

Isaiah 49-50 • The Servant of the Lord

Introduction

From the earliest times, even long before Christ appeared the first time, Bible scholars began to develop a picture of the Messiah as what they would ultimately term, "The Suffering Servant". Most of the groundwork for this is provided through Isaiah and, after all the prophets were recorded, it would ultimately be tied to the person of Joseph, seen as the ultimate example of the Messiah the Suffering Servant.

In this study we've used the Inductive Study Approach of asking the "W"'s and the "H" (who, where, what, when, how, and why) with a particular emphasis on "who". Read through both chapters and make a note of how the conversation changes, who is speaking from one section to the next, and to whom they are speaking. The study is then organized to group those sections of Scripture together so we can clearly understand the greater meaning of what these conversations are teaching us.

³He said to Me, "You are My Servant,
Israel,
In Whom I will show My glory."

⁵And now says the Lord, who formed Me
from the womb to be His Servant,
To bring Jacob back to Him, so that
Israel might be gathered to Him
(For I am honored in the sight of the
LORD,

And My God is My strength),

⁶He says, "It is too small a thing that You
should be My Servant
To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to
restore the preserved ones of Israel;
I will also make You a light of the nations
So that My salvation may reach to the end
of the earth."

⁷Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of
Israel and its Holy One,
To the despised One,
To the One abhorred by the nation,
To the Servant of rulers,
"Kings will see and arise,
Princes will also bow down,
Because of the Lord who is faithful, the
Holy One of Israel who has chosen
You."

⁸Thus says the LORD,
"In a favorable time I have answered
You,
And in a day of salvation I have helped
You;
And I will keep You and give You for a
covenant of the people,
To restore the land, to make them inherit
the desolate heritages;

⁹Saying to those who are bound, 'Go
forth,'

To those who are in darkness,
'Show yourselves.'
Along the roads they will feed,

[Read 49:3, 5-13]

Q: Of whom is this passage speaking? Is God speaking about the nation Israel?

A: No, God is speaking about Israel in spiritual terms as He directly addresses His Son the Messiah to come.

Q: What are the 4 main statements in v.3-7 the Father makes directly to the Son showing the work of the Messiah the Servant?

1. (v.3) "...In Whom I will show My glory". The ultimate goal.
2. (v.5) "...To bring Jacob back..." God commissions Christ to bring Israel back to Him.
3. (v.6) "...a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth". God commissions Christ to also bring salvation to the rest of the world.
4. (v.7) At first "...despised" and "abhorred", ultimately to Christ all will "see and arise" and "bow down". Rejected by most at His First Coming, He will be worshiped by all at His Second Coming.

Point: Throughout Scripture we are presented with two brides of Christ: Israel – composed exclusively of Jews, and the church – composed of both Jew and Gentile. Although the first bride (Israel) rejects Christ at His First Coming so that He takes His other bride (the Church) first, ultimately He will have both. The role of the Messiah isn't simply to bring salvation in general, but specifically to **BOTH** groups.

Q: What are the specific details of Christ the Servant's work as provided by God in v.8?

A: "...I will keep You and give You for a covenant to the people..."

Q: What might be significant about giving Christ as part of a covenant between God and mankind?

A: All biblical covenants are confirmed by blood (some kind of sacrifice), in this case with the blood of the Son Himself. Also all biblical covenants have a sign associated with them such as the rainbow given to Noah or circumcision given to Abraham. In this case it is the sign of the cross.

Q: In v.9-11, what will result from this covenant?

1. Restoring the promised earthly inheritance (v.8) "...To restore the land, to make them inherit the desolate heritages..."
2. Freeing those in bondage. (v.9)
3. Bringing people out of darkness. (v.9)
4. He will provide whatever is necessary to bring them back both physically

And their pasture will be on all bare heights.
¹⁰They will not hunger or thirst,
Nor will the scorching heat or sun strike them down;
For He who has compassion on them will lead them
And will guide them to springs of water.
¹¹I will make all My mountains a road,
And My highways will be raised up.
¹²Behold, these will come from afar;
And lo, these will come from the north and from the west,
And these from the land of Sinim.”
¹³Shout for joy, O heavens! And rejoice, O earth!
Break forth into joyful shouting, O mountains!
For the LORD has comforted His people
And will have compassion on His afflicted.

⁴But I said, “I have toiled in vain,
I have spent My strength for nothing and vanity;
Yet surely the justice due to Me is with the LORD,
And My reward with My God.”

and spiritually. (v.9-10)

5. He will lead them and guide them. (v.10)
6. All obstacles will be removed. (v.11)

Point: *All the references to physical restoration have a dual meaning teaching something about the spiritual restoration the Messiah will effect at the same time.*

Q: To what is v.12 referring?

A: The return to Israel by those scattered to the north, west, and south (Sinim), those furthest away who had no earthly hope of ever returning.

Q: What might be significant about the reference in v.12 to people coming back “from the land of Sinim”?

A: “Sinim” literally means “thorns”. While it may refer to literal lands bordering Egypt, it most certainly has a greater spiritual representation of a life of hardship and unfruitfulness, a picture of leaving the old life of destitution for a new life of riches and comfort in Christ.

