ps 2:7). (TLSB)

The Servant is called Israel, and through him Yahweh will manifest his beauty and glory. The same promise with the same verb appears also in 44:23, but to the nation of Israel. He [the Suffering Servant] will be for Israel, and the world, what Israel could not be. (CC)

I will be glorified. Through the redemption he will accomplish. (CSB)

Faced with Israel’s failure, God does not wipe out the nation. Instead, the Second Servant is “a light for revelation to the Gentile and the glory of your people Israel” (Lk. 2:32). In a supreme paradox, the Servant’s greatest beauty is displayed when “his appearance was disfigured beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of ordinary men” (Is. 52:14). Now we, who are ugly from sin (e.g., Is. 1:18; 64:6), become most beautiful in Christ (e.g., Is 62:3; Eph. 5:26-27). The hymn rightly acclaim him our “Beautiful Savior.” (CC)

This is reminder of the Transfiguration. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume, Part 1)

Here you have what the ministry of the Word should preach. It is the antithesis of all false preachers, as they are described in Galatians (Gal. 6:13): “They desire to have you circumcised that they may glow in your flesh.” So all false teachers seek their own glory, although they give lip service to the glow of God. Therefore, you preachers, know that you are not free from the monster of glow. We will not be rid of it as long as there is a drop of blood in us. Life is soon over, because they quickly fade away, since they do not honor God as God (Rom. 1:21). Yet the Gospel proclaims the glory of God alone. “The heavens are telling the glow of God” (Ps. 19:1), not their own glory. The glow of God is that God alone is wise, righteous, and the Redeemer. It follows that we are foolish and lost sinners, because the glow of God is not set forth unless we ourselves are confounded. The papists do not want this confounding, yea, they ascribe a part of righteousness to their own glory, and therefore it cannot bear the Gospel. The Holy Spirit convicts the whole world of sin (John 16:8) and proclaims the righteous Christ and His glow alone. It is the office of an evangelical preacher to proclaim the glory of God alone. Away with the papists and Anabaptists, who boast of their own glory! In their word, evangelists teach nothing but grace. Therefore it follows that there is nothing but confusion and sin in us. (Luther)

49:4 *but I said* – the Messiah speaking here in His role of true human being, in the weakness which beset Him in Gethsemane. (Kretzmann)

labored in vain.† Christ would encounter strong opposition during his ministry and would temporarily suffer apparent failure. The “suffering servant” theme is developed in the third and fourth of the four servant songs (50:4–9 or 50:4–11; 52:13–53:12). (CSB)

Redemption came by way of suffering and agony so intense that the Servant “in the days of His flesh ... offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears” (Heb 5:7). Cf Mt 26:39; 27:46. (TLSB)

The Servant speaks of the seeming ineffectiveness of His work, but nevertheless relies on the Lord for His strength. (TLSB)

Because here the Servant has already expended his strength, this may be a lament toward the end of his ministry that, from a human perspective, his mission appeared to have been unsuccessful. In light of Yahweh’s scathing rebuke of the exiles in chapter 48, the Servant’s frustration is understandable. Look at what he has to work with! The people do not know and have not heard (40:21-28), believe that Yahweh has ignored their cry for justice (40:27), and are admonished (43:22-24); 45:9-13; 48:18-19), in large part, because of their Idolatry (44:9-20). The exiles are deaf and blind (42:18-20), stubborn (46:12; 48:4), insincere (48:1), and outright rebels (46:8). The Suffering Servant stands in a long line of ministers who lament that they have been called to a task too great for their abilities (e.g., Ex. 4:1; 1 Kings 19:9-10). (CC)

The Suffering Servant of Isaiah 52:13-53:12 seemed like a failure. But he was vindicated and rewarded through his resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume, Part 1)

