

- A twofold ministry – Israel and the gentiles
- The people of Zion will feel discouraged – but God answers them

### 1. God never forgets his people

- Our names are engraved on the hands of God
- The company of God's people are a city whose walls will never collapse

### 2. Restoration is on its way

- Babylonians will no longer be Israel's prison guards

- The church – seen as a bride and also as a mother with abundant children

The Servant of the Lord has a twofold task, a ministry to Israel and to gentiles<sup>1</sup>. Yahweh will enable him to achieve the task<sup>2</sup>. Now we look at some of the people who need the Servant's great salvation. The people of God are in great need. **God's chastising often feels as if it is total abandonment.** Isaiah foresees a time when Zion is depressed.

<sup>14</sup>But Zion said, 'Yahweh has forsaken me, the Sovereign Lord has forgotten me.'

But God answers his discouraged people

#### 1. God never forgets his people.

<sup>15</sup>'Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the son of her body? Indeed, even these may forget, but as for me, I will not forget you! <sup>16</sup>See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me.'

The hands are the part of the body which we use the most for strong action. But our names are engraved (not written but engraved in a way that cannot be removed) on the hands of God. God is thinking of his people as a city: 'Your walls are ever before me.' The entire company of God's people are a city whose walls will never be allowed to collapse. The earthly city could be destroyed with not one stone left upon another but the true Zion – the people of God – is indestructible, collectively and one-by-one.

**2. Restoration is on its way.** The Israelite people in Babylon will be able to return.

<sup>17</sup>'Your sons hasten back, and those who demolished you and left you waste depart from you. <sup>18</sup>Lift up your eyes and look around; all these gather and come to you.'

The Babylonians will no longer be Israel's prison-guards. Large numbers will come to Israel. The 'new Israel' will be like a bride.

'As surely as I live,' declares Yahweh, 'you will wear them all as ornaments; you will put them on, like a bride. <sup>19</sup>For, as regards your waste and devastated areas and your demolished land – surely now you will be too constricted for the inhabitants, and those who swallowed you up will be far away.'

Isaiah mixes his picture-language. At one moment the church is a bride. At the next moment the people of God are a mother with abundant children.

<sup>20</sup>'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."  
<sup>21</sup>Then you will say in your heart, "Who bore me these? I was bereaved and barren; I was captive and rejected. Who brought these up? See, I was left all alone, but these – where have they come from?"'

1 49:1-6  
2 49:7-13

• *God's Israel grows by the miraculous work of God*

### **3. Gentiles will become part of God's Israel**

• *Whole nations turn to God through the work of the Servant*

### **4. Every kind of captivity is abolished**

• *Satan is the greatest oppressor – but Jesus brings every kind of release*

• *Sin may make us feel that God has abandoned us – but God never gives up on us*

• *Neither the people of God as a whole nor any individual in it will ever be removed from the hands of God*

The people of God, God's Israel, grows by the miraculous work of God. When God is moving to bring large numbers into his kingdom, we do not claim any credit for the growth. God's Israel is like a widow who, despite her widowhood, has an abundant family. Actually after Cyrus the number of returnees to Jerusalem was small. But Isaiah looks forward to a yet greater return – the coming of millions into the kingdom of God.

**3. Gentiles will become part of God's Israel.** God gives a wave of the hand and the time for the salvation of gentiles begins.

<sup>22</sup>*This is what the Sovereign Yahweh says:*

*'See, I will beckon to the gentiles,  
I will lift up my banner to the peoples;  
they will bring your sons in their arms  
and carry your daughters on their shoulders.*

<sup>23</sup>*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 Yahweh;  
those who hope in me will not be disappointed.'*

It is not simply that one or two gentiles come to salvation. Whole nations – plus their kings – turn to God through the work of the Servant of God.

**4. Every kind of captivity is abolished.** It is not simply that Babylonian captivity ends. Every kind of captivity comes to an end.

<sup>24</sup>*Can plunder be taken from warriors,  
or can lawful captives be rescued?*

<sup>25</sup>*But this is what Yahweh says:*

*'Yes, captives will be taken from warriors,  
and plunder retrieved from the fierce;  
and your cause I will plead at law,  
and your sons I will save.*

<sup>26</sup>*I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh;  
they will be drunk on their own blood, as with wine.'*

The Babylonian exile is a kind of picture of many different chastenings and captivities that God's people experience. But an end will come to them all! The greatest oppressor of all is Satan (as we know from the New Testament), but every kind of release comes through the Lord Jesus Christ

There are times when sin brings upon us the feeling that God has abandoned us. 'Yahweh has forsaken me, the Sovereign Lord has forgotten me', we say. Isaiah says: yes, sin forfeits many joys – but God has not abandoned you! He never gives up on his Israel. Today the 'Israel of God' includes gentiles. The church of Jesus Christ had a Jewish starting point and still has Jewish believers in it. But millions of gentiles have been grafted in to become fellow-citizens with the original people of God. We have reason to believe that even unbelieving 'Israel according to the flesh' will turn in faith and will join us. It is this programme that will not be abandoned. Neither the people of God as a whole nor any individual in it will ever be removed from the hands of God.

*'Then all flesh will know  
that I, Yahweh, am your Saviour,  
your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.'*



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