Q: How do we know that God’s ultimate goal isn’t simply to return people to the land of Israel? What is indicated here which shows God’s greater goals and concerns?

A: In v.13 these things are presented in the past tense as if it already happened: “For the LORD has comforted His people and will have compassion on His afflicted”.

Point: *From this and other teachings in both Isaiah and other places in Scripture there developed a picture of the Messiah called “The Suffering Servant”. Whereas false religions often portray a god who must be served without question at all costs, the Gospel reveals that the One True God reconciles people to Him through the service of His Son on their behalf.*

Application: *If Christ’s work was to be a Servant on behalf of all people, how should that reflect our life’s goal of being more Christ-like?*

[Read 49:4]

Q: Who is speaking now?

A: It is the Son speaking to the Father.

Q: Why might Christ label His efforts as having “toiled in vain”?

A: At His First Coming He was mostly rejected by Israel, the ones He first ministered to.

He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.

– John 1:11

For not even His brothers were believing in Him.

– John 7:5

Q: In spite of the circumstances what did Christ do?

A: He trusted the Father for the ultimate results.

and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously;

– 1 Peter 2:23

Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.
– 1 Peter 4:19

Application: Have you ever thought your work for God is a failure because it didn't produce measurable results the way the world measures them? What might be the greater lesson about our work for the Kingdom?

¹Listen to Me, O islands,
And pay attention, you peoples from afar.
The LORD called Me from the womb;
From the body of My mother He named Me.

²He has made My mouth like a sharp sword,
In the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me;
And He has also made Me a select arrow,
He has hidden Me in His quiver.

⁴The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of disciples,
That I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word.
He awakens Me morning by morning,
He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple.

⁵The Lord GOD has opened My ear;
And I was not disobedient
Nor did I turn back.
⁶I gave My back to those who strike Me,
And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard;
I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting.

⁷For the Lord GOD helps Me,
Therefore, I am not disgraced;
Therefore, I have set My face like flint,
And I know that I will not be ashamed.

⁸He who vindicates Me is near;
Who will contend with Me?
Let us stand up to each other;
Who has a case against Me?
Let him draw near to Me.

⁹Behold, the Lord GOD helps Me;
Who is he who condemns Me?
Behold, they will all wear out like a garment;
The moth will eat them.

[Read 49:1-2; 50:4, 8-9]

Q: In the opening passage God was speaking about His Son, and in the verse above the Son is speaking to God. Who is speaking in these verses?

A: It is the Son speaking to us about Himself.

Q: What are the main points Christ is communicating about Himself?

1. (v.1) "The Lord called Me from the womb..." The Father commissioned the Son even before His physical birth.
2. (v.2) "...a sharp sword...a select arrow...hidden...in His quiver". The Son is a mighty weapon in the hand of the Father both physically and spiritually.
3. (v.4) "...given Me the tongue...that I may know how to sustain" and "...My ear to listen..." The Son is equipped with perfect wisdom to comfort those in need, knowing when it is appropriate to talk and when it is time to listen.
4. (v.5-7) "...I was not disobedient" even while He was suffering for Him.
5. (v.8-9) "He...vindicates Me..." It is all in the Father's hands.

Point: If we compare each of these points with those in the opening passage made by the Father, we see that Christ here is confirming that He carried out exactly what the Father called Him to do: to be His Suffering Servant and trust the Father for the results.

Summary To This Point

We are presented with three viewpoints about the will of the Father as fulfilled through the work of His Son the Suffering Servant:

- From the Father to the Son
- From the Son to the Father
- From the Son to Us

Every point of view confirms the same basic foundation of the work of the Messiah as the Suffering Servant on the part of all humanity. It is the ultimate expression of the new covenant Christ will give us...

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

– John 13:34-35

¹⁴But Zion said, “The LORD has forsaken me,
And the LORD has forgotten me.”

[Read 49:14]

Note: In the remaining verses of this study the conversational point of view is no longer about the Father and the Son, but the Father and His people.

Q: What is the chief complaint of God’s people?

A: They feel like God as “forsaken” and “forgotten” them.

¹Thus says the LORD,
“Where is the certificate of divorce
By which I have sent your mother away?
Or to whom of My creditors did I sell
you?
Behold, you were sold for your iniquities,
And for your transgressions your mother
was sent away.

[Read 50:1-3]

Q: But what is the Father’s response to His people’s accusation?

A: They are in their current predicament not because the Father forsook them, but because **they** forsook the **Father**. They are not suffering unjustly, but undergoing His discipline for their “iniquities” and “transgressions” (v.1)

²Why was there no man when I came?
When I called, why was there none to
answer?
Is My hand so short that it cannot
ransom?

Q: How do we know that the main issue is the people’s unfaithfulness?

A: From the reference to “the certificate of divorce”. (v.1) Spiritual unfaithfulness throughout Scripture is repeatedly compared to marital unfaithfulness.

Or have I no power to deliver?
Behold, I dry up the sea with
My rebuke,
I make the rivers a wilderness;
Their fish stink for lack of water
And die of thirst.