This is the lament of every preacher, that even though the Word is sure, he has so few disciples. “I preach, but there seems to be no fruit. Here Christ in His own person complains about the small number of disciples. So we, too, experienced that we lost many. David had this offense in mind in Ps. 88:1: “O Lord, my God, I call for help.” Jeremiah, too, had this offense in mind (Lam. 2:20): “Should priest and prophet be slain in the sanctuary of the Lord?” “I am the only one left.” So Paul says after his labor in Asia that “all who are in Asia turned away from me” (2 Tim. 1:15). This is a fine pleasure! Therefore you must not give up if for your labor you get the reward of ingratitude. We must not lose hope, as though the Word were about to be destroyed. Let fall what may, let come what will. Jeremiah has his 7,000, Paul has his Corinthians, Ephesians, and Timothy. So the seed falls on the rock, on the road, among the thorns, and yet some also falls on good soil. This is the consolation for all preachers so that they do not lose hope, though the traitor Judas should come among the Twelve. (Luther)

The accomplishment of the Father’s mission would not be easy. In true humility and in His true humanity Christ describes His discouragements and loneliness as one by one His followers leave Him. We remember His sadness as he asks His disciples if they will also leave Him. We are reminded of the hour of intense and lonely suffering and agony in Gethsemane where “His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground” (Luke 22:44). As He faces the horror of the cross and all He would suffer there, we hear His agonized cry: “My father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me” (Matthew 26:39). (LL)

The disappointing aspect of Christ’s earthly ministry is here indicated at least for His three years ministry on earth. The fruits of this ministry were startlingly meager. The Servant would put His best effort into His labor, toiling and spending His strength. Visible results will not be in evidence. (Leupold)

Philippians 2:5-11 “⁵Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷but made himself nothing, taking the very nature ^b of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! ⁹Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

my right. Perhaps referring to the spiritual offspring of the servant (see 53:10)—Jews and Gentiles alike who believe in him (vv. 5–6); see 40:10 and note. In any case, he will be vindicated and rewarded (50:8; 53:10–12; 1Ti 3:16). (CSB)

An angel appeared to assure Him of the justice of His cause and the certainty of recompense. (TLSB)

The expression “my justice, cause” first appears when Israel voices the complaint that “my justice passes by my God” (40:27). While Israel wallows in self-pity, the Servant in his lament turns in hopeful confidence to Yahweh, who announces, “my justice as a light to the peoples I will establish” (51:4). This happens through the Suffering Servant, who is violently taken away without due justice (53:8). But paradoxically, Israel is vindicated through this human perversion of justice (53:11; 54:17). (CC)

Jesus experienced the corruption of justice in his trials (e.g., Mt. 27:24) and was forsaken by his Father (e.g., Mt. 27:46). “in the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered” (Heb. 5:7-8 ESV) Jesus is true God, and as true man, he fraught with frailty and weakness, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15). He finished the Father’s course (Jn. 19:30), and his completed mission brings salvation for all by grace and through faith alone. (CC)

Although it seems empty and vain, it is nevertheless God’s work, even though I am deserted by brethren and attacked by tyrants. Yet this consolation and the witness of our conscience heartens us, as Paul says (2 Cor. 1:12). (Luther)

Thank God that agonized cry was followed by the difference between life and death with words for you and me and an entire human race: “Yet not as I will, but as You will...” (LL)

A few hours after Jesus’ “Why have You forsaken Me” cry by committing Himself into the hands of the Lord: “Father into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46). And He was not disappointed. (PBC)

49:5 *formed me in the womb.* “My office is from God. My word is the Word of truth. If they refuse to believe, let the Gentiles believe. The unbelief of the Jews does not nullify the truth of God.” So the apostles speak (Acts 13:46): “It was necessary that the Word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you ... behold, we turn to the Gentiles.” When some despise the wedding, others are invited from the lanes and highways. (Luther)

bring Jacob back. A prophecy of release from captivity in Babylon (see vv. 9–12, 22; 41:2 and note) and from the greater captivity of sin. (CSB)

The One called Israel in v 3 is to bring Israel back to the Lord; this means the Servant is not the nation of Israel, but One representing the nation for its restoration. Similarly, Adam, though one man, is representative of all humanity (cf Rm 5:12; 1Co 15:45). This same “one for all” idea characterizes Jesus. His death, burial, and resurrection are given to the baptized (cf Rm 6:1–10). (TLSB)

