

# GOD'S SERVANT IN ISAIAH 49

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Isaiah 49:1 says, “*The Lord has called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother has he made mention of my name.*” The speaker in this verse is Jesus Christ the Son of God, and he continues to speak until probably at least verse 13. Christ is the one whom God named and called from even *before* he was in the womb (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38; 1 Pet 1:18-21; Rev 13:8). He is also the one whose mouth is a sharp sword (Isa 49:2; 11:4; Rev 1:16; 2:12,16; 19:15,21). Christ is the one whose job it was to gather Israel back to God (Isa 49:5-6; Matt 15:24; John 1:31; Acts 5:31; 10:36), and also to be a light to the Gentiles to bring God’s salvation to the ends of the earth (Isa 49:6; see also Isa 42:6; 60:3; Luke 2:32; Acts 13:46-49; 26:23). In fact, Isaiah 49:6 is *quoted* in Acts 13:47 and applied to Christ (and verse 8 is quoted in 2 Corinthians 6:2), so the Holy Spirit confirms in the New Testament that the speaker here is Jesus Christ. Christ is also the one God gave as a covenant to the people (Isa 49:8; Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6-18; Heb 7:22; 8:6-13; 9:15; 10:16-17; 12:24; 13:20-21). He was sent to release the prisoners from the bondage of sin (Isa 49:9; 29:18; 32:3-4; 42:7; Jer 48:47; 49:6,39; Ezek 16:53-57; Zech 9:11; Luke 4:17-21; Acts 26:13-18; Rom 6:6-7,16-23; 7:23-25; 8:1-2,21; Eph 4:8; 2 Tim 2:24-26; 2 Pet 2:18-20).

## God’s servant called “Israel”

God calls Jesus “Israel” in Isaiah 49:3: “And said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.” Some people wrongly conclude that this means that the one who is speaking in these verses is the *nation* of Israel. But “Israel” of Isaiah 49:3 is not the nation of Israel, as the descriptions of this “Israel” in Isaiah 49:1-9 do *not* fit the nation of Israel. Verses 5-6 specify this “Israel’s” job was to gather “Israel” back to God. The nation of Israel was not going to gather *itself* back to God! The prophecy said that the nation of Israel was going to reject and abhor God’s servant (Isa 49:4,7, which was fulfilled in the quotation in Acts 13:42-49). “Israel” in Isaiah 49:3 is God’s “servant.” Jesus was God’s faithful servant. He committed no sin (John 8:46; Heb 4:15; 7:26; 1 Pet 2:22; 3:18), did only God’s will and nothing of himself (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 8:28-29), and grew to spiritual perfection (Luke 6:40; John 15:9; 17:20-26; Heb 2:10). Truly, God was glorified by everything that Jesus did on this earth (Isa 49:3; John 17:4). All the descriptions of God’s servant Israel in Isaiah 49:1-9 only fit Jesus Christ, and the New Testament agrees that Jesus is the speaker in these verses (Acts 13:47; 2 Cor 6:2). Therefore, Jesus is the “Israel” of Isaiah 49:3. It is unusual that Jesus is called “Israel” in Isaiah 49:3, but it does make sense for a number of reasons. First, Jesus was an Israelite (Matt 2:6; Luke 1:68-75; 2:25-34; John 1:11; Acts 3:25-26; 13:22-23; Heb 7:14). Second, Jesus fulfilled the law (Matt 5:17-19; John 19:28-30) that God had given to the nation of Israel (Deut 5:1-3), which they had *not* fulfilled (Jer 31:32; Heb 8:8-9). Jesus the Israelite accomplished the purpose of the entire nation. Third, the primary work that Christ did on this earth was to seek to save the lost souls of Israel (Isa 49:5-7; Matt 15:24; John 1:31; Acts 5:31; 10:36).

## Prophecy of Christ’s work

Isaiah 49:5-6 mentions two of the great works that God’s Son and servant would accomplish on the earth. First, God sent Jesus “to bring Jacob again to him” (Isa 49:5), and “to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel” (Isa 49:6). (Note that Jesus would restore Israel to *God*, not to the *land* as Premillennialists wrongly allege.) This aspect of Jesus’ work would not be extremely successful in terms of the number of Jews who were converted (John 1:11; Rom 9:31-33; 10:1-3,21; 11:1-10). Concerning this, Jesus said in Isaiah 49:4, “Then I said, I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nought,

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and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God." Nevertheless, God would view Jesus' work successful because Christ would fulfill God's will. "Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength" (Isa 49:5). Secondly, God said to Jesus in Isaiah 49:6, "I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth." This aspect of Jesus' work would be much more successful, numerically. "Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the Lord that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee" (Isa 49:7). "Thus saith the Lord, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages" (Isa 49:8).

## **Fulfillment of prophecy**

Jesus fulfilled this prophecy as he preached and labored to save the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt 15:24; John 1:31; Acts 5:31; 10:36). And Jesus also fulfilled this prophecy as his apostles carried the gospel to the Gentiles. In fact, Acts 13:47 quotes Isaiah 49:6 and the context reveals a complete fulfillment of both of Christ's works, to save both Jews and Gentiles, and the fulfillment of the fact that few Jews believed, but many Gentiles did believe. "And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath. Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so has the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region" (Acts 13:42-48). Jesus is the mediator of the New Testament (Isa 42:6; 49:8; Jer 31:31-34; 32:39-40; Ezek 16:60-63; 34:22-26; 37:26-28; Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6-18; Heb 7:22; 8:6-13; 9:15; 10:16-17; 12:24; 13:20-21), which includes the Gentiles (Isa 2:2; 11:10; 49:6,22; 54:3; 60:1-5,11; 62:2; Luke 2:10,30-32; Rom 1:16).

## **Now is the time**

Isaiah 49:8 says, "Thus saith the Lord, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages." God would hear and help his servant and Son Jesus accomplish his work in the "day of salvation." This "acceptable time" and "day of salvation" is defined in 2 Corinthians 6:1-2 as including the entire New Testament period, beginning in the First Century A.D.: "*We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succored thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)*" Isaiah 49:8 associated the prophecy of this passage with the giving of the New Covenant, and 2 Corinthians 6:1-2 agrees. The work of Christ to reconcile all men to God encompasses the entire New Testament period until the end of the world (Matt 28:18-20; 1 Cor 15:24-28).