**Jesus in the Servant Songs of Isaiah**

**Song # 2 – Is. 49:1-10**

There are four sections in the Book of Isaiah known as the “Servant Songs,” because they are Hebrew poetry about a special Servant of the Lord. Jewish rabbis for centuries have pondered these songs, wondering who the Servant they speak of might be. As Christians, we believe they refer to Jesus, but Jewish people, for the most part, don’t see or agree with that idea. Last time, we looked at the first Servant Song in Is. 42. Today, we’ll discuss the second song. These songs are important because seeing Jesus in the OT connects the two testaments and connects Judaism with Christianity. These songs clearly point to the Messiah so all might know who He is. Every believer should be familiar with them for that reason, so they can show people that Jesus is the Servant of God, the Messiah.

**Is. 49:1** Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations: Before I was born the Lord called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name.

Notice that in vs. 1-5, the Servant Himself is speaking, and in vs. 6-10 it is God the Father speaking to Him. The Servant calls to distant islands and nations, not just to the Jewish people. The First Covenant was strictly for the nation of Israel, but the Servant who is coming will call to all nations. The Servant says before He was born God called Him and from His birth He has made mention of His name. This shows the greatness of the Servant’s calling. In Luke 1:31-33, the angel Gabriel told Mary before Jesus was born that He would be great, would be called the Son of God, and would be King forever over God’s people. In Mat. 1:21, Joseph was told what the Child’s name was to be before He was born. In Lu. 1:31, Mary was also told His name before she was pregnant.

**Is. 49:2** 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.

The Servant will be endowed with extraordinary ability to communicate God’s message. Apparently His words would cut powerfully through all the deceptive thinking and excuses of unbelievers and religious hypocrites and really penetrate hearts with God’s truth. We know that Jesus was the greatest communicator for God who ever lived. He spoke so clearly and concisely for God that His words are repeated and taught all over the world to this day, and impact people for God like no others. When the religious leaders sent the temple guards to arrest Jesus, they came back empty-handed, saying “No man ever spoke like this man.” (Jn. 7:46) In Rev. 1:16, John the apostle saw a vision of Jesus with a sharp two-edged sword proceeding from His mouth. He *speaks* God’s Word because He *is* God’s Word! In Heb. 4:12, we’re told the Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword, and it penetrates to the dividing of joints and marrow, and discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart. That’s not just talking about the Bible. It’s talking about the Living Word, Jesus. He spoke words that pierced the heart and mind and brought clarity and conviction to all hearers. Jesus certainly fulfilled that part of the prophecy.

The reference to Him being like a polished arrow hidden in a quiver conveys two ideas. First, that He will be specially prepared and kept by God until the appropriate time. Jesus was born “in the fullness of time” (Gal. 4:4), at exactly the right point in history for His ministry to have the desired effect. A polished arrow is perfectly prepared and ready to be launched. Secondly, a polished arrow is like a sharp sword. The Bible speaks of God’s arrows in places like Deut. 32, where God says He will shoot His arrows at rebellious Israel when they turn against Him in coming years, and Ps. 38, where David says the arrows of God have penetrated his heart, speaking of God’s conviction of sin. In Ps. 45:5, God’s arrows pierce the hearts of His enemies. Ancient writers said certain leaders were like arrows in how they spoke. The Messiah will be like an arrow, penetrating the darkness and sin of a world in rebellion against God, in order to bring God’s light and salvation, conviction of sin and repentance.

**Is. 49:3** He said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor."

Vs. 3 is puzzling, because the Servant is called Israel, yet He will be commissioned to bring Israel back into relationship with her God. (vs. 6) How could *Israel* bring *Israel* back to God? Some have said this must mean that the so-called “remnant” of Israel would bring back the rest of the nation to God. But there are verses which make it pretty clear the Servant is a single individual, not a group of people. (50:6) So the best interpretation is that the Servant must be the *ideal fulfillment* of Israel, accomplishing what the nation was never able to carry out. A single individual who would be the ideal representation of God’s people? What Jewish person of all history could be said to do such a thing? The first Israel (Jacob) also wrestled with God and prevailed.

God also says that in this Servant He will display His splendor. What human being fully displayed the splendor and glory of the Lord? Any names come to mind? Heb. 1:3 tells us that Jesus was the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being. In Jn. 14:9, Jesus said anyone who’d seen Him had seen the Father, in other words, had seen God.

**Is. 49:4** But I said, "I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing. Yet what is due me is in the Lord's hand, and my reward is with my God."

