

Messiah's Mission

Isaiah 49

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Isaiah 49:1-12 – Messiah declares His mission (NIV)

Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations: Before I was born the Lord called me; from my mother's womb he has spoken my name. ² He 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. ³ He said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor." ⁴ But I said, "I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing at all. Yet what is due me is in the Lord's hand, and my reward is with my God." ⁵ And 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— ⁶ he 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 my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." ⁷ This 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 stand up, princes will see and bow down, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you." ⁸ This 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 reassign its desolate inheritances, ⁹ to 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. ¹⁰ They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat down on them. He who has compassion on them will guide them and lead them beside springs of water. ¹¹ I will turn all my mountains into roads, and my highways will be raised up. ¹² See, they will come from afar— some from the north, some from the west, some from the region of Aswan."

v1 – Who does the Lord want to listen to Him?

As the context will show, these words come prophetically from the Messiah, the Servant of the LORD revealed in previous chapters. Here, He commands the coastlands — the distant lands of the Gentiles — to listen to Him.

Who was called from the womb?

The Messiah, later revealed as Jesus Christ, was called from the womb. Actually, as shown in Micah 5:2, Jesus was called even before He was in Mary's womb, yet here He starts at the point which any man could most readily relate to.

How did God speak the name of the Messiah before He was born?

This was fulfilled in Luke 1:31, where the LORD, through the angel Gabriel, declared the name of Jesus before the conception in Mary's womb.

v2 – How were the words of the Messiah like a sharp sword?

The very words of the Messiah have power and authority. While some might need to brandish a weapon to show their authority, the Messiah needs only to speak.

How was the Messiah hidden?

The Messiah prophetically proclaims that He is like a carefully made and polished arrow in the service of the LORD, ready to be used at the right time. This probably has reference to the "hidden" years of Jesus, when He lived in obscurity, as a polished shaft waiting in the quiver of the LORD.

v3 – Why is the Messiah referred to as Israel here?

The term Israel has to be referring to the Messiah because in verses 5-6, it is the Servant's task is to bring Israel back to Yahweh and to the land. This is done because:

- First, because the Messiah comes from Israel, and is a representative of the nation.
- Second, because the Messiah fulfills the name Israel, which means, "governed by God."

v4 – Why would the Messiah be discouraged about His work being in vain?

He would certainly be tempted by discouragement because of the unfaithfulness of the nation Israel and prophetically by our own unfaithfulness. How do you think Jesus felt about Peter denying Him three times? Yet he called still him and restored him.

v5 – What assignment did the Father give the Messiah regarding Israel?

To bring Jacob back to Him: This shows that ethnic Israel has an enduring place in God’s plan, and that plan will be fulfilled when all Israel will be saved (Romans 11:26).

How will the Messiah accomplish bringing Israel back to Him?

By pouring out the Spirit on them once their hearts are prepared during the Tribulation. There will be sufficient supernatural developments, fulfillment of prophecy and being brought to the end of themselves that the Jews will be compelled to believe.

v6 – What other mission did the Father give the Messiah?

It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob...I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles: Though part of the Messiah’s mission is directed to Israel, He also has a mission to the Gentiles.

- The salvation of Israel is a small thing to God because He is God... everything is small compared to Him.

What will the Messiah do for the Gentiles?

That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth. The Messiah would not simply bring salvation; He would be...salvation to the ends of the earth (the distant places).

- Israel has light but needs restoration, while the Gentiles need both light and salvation.

v7 – What does the Father say to the Messiah here?

The Lord speaks to His Messiah revealing that He will be One whom man despises, and whom His own nation abhors. This is an important prophecy of the rejection of the Messiah, by mankind in general and by Israel specifically.

When will Kings and princes arise to worship the Messiah?

Certainly, during the Millennial Kingdom. But we see sporadic foreshadowings of this today and in history.

v8 – On what occasion do you think the Lord Father had in mind here?

In an acceptable time I have heard You, and in the day of salvation I have helped You; I will preserve You: The LORD God extended His help and preservation to the Messiah all through His earthly ministry. Yet if there is any specific time that this promise was fulfilled, it was as Jesus died on the cross and trusted in the promise of resurrection.

- It is beautiful to imagine Jesus comforting and strengthening His soul with these promises as He anticipated and endured the ordeal of the cross.

How was Jesus a covenant to the people?

Jesus, the Messiah, doesn’t merely bring a covenant; He is a covenant to the people. His resurrection proved that everything He promised was true.

What aspects of the new covenant are mentioned here?

That the earth would be restored and that there would be an inheritance for those faithful to Him. This of course is speaking of the Eternal State but that will be foreshadowed in the Millennial Kingdom.

v9 – How is it Jesus would say to the prisoners, “Go forth”?

Jesus’ ministry set people free from bondage and imprisonment...

