

• *Promise of the Messiah*

Chapter 49 is the point in Isaiah where the prophet focuses very directly on the promise of the Messiah. By the time we have reached this chapter some very definite predictions have been made. (i) Northern Israel is to be exiled by the Assyrians, but Judah is to be rescued from them at the last moment. (ii) Judah will subsequently face the chastening of God through Babylonian invasion and exile. (iii) Eventually Judah will be rescued from exile by a God-appointed conqueror named Cyrus. (iv) The plan of God will move on to the salvation of the world.

**Who will be Israel's Saviour?**

(i) *An individual godly man?*

(ii) *The nation of Israel?*

(iii) *The remnant?*

(iv) *Cyrus?*

By the time we have reached Isaiah 48 some questions are beginning to form in our minds. Will Cyrus be an adequate saviour? The answer is: no! Even after restoration from exile there is **still** no peace for the wicked<sup>1</sup>. A more powerful 'Servant of the Lord' is needed. Another question that arises is: who is the 'Servant of the Lord' that Isaiah mentions? (i) Is he an individual godly man, such as Isaiah himself<sup>2</sup> or Eliakim<sup>3</sup> or a new David<sup>4</sup>? But the work seems too gigantic for it to be achieved by any ordinary human being. (ii) Could it be the nation, Israel<sup>5</sup>? But Israel is a blind and deaf servant<sup>6</sup>. (iii) Could it be the remnant? But the remnant are themselves in trouble and need the help of God's Servant<sup>7</sup>. (iv) Could it be Cyrus? Cyrus could rescue Judah politically but he had no way of giving peace to the wicked. Who can the Servant be? Isaiah 49–55 begins to draw closer to an answer.

1 48:22  
2 see 20:3  
3 see 22:20  
4 see 37:35  
5 as in 41:8-9  
6 42:19  
7 see 50:10

**1. The Servant has a worldwide work to do**

**1. The Servant has a worldwide work to do.** He calls upon the whole world to pay attention to what he says.

*1 Listen to me, you distant lands;  
hear this, you peoples everywhere.*

**2. His is specially superintended**

**2. The Servant's birth is specially superintended.**

*In the womb Yahweh called me;  
from my mother's body he mentioned my name.*

**3. He has a message; His word will be effective**

**3. The Servant has a message; his word will be effective.**

*2 He made my mouth like a sharp sword,  
in the shade of his hand he hid me.*

**4. He has a work to be done for God**

**4. The Servant has a work to be done for God.** He is like a polished arrow that flies straight to the target.

*He made me a polished arrow;  
in his quiver he concealed me.*

**5. He glorifies God Yahweh**

**5. He glorifies God Yahweh.**

*3 He said to me, 'You are my servant,  
Israel, in whom I will show my beauty.'*

• *'Israel' is the name of the Messiah*

Many are surprised by the word 'Israel' here. Is the Servant really the entire nation? No, it cannot be. 'Israel' is here the name of the Messiah. The Saviour is the faithful remnant, reduced to one! He is the One who fulfils Israel's calling and is a light to the nations (as Israel the nation should be). We remember 'Israel' was originally the name of an individual (Jacob, Abraham's grandson) before ever it was the name for a nation.

## 6. He will do his work with great power and human weakness

- He will face powerful enemies and weak disciples

## 7. He will successfully minister both to Israel and to the gentiles

- He will have great success – gentiles will acknowledge Him

- His success will come from Yahweh

- The 'Servant' will be at the heart of the new covenant – and will unite people from all over the world

## 6. He will do his work with great power and human weakness.

Everything we are reading leads us to expect a Saviour of great might. Yet there is another aspect to the matter.

*<sup>4</sup>But I said, 'I have laboured to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing. But however, what is decided about me is in Yahweh's hand, and the outcome of my work is with my God.'*

The Saviour will face powerful enemies and weak disciples. Temptations to discouragement will be faced by confidence in God.

## 7. He will successfully minister both to Israel and to the gentiles.

*<sup>5</sup>Well then, Yahweh 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 honoured in the eyes of Yahweh and my God has been my strength.*

*<sup>6</sup>He says:*

*'It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and bring back the protected people of Israel whom I have kept.*

*I will also make you a light for all peoples, that you may be my salvation to the ends of the earth.'*

He will have great success. Gentiles will acknowledge him.

*<sup>7</sup>This is what Yahweh says – the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel – to him who was deeply despised and abhorred by the people, to the servant of rulers: 'Kings will see and rise up, princes will see and bow down, because of Yahweh, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.'*

Yahweh will give the Saviour success.

*<sup>8</sup>This is what Yahweh says: 'In the time of favour 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 establish the land and cause the desolate inheritances to be inherited, <sup>9</sup>to say to those who are bound, 'Come out,' and to those in darkness, 'Show yourselves!'*

There will be a new covenant and 'the Servant' will be its heart. People from the entire world will stream together to be part of the Servant's kingdom.

• *The covenant will bring worldwide joy*

*'They will pasture beside the roads and find pasture on every barren hill.  
<sup>10</sup>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.  
 11 I will turn all my mountains into roads, and my highways will be raised up.  
<sup>12</sup>See, they will come from afar – some from the north, some from the west, some from the region of Sinim.'*

It will bring worldwide joy, even cosmic joy.

• *Our Lord Jesus Christ – perfect Saviour bringing salvation*

*<sup>13</sup>Shout for joy, O heavens; rejoice, O earth; burst into song, O mountains! For Yahweh has comforted his people and on his downtrodden ones he has had compassion.*

**The Christian sees all of this, of course, in our Lord Jesus Christ.** He is the Saviour greater than Cyrus. He is the one who brings salvation for the world, who is prepared by God to be the perfect Saviour, who glorifies God, who finds strength amidst weakness, whose saving work will eventually bring joy to the entire universe.



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