The one called Israel (49:3) is to restore Israel. How can this happen? The Servant is called to embody the people’s calling...Yahweh is still concerned to bring them back, so that they can take up their calling. The Servant is an individual, not the nation of Israel, but he represents the nation for its restoration. He will be for Israel what Israel could not be in itself. Jesus is not only the Second Adam (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:45), but he is also the Second Servant. (CC)

my strength. This may well have to do with the restoration of Judah 70 years of captivity in Babylon, but especially alludes to the greater deliverance from the captivity of sin, as the angel said to Joseph in Matthew 1:21. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume, Part 1)

49:6 Together with Gen. 12:1–3; Ex 19:5–6, this verse is sometimes called the “great commission of the OT” and is quoted in part by Paul and Barnabas in Ac 13:47. (CSB)

too light a thing – The Servant is to affect a salvation benefiting not only the “preserved of Israel” but extending “to the end of the earth.” (TLSB)

preserved of Israel – נִצְּרָה means something unguarded, something abandoned. He wants to describe Israel as scattered, unprotected, without protector and shepherd. Where the Word is not in use, there must be endless sects. And these in turn convert those who were scattered. (Luther)

We note two reasons. First, the Servant came to restore the tribes of Jacob. His work would focus on the ancient people God had chosen. Jesus was born in Bethlehem to “save His people from their sins,” as the angel proclaimed to Joseph (Matthew 1:21). But we also note God’s second reason for sending the Servant. God implied the reason in the first verse when He commanded the distant nations to listen. (PBC)

The Servant’s ministry is to resurrect Israel and bring people home, a theme announced in 40:1-11. Through his victory over Babylon, Cyrus will permit the Judean exiles to return to the land (44:28; 45:1). The Servant, however, is the one who regulates all the scatter people and bring them back to God (cf. James 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1). (CC)

light for the nations. Christ is the light of the world (Lk 2:30–32; Jn 8:12; 9:5), and Christians reflect his light (Mt 5:14). (CSB)

This Servant is to be a light for the nations (Lk 2:30–32; Jn 8:12; 9:5). The nations have a prominent role throughout Is (cf 2:1–5; 11:10; 25:6–9; 40:5; 66:23). (TLSB)

The Suffering Servant will accomplish individually what Israel was unable to do corporately. He brings salvation not only to the children of Abraham (cf. Mt. 1:1-17), but to all the other children of Adam and Eve as well (cf. Lk. 3:23-38). The movement from Israel’s restoration to the restoration of the nations describes Christ’s ministry in Matthew. He sends out the Twelve to gather the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Mt. 10:5-7; cf. Mt. 15:24). After his resurrection, he issues the charge to make disciples of all nations through baptizing and teaching (Mt. 28:19-20). (CC)

This is covenant language which goes back to the covenant between God and Abraham. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume, Part 1)

end of the earth. The only salvation through Christ must be brought about in all the ends of the earth. “Salvation of God” is a Hebraism. It is not that by which one is saved but that by which He saves us. Thus the righteousness of God is that by which He makes us righteous. Here you see it: He depicts one Head for both Jews and Gentiles. (Luther)

Hbr *yeshu‘ah*, the basis for the name “Jesus” (Mt 1:21). (TLSB)

49:7 Redeemer and his Holy One. Stresses the Lord’s role as the One who rescues (cf 41:14). (TLSB)

Focuses on the Lord’s judgment. (TLSB)

This name recalls the laws of redemption in Leviticus. If a man was forced to sell himself as a servant or sell his property to another, he could later buy back whatever had been sold. If he could not, a relative – a kinsman-redeemer – then could buy back whatever had been sold. The Lord would offer the payment; the Servant of the Lord would suffer and die to buy back those held captive by sin and death. (PBC)