Q: How would you sum up the point God is making in v.2 & 3?

A: The issue cannot possibly be due to the Father not being able to work on His people’s behalf as illustrated by things which demonstrate His awesome capabilities; the problem therefore has to be on the people’s side of the equation.

³I clothe the heavens with blackness
And make sackcloth their covering.”

Application: What is the reality of the source of our hardships? Are they brought about by unjust persecution by the world? Or are they the result of bad choices we’ve made and merely the consequences of our actions? How well do we realize that in either case the solution is one and the same: a commitment to faithfulness.

¹⁵“Can a woman forget her nursing child
And have no compassion on the son of
her womb?
Even these may forget, but I will not
forget you.

[Read 49:15-26]

Q: What are the main points of comfort offered by the Father to His people?

1. (v.15) The power of God’s love as compared to the mother-son relationship.
2. (v.16) The picture of God’s love as signified by engraving their names on the palm of His hands. [Note: It’s interesting that God marks the palms, the Antichrist as a counterfeit marks the backs of the hand.]
3. (v.17-26) The promises of God’s love.
 - a. (v.17-18) Their enemies will be destroyed.
 - b. (v.19-21) They will be returned to the land which will be filled to the breaking point with the great numbers who have returned.
 - c. (v.22-26) All of their needs will be cared for.

¹⁶Behold, I have inscribed you on the
palms of My hands;
Your walls are continually before Me.

¹⁷“Your builders hurry;
Your destroyers and devastators
Will depart from you.

¹⁸Lift up your eyes and look around;
All of them gather together, they come to
you.

As I live,” declares the LORD,
“You will surely put on all of them as
jewels and bind them on as a bride.

¹⁹“For your waste and desolate places and
your destroyed land—
Surely now you will be too cramped for
the inhabitants,
And those who swallowed you will be far
away.

Q: Since this has not yet taken place, what famous work through the Son is this speaking of?

A: The Millennial Reign.

Q: How might v.23 provide the key application of these things for His people?

A: “Those who wait **hopefully** for Me will not be put to shame”.

Application: The biblical definition of “hope” is having such faith that God will

²⁰The children of whom you were bereaved will yet say in your ears,
'The place is too cramped for me;
Make room for me that I may live here.'

²¹Then you will say in your heart,
'Who has begotten these for me,
Since I have been bereaved of my children

And am barren, an exile and a wanderer?
And who has reared these?
Behold, I was left alone;
From where did these come?'"

²²Thus says the Lord GOD,
"Behold, I will lift up My hand to the nations

And set up My standard to the peoples;
And they will bring your sons in their bosom,
And your daughters will be carried on their shoulders.

²³Kings will be your guardians,
And their princesses your nurses.
They will bow down to you with their faces to the earth
And lick the dust of your feet;
And you will know that I am the LORD;
Those who hopefully wait for Me will not be put to shame.

²⁴"Can the prey be taken from the mighty man,
Or the captives of a tyrant be rescued?"

²⁵Surely, thus says the LORD,
"Even the captives of the mighty man will be taken away,
And the prey of the tyrant will be rescued;
For I will contend with the one who contends with you,
And I will save your sons.

²⁶I will feed your oppressors with their own flesh,
And they will become drunk with their own blood as with sweet wine;
And all flesh will know that I, the LORD, am your Savior
And your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob."

bring to fulfillment all His promises that we view them as "future fact" – things which we see almost in the past tense as having already been fulfilled. We are to "wait hopefully" – to wait in a state of biblical hope. We're supposed to live looking toward the Millennial Reign to such a degree that we see it as already being fulfilled, thus negating any benefits of pouring ourselves into this world.

¹⁰Who is among you that fears the LORD,
That obeys the voice of His servant,
That walks in darkness and has no light?
Let him trust in the name of the LORD and
rely on his God.

¹¹Behold, all you who kindle a fire,
Who encircle yourselves with firebrands,
Walk in the light of your fire
And among the brands you have set
ablaze.
This you will have from My hand:
You will lie down in torment.

[Read 50:10-11]

Q: What is the closing challenge the Father issues to His people in v.10?

1. Fear God the Father
2. Obey the voice of His Servant (Christ the Son)
3. Trust in the name of the Lord.
4. Rely on God.

Q: Combined together, what do these things speak of?

A: They're all behavioral changes in His people to the point that they don't just trust Him with their lips, but follow faithfully from the heart.

Q: How is this contrasted to the challenge the Father issues to those rejecting Him in v.11?

A: They walk in their own light and will ultimately suffer the consequences for their lifelong rejection of the Father.

In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

– John 1:4-5

Overall Application

It should be no surprise when, in the New Testament, the Suffering Servant issues a new commandment explaining that in order to keep the whole Law of God it is necessary to love others since the Suffering Servant Himself came, served, and loved. It is fascinating to go back through these chapters and realize there is almost nothing referring to the temple, the sacrifices, or even the commandments of the first tablet such as keeping the Sabbath. The whole Law is fulfilled by a faith in Christ expressed by love for others, something clearly spelled out in Isaiah's time when the concept of the Messiah was being communicated for the very first time. The message then is still just as relevant for us today.