- Jesus set the demon possessed free from the bondage of chains and demonic torture (Mark 5:1-15).
- Jesus set the sick and diseased free from the bondage of their infirmities (Luke 13:16).
- Jesus set the righteous dead captive in Hades free from their place (Ephesians 4:8).
- Jesus sets those in bondage to sin and the law free (John 8:33-36, Galatians 3:22-23).

How is it people are in bondage to sin?

Unbelievers are in bondage to sin (Acts 8:23; Romans 6:6, 16, 19; 7:14; 2 Peter 2:19).

John 8:34 – *Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin*

Sin always has consequences so unbelievers have no choice but to engage in activities that has the consequence of separation from God. Believers have a choice to do what honors God or not; believers will have consequences as mortals for bad decisions but we are free from the ultimate consequence.

- Additionally, evil has a way of taking hold in a person’s life, and bad habits are hard to break. For an unsaved person, sin forms a chain that only the Savior can break.

It is possible to “give the devil a foothold” (Ephesians 4:27) by harboring sins like anger in our hearts. However, we should not think of spiritual bondage as Christians being bound by demons.

- There is no doubt that demons oppress and tempt believers, and there are some states of mind that are fertile ground for temptation (Matthew 6:13; 1 Corinthians 7:5; Galatians 6:1). But there is no evidence to suggest that we are in any way bound by demons or rendered helpless in spiritual warfare.

Who are those in darkness Jesus would invite to come into the light?

Those who don't know Jesus as their Savior after the cross and those who trusted in anything but God's provision for their salvation before the cross.

John 8:12 – *Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."*

How would God bless those who embrace the light of God's provision for salvation?

They would get what they need... *They will feed beside the roads and find pasture on every barren hill.* I can't help but think of the deer that partakes of the green grass along the roads. The point is, God provides what we need.

v10 – Who is it that will neither hunger or thirst?

In the immediate context, this refers to God's supply and sustaining of the exiles returning from Babylon to Judah, through the unseen hand of the Messiah. In the larger sense, it speaks of mercy and the provision of God for people as they return to Him at the midpoint of the Tribulation (see Revelation 12:6, 12:14).

v11 – What does it mean that God will make each of My mountains a road?

The mountains in the way of the returning exiles — both in near and far fulfillment — would seem to defeat the purpose of the LORD. But they will not.

- This principle here is that God often turns what looks like obstacles in our life into opportunities.

v12 – From where would those seeking the Lord come?

They would come from distant places, both physically and spiritually. Even as far as *the land of Sinim*: this is probably a reference to China.

Isaiah 49:13-26 – The Lord's faithfulness to Zion (NIV)

¹³ *Shout for joy, you heavens; rejoice, you earth; burst into song, you mountains! For the Lord comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones.* ¹⁴ *But Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me."*

¹⁵ *"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!"* ¹⁶ *See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me.*

¹⁷ *Your children hasten back, and those who laid you waste depart from you.* ¹⁸ *Lift up your eyes and look around; all your children gather and come to you. As surely as I live," declares the Lord, you will wear them all as ornaments; you will put them on, like a bride.*

¹⁹ *"Though you were ruined and made desolate and your land laid waste, now you will be too small for your people,*

and those who devoured you will be far away." ²⁰ *The children born during your bereavement will yet say in your hearing, "This place is too small for us; give us more space to live in."* ²¹ *Then you will say in your heart, "Who bore me these? I was bereaved and barren; I was exiled and rejected. Who brought these up? I was left all alone, but these—where have they come from?"* ²² *This is what the Sovereign Lord says: "See, I will beckon to the nations, I will lift up my banner to the peoples; they will bring your sons in their arms and carry your daughters on their hips.*

²³ *Kings will be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. They will bow down before you with their faces to the ground; they will lick the dust at your feet.*

Then you will know that I am the Lord; those who hope in me will not be disappointed." ²⁴ *Can plunder be taken from warriors, or captives be rescued from the fierce?*

²⁵ *But this is what the Lord says: "Yes, captives will be taken from warriors, and plunder retrieved from the fierce; I will contend with those who contend with you, and your children I will save."* ²⁶ *I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh; they will be drunk on their own blood, as with wine. Then all mankind will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob."*

v13 – Who should praise God for the comfort and mercy He has shown His people?

Sing, O heavens! For the LORD has comforted His people:

It is simply assumed that the people the LORD has comforted will praise Him; here, the LORD calls for creation itself to add their voices in praise for all the Messiah has done.

v14 – What spoils the praise for God?

But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me": Zion — speaking of the highest hill in Jerusalem, and the place of God's people by association — Zion objects. Zion believes, "The LORD has forsaken and forgotten me."

- The rest of Isaiah 49 and Isaiah 50 will answer this question.
- Because of their captivity in Babylon, Zion wonders "Does God really care about us?" God will answer, with strength and insight.

v15 – What analogy does God provide to explain why He would not forget Israel?