“I therefore now establish one Man out of two, having set up one Christ as Prince, so that the faith and religion of one people be under one Head.” Now He describes the cross which follows in the church. Because Satan cannot bear this true worship, David says (Ps. 116:10): “I kept my faith, even when I said, ‘I am greatly afflicted.’ ” The cross soon follows. I, however, was humiliated on the way. (Luther)

The name Redeemer recalls the laws of redemption in Leviticus. If a man was forced to sell himself as a servant or sell his property to another, he could later buy back whatever had been sold. If he could not, a relative – a kinsman-redeemer – then could buy back whatever had been sold. The Lord is the Redeemer. His people had sold themselves to the servitude of sin and could not escape. Because they had nothing to offer as adequate payment, they could not redeem themselves. The Lord would offer the payment; the Servant of the Lord would suffer and die to buy back those held captive by sin and death. In addition, the Lord would redeem His people from the captivity of Babylon. Cyrus would release them from that bondage, but it would only be a preliminary event to a much greater deliverance through the Servant of the Lord. (PBC)

despised. Applied twice to the suffering servant in 53:3. In 60:14 Zion is despised by her enemies. (CSB)

He who was to be “a light for the nations” was “abhorred by the nation[s].” But “the darkness has not overcome it” (Jn 1:5; cf 1Jn 5:4). Cf 1Tm 6:15; Is 52:15. (TLSB)

Yahweh’s ways are so strange! His tactic is not to overcome the world’s arrogance with more arrogance, like every terrestrial conqueror, but to triumph in grace by allowing his Servant to be despised and rejected (cf. Is. 53:3; Mt. 26:67-68). Christ “emptied himself” (Phil. 2:7) and was obedient even to death on a cross (Phil. 2:8). (CC)

This is the appearance of God’s people, despised, abhorred, and a people of servants. This agrees well with the promises that they are a people saved and redeemed. You see today that there is nothing more contemptible and despised than this Word... Then it is an abomination, as Paul says

(1 Cor. 4:13): “We have become, and are now, as the refuse of the world, the off scouring of all things.” In the eyes of the world the greatest insult is to call a person a Christian. (Luther)

His own countrymen screamed, “Crucify Him.” When Pilate asked what he should do with their king, the crowd answered, “We have no king but Caesar” (John 19:15). (PBC)

nation. Refers to either Israel (1:4) or Gentiles. (CSB)

Kings shall see. See v. 23. This reaction to the servant is similar to that of 52:15. (CSB)

Even kings and princes will be found among His subjects, humbly falling down before the King of kings and Lord of lords. (TLSB)

In spite of the way the world and its rulers will treat the Servant (50:6; 53:3), they will eventually kneel before him (49:7; 52:15; cf. 45:23). Psalm 2 likewise exhorts those who conspire against the Messiah (Ps. 2:1-3) to “kiss the Son” in humble adoration (Ps. 2:12) lest his wrath flare against them. (CC)

You are oppressed by them and by the kings, and yet you shall be exalted so that the kings must arise in your presence and do homage to you.” So the princes shall fall prostrate and do homage to the church after tyranny. This is the consolation: “Do not lose hope because of the contempt. Your Word must stand in such a way that even the persecuting tyrants will long for it and revere it.” This is beginning already and is bound to get still better, since the very princes and persecutors must kiss the Gospel. These words were not spoken for the sake of the princes but for the purpose of consoling the godly. (Luther)

They will bow down because of the redemption He will bring to the world. The kings of the earth bow because of the unsurpassed blessing of the redemption God has provided for their people and for all the people of the earth. Note again that kings and princes outside the people of Israel – Gentiles – accord the honor to this Servant. Redemption is for all humanity. (PBC)

faithful – Despite the way the world and its rulers have treated the Servant, they will still kneel before Him (52:15; 60:14). (TLSB)

chosen you. He Himself will strengthen your faith and make you sure, so that you may believe Him to be true. This seems to the world contrary to reason, because God seems to be lying, forsaking us, not choosing us but rejecting us. To the godly man, however, it is believable. (Luther)