This verse may seem surprisingly negative. The greatest Servant of the Lord will feel a sense of discouragement, as if He has labored hard and spent His strength in vain and for nothing?! Most commentators believe this verse refers to the fact that the Messiah was not accepted by His own people, the Jews. John 1:11 says He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. Even though He did impact thousands of His own people during His earthly ministry, and still today there are Messianic Jewish believers, the majority didn’t accept His ministry then and don’t today. They rejected Him, because He didn’t fit their concept of the Messiah. Vs. 7 even says He’ll be despised and *abhorred* by the nation. Ironically, even their rejection of Him was foreknown by God!

Be that as it may, I found vs. 4 encouraging! If the Messiah felt like He was working in vain at one point, I guess we shouldn’t feel surprised if we sometimes feel that way! But the Messiah’s way of dealing with this feeling of failure is what we must all *really* take note of. He was realistic about discouragement, but reminded Himself that what was due Him was in God’s hands, and that His reward would eventually come from God. We need to always remember this too. Nothing we do is in vain, if we do it from our hearts and for the glory of God. He will reward us one day, even if nobody sees or rewards us on earth. (1 Cor. 15:58) Our Source is God!

**Is. 49:5, 6** 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 you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."

All of the prophets were sent to call Israel back to their covenant relationship with God. Certainly Jesus was the most perfect and complete fulfillment of the prophetic ministry. He perfectly represented God to the nation of Israel and called them to return to Him. In Mat. 23:37, He said, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I would have gathered you together, as a hen gathers her chicks, but you were not willing!” Though the majority rejected His call, some did repent and come back to God. Yet the amazing thing is that Israel’s stubbornness actually led God to throw open the doors to all nations. Paul says this in Ro. 11, that Israel’s rejection of Jesus meant reconciliation for the world, and that’s just what Isaiah predicts here! God’s Servant would be a Light to the Gentiles, and bring God’s salvation to the ends of the earth. (vs. 6) What looked like something very negative, God turned to something very good for all of us and the world.

This is another of those concepts the Jews had a terribly difficult time accepting. Jonah didn’t want to go to the Ninevites. Peter didn’t want to go to the house of Cornelius. But God had told the very first Jew, Abram, the father of the Jewish nation, that through his seed, all families on earth would be blessed. (Gen. 12:3) And Is. 49:6 makes it plain that reaching people of all nations was God’s plan from the very beginning.

Paul quoted verse 6 in Acts 13:47, to show how his Gospel ministry was the continuation of Jesus’ ministry. It makes me think too of Ps. 27:1, 2 – the Lord is my light and my salvation. Jesus is the Light who brings salvation!

**Is. 49:7** 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 rise up, princes will see and bow down, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

Isaiah predicts here that this special Servant of God will be despised and rejected and abhorred by the nation. He will come so humbly, as a servant of rulers. And yet, eventually He will be exalted and given a name above every name, and every knee will bow to Him, every tongue confess that He is Lord (Phil. 2:11). He is the Chosen One.

**Is. 49:8-10** 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 upon them. He who has compassion on them will guide them and lead them beside springs of water. NIV

Here, God says He is going to answer the Servant’s prayers and help Him fulfill His mission. Paul quoted vs. 8 in 2 Cor. 6:2 to show that the day of salvation which was only *predicted* in Isaiah 49:8 was even then being *realized* in the first century and still is to our present day. The current age is the age of God’s grace and favor, the time of a New Covenant, and Jesus is that New Covenant. Through Him, people of any nation may now receive God’s forgiveness, be adopted as His sons and daughters, and become part of the new people of God.

That won’t always be the case, but thank God, it still is today! Why? Because God anointed and empowered His Servant Jesus to fulfill His mission and become the Great Shepherd of the Sheep (Heb. 13:20). God kept Him (giving His angels charge over Him) and made Him to actually *be* the New Covenant Himself, the Way of reconciliation with God.

He sets us free from sin and Satan, He provides for us, for He is the Bread of life and the Living Water, and He guides us as our Shepherd. David wrote these kinds of things about the Lord in Ps. 23, yet here, Isaiah says them about His Special Servant.

Who is this Person? Only Jesus truly fulfilled these scriptures! Through Him, we are reconciled to God. Through Him, the meek shall inherit the earth, because someday soon, Jesus will restore the earth and reassign it to His people. Today is still the day of salvation. Have you called out to God and “signed up” for your part in it?