Can a woman forget her nursing child: Despite bizarre accounts of unspeakable cruelty, everyone knows that a woman will never forget her nursing child. Yet the LORD says, *Surely, they may forget, yet I will not forget you.*

- The LORD's affection for His people is greater than the devotion a woman has for her nursing child.

v16 – What is the significance of being inscribed on the palms of the Messiah’s hands?

This has an obvious and beautiful fulfillment in the nail-scarred hands of Jesus. As Jesus told Thomas in a post-resurrection appearance, look at My hands (John 20:27). When we see the nail-scarred hands of Jesus, we see how He has inscribed us on the palms of His hands. With such love, how could God ever forget His people?

How is it that their walls are continually before Me?

The walls refer to the walls of the city of Jerusalem, which figuratively speak of the health, the strength, the prosperity, and the security of God’s people.

- God is always mindful of the condition of His people, despite the objections of a doubting Zion.

v17 – What would become of those who oppressed Israel?

They would go away from them... their oppression would be limited.

v18 – What would constitute an ornament for Israel?

The LORD will bring back the exiled and captive sons of Zion to the Promised Land, and this will be an ornament for God’s people.

- The LORD’s love and faithfulness for Zion are also shown by His promise for their future. It isn’t just demonstrated by the past and the present, but also by His future plans for them.
- This promise was partially fulfilled in the return of the exiles from Babylon but will be ultimately fulfilled in the regathering of Israel for the Millennial Kingdom.

v19 – What would characterize Israel’s return to the land?

They would have to occupy the *waste and desolate places* because otherwise it would be *too small for the inhabitants*.

- As the LORD brings the sons of Zion back to Israel, they will fill the land in a glorious way.
- We are seeing that aspect of their return being foreshadowed today.

v20-21 – How would God bless Israel?

God would replace what Israel had lost due to the Babylonian invasion and captivity to the point where they would need more land.

- The great blessing of the returning Israel (in both near and far fulfillment) will be an astounding surprise. God’s blessing will seem to come from nowhere.

v22 – What is this oath to the nations that God makes?

The oath that seems to apply here is the Abrahamic Covenant...

Genesis 12:3 – *I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*

God will rescue Israel from both their immediate and ultimate captivity.

What standard would God set for the peoples that is connected to the sons of Israel being returned to the land?

Israel being re-established and having their own national flag (a standard for the nations). This was a prerequisite for Aliyah, a special term describing the process of returning to the Land from the Diaspora...Aliyah means to “ascend.”

The fact that Israel would have a nation flag when they return is a fulfillment of prophecy...

Isaiah 11:10 – *And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, who shall stand as a banner to the people*

The flag of Israel uses the Star of David and King David was a son of Jesse, thus the root of Jesse. There are a lot of other symbols they could have chosen for their flag. The emblem of Israel is an Escutcheon which contains a Menorah in its center, two olive branches on both sides of the Menorah and the label "Israel" in Hebrew at the bottom. But they chose a star of David for their flag. Is this self-fulfilling prophecy or God declaring the end from the beginning? It is hard to swallow the idea that a secular nation chose a symbol just to say they have fulfilled Bible prophecy.

v23 – When would the Gentile kings and queens bow down to Israel?

During the millennial Kingdom, Israel will be exalted over all nations because the Lord Jesus will be ruling from there.

Isaiah 2:2-3 – *Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.*

Just as antisemitism today reflects rebellion against God, during the Millennial Kingdom honoring Israel will go along with honoring God.

Psalms 72:11 – *Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him; All nations shall serve Him.*

Indeed, one of the Lord’s titles is King of kings (Revelation 19:16)

v24 – How would *captives be rescued from the fierce?*

Certainly, mighty Babylon would lose its kingdom by the Medes and Persians resulting in the Jews being allowed to return to Israel.

v25 – How would the *captives will be taken from warriors?*

Babylon, the mighty empire, had taken Zion captive. But even they shall be taken away. God will show His strength and love for Zion by doing to Babylon what Babylon did to Zion.

- This is even more true for those set free from captivity to Satan. Jesus spoke of spoiling Satan in...
Luke 11:21-22 – When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils.

v26 – What would happen to the oppressors of Israel?

The pictures of eating their own flesh and drinking their own blood draw on the horrors of siege conditions. The reality is that those who oppose the Lord and his people experience the self-destructiveness of sin.

When will all mankind know that Jesus is the Lord, our Savior, Redeemer, and the Mighty One of Jacob?

Certainly, when He returns to earth at the end of the Tribulation and into the Millennial Kingdom.

- This is why the book of Revelation is named that... it is the revealing of Jesus to the world.

What applications come to mind from our discussion?

- The Lord Jesus being a light to the Gentiles was always God's plan, it was not a "Plan B" when Israel rejected Him.
- Sin always has consequences, but believers are exempt from the ultimate consequence, separation from God.
- Jesus sets us free from bondage to sin
- God can turn what looks like obstacles in our life into opportunities
- God is not done with Israel; He will fulfill His promises.
- As we see God preparing to work through Israel today it should cause us to get on to what He has called us to do.