49:1–7 Further description of the Servant-Savior is provided by the Lord. The Servant will administer not only the “sword” of God’s Law but also the salvation delivered for you through the Gospel. • Shine upon us, O Light for the nations, and extend to all people the promise of salvation. Amen. (TLSB)

Restoration of Israel

Thus says the LORD: “In a time of favor I have answered you; in a day of salvation I have helped you; I will keep you and give you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages, 9 saying to the prisoners, ‘Come out,’ to those who are in darkness, ‘Appear.’ They shall feed along the ways; on all bare heights shall be their pasture; 10 they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them,

for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them. 11 And I will make all my mountains a road, and my highways shall be raised up. 12 Behold, these shall come from afar, and behold, these from the north and from the west, and these from the land of Syene.” 13 Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the LORD has comforted his people and will have compassion on his afflicted. 14 But Zion said, “The LORD has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me.” 15 “Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. 16 Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me. 17 Your builders make haste; your destroyers and those who laid you waste go out from you. 18 Lift up your eyes around and see; they all gather, they come to you. As I live, declares the LORD, you shall put them all on as an ornament; you shall bind them on as a bride does. 19 “Surely your waste and your desolate places and your devastated land—surely now you will be too narrow for your inhabitants, and those who swallowed you up will be far away. 20 The children of your bereavement will yet say in your ears: ‘The place is too narrow for me; make room for me to dwell in.’ 21 Then you will say in your heart: ‘Who has borne me these? I was bereaved and barren, exiled and put away, but who has brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; from where have these come?’” 22 Thus says the Lord GOD: “Behold, I will lift up my hand to the nations, and raise my signal to the peoples; and 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 mothers. With their faces to the ground they shall bow down to you, and lick the dust of your feet. Then you will know that I am the LORD; those who wait for me shall not be put to shame.” 24 Can the prey be taken from the mighty, or the captives of a tyrant be rescued? 25 For thus says the LORD: “Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken, and the prey of the tyrant be rescued, for I will contend with those who contend with you, and I will save your children. 26 I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh, and they shall be drunk with their own blood as with wine. Then all flesh shall know that I am the LORD your Savior, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.”

49:8 (This is a continuation of the second of the four servant songs. The speaker in vv. 1–6 is the servant of the Lord, the Messiah.) Quoted in part in 2Co 6:2. (CSB)

time of my favor ... day of salvation. † The background of this verse is probably the Year of Jubilee (see 61:1–2; Lev 25:10). (CThe Restoration of Israel (CSB)

One year in seven it is to lie fallow: a year in which the people, freed from much of their ordinary work, are to be taught and trained in God’s law (Deuteronomy 31:10ff – Law generally meant not just Law but also the Gospel promises of God). The 50th year following the seventh seven, is an extra fallow year for the land, which reverts to its’ original owner. It is a time when those who have fallen on bad times have their freedom and property restored. Jubilee serves a dual purpose. It reminds the people that the land belongs to God; and it prevents the wealthy from amassing land (like the Pharisees were doing at Jesus time) (Eerdman’s Handbook to the Bible)

answered. From the eternal heights, God sees the deadly struggle as a thing of the past. (TLSB)

You. The Lord’s Servant. (TLSB)

the day of salvation – This is the day of redemption for God’s people at the end of time. But as Christians we already enjoy salvation in the here and now and God provided it at just the right time.

God’s eternal view shows that the time of humiliation has become “a time of favor”; the day of agony has turned into “a day of salvation.” (TLSB)

Romans 5:6, “You see, at just the right time, when we were powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.”

keep you ... to be a covenant. At the conclusion of a typical Near Eastern treaty, the feudal lord delivered a copy of the covenant document to his vassal, with instruction that the vassal must preserve the copy in an important location, usually in one of his temples. Priests protected the document, and they believed the gods watched over it. When the vassal died, the person chosen as the new ruler in the vassal nation usually had to receive the lord’s approval. In addition, the lord required his vassal to announce publicly his intention to preserve the covenant agreement made by the previous vassal ruler. It was equally important that a treaty document not be forgotten, but that it serve as a living declaration of the relationship between two nations. Stipulations were needed, therefore, to designate when the vassal was to read the covenant document publicly, so the new vassal couldn’t defy the covenant, then plead, “I didn’t know we had an agreement!” Some lordly covenants required their vassal to reread the entire document as often as three times a year. The covenants between God and His people were very serious with corresponding consequences. They were almost always one-sided in the God kept His in mind but His people did not. Yet they were not void because His people failed to live up to their end of the agreement. Genesis 15 is a great example of what has just been said. (PBC – Deuteronomy)

apportion its desolate inheritances.† See 44:26. It was under Joshua that the land had been divided among individual tribes and families (Jos 14:1–5). The Messianic servant will be a new Joshua—as well as a new Moses (see vv. 9–10, which echo Israel’s deliverance from Egypt and her desert experiences under Moses during the period of the exodus). Isaiah is speaking of the redemptive work of the Messiah, who will bring about the day of salvation and establish his covenant with his church. (CSB)

The Servant’s suffering was an atoning sacrifice (53:5–6), and so by His victory God extended favor and salvation to the people of Israel and to all prisoners (v 9) held by Satan in the dungeon of sin and death (cf ch 42). (TLSB)

49:9 *prisoners.*† From the prison of Babylon and also from spiritual and moral bondage. (CSB)

Captives will be restored to their homelands and given new lands. (TLSB)

bare heights. There are no limits to the help His children can expect. Even nature springs into action at God’s command. (CSB)

49:10 Quoted in Rv 7:16–17 as a picture of heaven. (TLSB)

not hunger or thirst. A reference to God’s provision after the exodus. (CSB)

Restoration to God’s favor by the Servant is portrayed in terms of physical safety and satisfaction of bodily needs. (TLSB)

Israel is likened to a flock with its shepherd, the Servant. The figure is familiar since 40:11. Israel is being led from Babylon. New aspects of the case are that ample pasturage will be, as it were provided along the sides of the road. Even, for that matter, the utterly unproductive sand dunes shall produce sufficient pasturage as the flock passes by. Physical hardships will be alleviated. Hunger and thirst, a seemingly unavoidable difficulty under such circumstances, will offer no obstacle. (Leupold)

neither scorching wind nor sun – The parching heat of the sun shall be no problem. (Leupold)

has pity. Babylon's fall will be linked with Israel's restoration. God's compassion on His people is the theme of chapters 40-66. (CSB)

The Servant will guide them as a shepherd. (TLSB)

All these blessings are traceable to the deep compassion of the shepherd for His sheep. (Leupold)

will guide them. As a shepherd. This whole verse is also a picture of heaven according to Rev 7:16–17. (CSB)

The shepherd shall, as it were, know how to find springs of water and suitable places for rest. (Leupold)

49:11 *mountain a road*. Cf 35:8; 40:3–4; 62:10. (TLSB)

The rough and difficult mountains shall present no obstacle. For He who can call them “my” mountains because He made them, can also transform them to be mere highways. (Leupold)

highways ... raised up. Even, for that matter, “highways” will be readied for convenient passage. (Leupold)

These themes show up in John the Baptist's coming and ministry. (CSB)

49:12 *come from afar*. The word of the Lord invites readers and hearers of His promise to look with the eyes of faith and they will see the flock coming in great numbers from all points of the compass, even from so far /distant a land as Syene, which most likely was the modern Aswan, to the extreme south of the land of Egypt. (Leupold)

north ... west. Ends of the earth. (CSB)

Syene. See Eze 29:10; 30:6; located in the most southern part of Egypt. (CSB)

Modern Aswan, on the first cataract of the Nile. However, the meaning of Hbr *sinim*, occurring only here, is not certain. When Judah was exiled by the Babylonians, people were scattered across the ancient Near East, even as far as Egypt (cf Jer 42–43). The Lord promises to gather His people from the four corners of the earth (cf Dt 30:4; Jer 31:8, 10; Mt 24:31). (TLSB)

49:13 *Sing for joy ... mountains*. Nature is personified often in Isaiah. Nature is called on to join in praise. (CSB)

Song boasts not of Israel's achievements but of the fulfillment of God's promises to His people (other songs in Is include ch 12; 24:16; 25:1; 54:1; cf 30:29). (TLSB)

Such gracious deeds of the Almighty, done for His covenant people, demand a response. They are deeds done on so grand a scale that the whole of God's creation is pictured as taking note and they are here invited, by a bold personification to make their praises vocal. The heavens, the earth and the mountains are bidden to bear their part in the joyful task. (Leupold)

—

comforted his people. As he redeems and saves them. Cf. 2Co 1:3–4. (CSB)

Also used in texts that look back and move the prophecy forward (cf 12:1; 61:2). (TLSB)

By changing the tense at this point, so to speak, the prophet seems to indicate that there are several stages in which the Lord's task will be performed: He has comforted; He will have compassion on His afflicted ones. (Leupold)

49:14 *forsaken ... forgotten.* See 40:27; 54:7; La 5:20–22. (CSB)

Deliverance of Israel and the nations, described as a certain reality (vv 1–13), is now viewed from the human standpoint of a promise to be believed (vv 14–26). The Lord pleads for faith in His tireless love and limitless power. (TLSB)

Though the prophet speaks very confidently of a glorious future, it is by no means easy under the circumstances to accept the message as true. Zion has several misgivings. Experience had proved in the past that nations led into captivity failed to return. Could Israel really return? Her Captivity had gone for decades. So the voices were being heard here and there to the effect: the Lord has written us off – abandoned. (Leupold)

49:15 *Can a mother forget ... ?* Cf. Ps 27:10. (CSB)

By way of assurance comes one of the loveliest words of the entire OT. The Lord's concern for Zion is likened to what may be the most selfless love that mankind know, mothers love. As impossible as it is for a normal mother to forget a child she nursed at her breast, so the Lord's for Zion is indestructible. (Leupold)

I will not forget you. Even if the unthinkable happened, like a mother forgetting her child, God will never forget His own. (TLSB)

49:16 *I have engraved you on ... my hands.* As the names of the tribes of Israel were engraved on stones and fastened to the ephod of the high priest as a memorial before the Lord (Ex 28:9–12; cf. SS 8:6). (CSB)

It was normal practice that an owner's name be engraved on his slaves; it is reversed here to show how far the Lord will go to remind Israel of His love. (TLSB)

To change the figure, it is as though the Lord had deeply engraved the name or picture, of Israel on the palms of His hands, that His eyes might lovingly dwell on her features and be continually reminded of the one whom He so deeply loved. (Leupold)

What wonderful picture of God's constant attention to the affairs of His people! Just as we see the palms of our own hands so often each day, so God thinks of us. We need to mark well how

the love of God for us burns in His heart. What a comfort to know that He has pledged to love us so! (PBC)

In Isaiah 40:25-26 we see God's ability to get done whatever He has promised; ²⁵“To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One. ²⁶Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.”

continually before me. Cf. Ps 137:5–6. (CSB)

Though Jerusalem's walls may be torn down, they are always in God's view. (TLSB)

49:17 *builders.* Following the reading of the Dead Sea Scrolls and some ancient versions. (CSB)

Picture is of a rebuilt Zion, a re-inhabited Jerusalem. (TLSB)

destroyer...laid waste – Those returning will displace the former invaders who destroyed Jerusalem. (TLSB)

49:18 *lift your eyes* – o the east, the west, the south, and the north. Where are they? Now you see nothing but enemies, persecutors, and heathen. Presently you will see generous friends and brothers, and they will lick your feet. Did not this happen to the apostles, who were received in an honorable way by their enemies? So it will happen to us, and our descendants will see it, if only we will abide in the Word. (Luther)

they all gather. The builders or children. (TLSB)

ornament. Beautiful clothes and jewels symbolize strength and joy. (CSB)

The ransomed, coming from all directions of the compass, adorn Zion as jewels on a bride's gown. As a bride treats her wedding dress, so should Israel treat the nations who believe in the Lord. (TLSB)

49:19–20 *be too narrow.*† The restoration of Israel will be astonishing and complete. The prophecy was partially fulfilled in the return from Babylon and completely in the spiritual offspring among both Jews and Gentiles. (CSB)

Zion, seemingly “bereaved and barren” (v 21), will become the mother of offspring so unexpected numerous as to overcrowd the once “devastated land.” However, Israel's restored population previews a spiritual commonwealth, the people ransomed by the Servant's blood and spread across every national boundary. (TLSB)

49:19 *waste ... desolate.* What you are now according to the appearance of the flesh is like a desolation and a destroyed and devastated land. The land will be narrow for the inhabitants. In appearance the Christian church is like a devastated and ruined city; as the saying goes. (Luther)

who swallowed you up – Former Babylonian captors will be distant and forgotten. (TLSB)

49:20 *children of your bereavement* – Throughout the ancient world, a woman who bore many children was treasured by her husband. The reasoning was influenced by basic issues of survival

(Ps, 127:3-5) and economy. It was a deep disappointment if a wife had no children (e.g. Sarah, Rachel, Hannah). Isaiah refers frequently to the theme of childbirth and barrenness. (TLSB)

49:21 *who has borne me* – Sudden increase amazes Israel in light of her former barren state. (TLSB)

bereaved and barren. The concept of Israel as a barren woman is stressed in 54:1. (CSB)

49:22 *my signal.* The Lord needs but to give a signal to the nations and their rulers to secure their readiness to promote the welfare of His sons and daughters. (TLSB)

The banner is the gospel, and it is responsible for the conversion of the Gentiles. God gathers together those who believe. The heathen Gentiles will accompany believing children of God's OT people. (PBC)

49:23 *Kings ... faces to the ground.* Even the nobles of their former oppressors will serve them. (TLSB)

The most powerful and greatest will humble themselves and place their treasure and power at the disposal of the church. Those kings and queens will give the church honor and glory and in humble faith will submit to the church and its head. (PBC)

lick the dust – Acts in extreme humility. (TLSB)

wait for me. This implies that the soul has been fixed on the Lord and on His gracious promises. (Leupold)

49:24 *mighty.*† The Babylonians and all enemies of God (see 51:13). (CSB)

Seems impossible that the weak should escape from the strong, yet the Lord will demonstrate His greater strength by delivering His own. (TLSB)

49:25 *captives...shall be taken.*† See Jer 50:33–34. (CSB)

I will contend. God takes up the case of his people. He will “defend their cause” (Jer 50:34). (CSB)

I will save. We will bring His own people out of Babylon. He continues to gather His own from the four corners of the earth. Among those God calls are some who are by the world's standard powerful and wealthy, and influential. No matter how godless or powerful the unbelieving world may seem to be, God will gather believers to Himself. The gospel will be effective, even if in the world it seems like foolishness and a stumbling block. (PBC)

49:26 *oppressors.* See 14:4; 16:4; 51:13. (CSB)

eat their own flesh. During the siege of Jerusalem its people were reduced to cannibalism (La 4:10). (CSB)

Opposition to God's people is self-destructive. His saving of His people will come by having Israel's enemies destroy themselves. (TLSB)

Redeemer. The Lord is both Judge and Redeemer; faith is His gift that brings salvation (cf Heb 11:31 on Rahab's faith). (TLSB)

Mighty One of Jacob. The mighty of this earth are no match for the Mighty One of Jacob (cf Is 1:24). (TLSB)

The piling up of these names adds emphasis. The truth of these promises does not depend on any human effort. It depends on the Lord and His activity on behalf of His people. (PBC)

49:8–26 Isaiah prophesies Israel's return and prosperity in contrast with the humiliation of the oppressors. Today, regard your sins with appropriate shame, but likewise see that the Lord, your Savior, has redeemed you. He will not forget you (v 15). He longs to restore you and your family.

- Dearest Jesus, the memorials of my salvation are graven on Your palms. Show them to all as a sign of Your mercy and forgiveness toward me and all sinners. Amen. (TLSB)