

He Whom the Nation Abhors (Isaiah 49:1-8) - Part 2

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49:5 - To Bring Jacob Back

- **"formed Me from the womb"**
Once again, we see the emphasis on the human origin of the Servant. "Formed Me" is the word *yotzeriy* from the root *yatzar* meaning to form or fashion something out of existing material. It describes the fashioning of a pot by a potter and is used to describe how God *formed* man from the dust of the ground ([Gen. 2:7](#)). This speaks of the intimate involvement of God molding the Servant within the womb of His mother. Although all human beings are woven by God in the womb, the Servant's birth from a virgin relied upon the unique intervention of the Holy Spirit ([Mtt. 1:20](#)).
- **"To bring Jacob back to Him, So that Israel is gathered to Him"**
Theories that the Servant in this passage is the nation of Israel run into trouble because Israel cannot at the self time be in apostasy and serve as the agent of his own restoration. "To bring back" is a verb in the piel stem indicating the involvement of the subject in the action: the Servant Himself leads back or restores Jacob.
- **"I shall be glorious in the eyes of the LORD"**
This is an amazing statement! At the end of a parallel passage concerning the Servant, God holds forth, "My glory I will not give to another" ([Isa. 42:8](#) cf. [Isa. 48:11](#)). Here lies the stumbling stone concerning the identity of the Servant: His work is apparently a failure yet **the Servant is Himself divine and shares the glory of the Father** ([John 1:14](#); [5:22](#); [Rev. 5:11-14](#))!
- **"My God shall be My strength"**
Notice the tension in this verse between the human and the divine. Even though the Servant is to be glorious in God's eyes, He relies completely on divine enablement for His ministry. The Servant's earthly ministry was accomplished completely in the power of the Holy Spirit. ([Isa. 11:2](#); [61:1](#) cf. [Luke 4:18](#); [Mtt. 12:28](#); [Acts 1:2](#); [Php. 2:7](#)).

49:6 - The Restorer of Israel

- **"To raise up the tribes of Jacob... to restore the preserved ones of Israel"**
Again, we might ask, how could Jacob raise up Jacob? Clearly, the servant cannot be the nation Israel itself. Neither can the Servant be *faithful Israel* within national Israel--for the Servant's task includes restoring "the preserved ones of Israel:" the *faithful remnant* which God watches over from among the larger nation.
- **The Agent of Restoration**
"To raise up" and "to restore" are in the hiphil stem indicating causation by the subject. The Servant is to *cause to raise up* the tribes of Jacob and *cause to restore* the preserved ones. As the apostle Paul revealed, the Servant is the agent of Israel's restoration ([Rom. 11:25-27](#)).
- **"preserved ones"**

A derivative term is used to describe guarding over a vineyard or fig tree to produce intended fruit ([Job 27:18](#); [Pr. 27:18](#)) meaning to cause to be safe from danger. This is the *elect remnant* within Israel ([Rom. 11:2-5](#)).

49:6 - A Light to the Gentiles

- **"I will also"**

The phrase "I will also." informs us that there are *two separate ministries* described for the Servant. They are not one and the same. They apply to different groups and although there is a great deal of overlap, the focus and emphasis is different between the Servant's ministry to Israel vs. the Gentiles. *An interpretation which fails to distinguish between these two groups where the text indicates differences will result in a distorted understanding of Scripture.* These two separate roles (the restoration of Israel, being a light to the Gentiles) are ultimately fulfilled by two separate visits of the Servant. The gospel went forth to the Gentiles at His rejection by Israel at His *First Coming*, but Israel will be not restored until His *Second Coming*. Paul emphasized the future blessing for the entire world that attends the eventual restoration of Israel ([Rom. 11:12](#)).

- **"a light to the Gentiles"**

The absence of light is connected with the Gentile nations because they lacked the Law (Torah) which was given to Israel. This is why Paul refers to them as "a foolish nation," literally: a nation without knowledge [of the law] ([Rom. 10:19](#)).

- **"My salvation to the ends of the earth"**

"Salvation" is *yeshua* -- the Hebrew name of Jesus which corresponds to the ministry of the Servant as a Deliverer for all peoples throughout the globe. This name was revealed to Joseph in recognition of this task ([Mtt. 1:21](#)).

49:7 - Despised and Abhorred

- **"To Him whom man despises"**

The first of three titles given of the Servant in this verse. "Despises" is the word *bazah* from a root meaning "to subjugate," "to treat badly." This is why He is known as the *Suffering Servant*. Although glorious in God's eyes, mankind despised Him and His ministry ([Ps. 22:6](#); [Isa. 53:3](#)).

- **The Despised Soul**

The text reads literally, "to the despised soul" (*bazah-NEphesh*) which can be interpreted as "the One of contemptible soul" [K&D] which has been rendered "Whom men do not think worthy to live." -- [Hofmann in K&D]. The term *NEphesh* can be translated by a variety of terms including: "life," "soul," "creature," "person." The mention of the Servant's *NEphesh* is highly significant:

1. The life (*NEphesh*) of the flesh is in the blood which is given to make atonement ([Lev. 17:11](#)),
2. It was the *NEphesh* of the Servant which God made as an offering for sin ([Isa. 53:10](#)). The very life which is despised by man is the only sufficient atonement for sin. That which God has valued above all other things in the universe is despised by man!

- **"whom the nation abhors"**

"Abhors" appears in the piel stem which may indicate "the thing exciting abhorrence." The term

is explained by Gesenius as "that which is considered an abomination." It is used to designate unclean food and idol worshipers. "The nation" is the word *goy*, a singular noun. Significantly, Jewish translations render this phrase as a *plural*: "to the one loathed by NATIONS" [STONE], "to the abhorred NATIONS" [JPS]. This distorts the clear implication of this phrase: not only do all men despise the Servant, but the chosen Nation (singular), Israel, *abhors* Him in a unique way. This stands to reason because the One considered smitten and accursed of God is the *Jewish Messiah*. Although the "plural" form of the word for nation (*goyim*) generally indicates the Gentile nations, it is also used frequently in the singular form to describe Israel. (e.g., [Ex. 19:5-6](#); [33:13](#)). Interestingly, other occurrences of *goy* in the singular are rendered "nation" and applied to Israel without hesitation. Truly, Simeon was right when he spoke over the Servant as a Child ([Luke 2:34](#)).

49:7 - The Worshipped Servant

- **"the Servant of rulers... Princes also shall worship"**
Here is yet one of the many riddles within the Old Testament. How could this individual be a lowly servant of rulers while at the same time receiving their worship? Did the study of this verse contribute to the young Jesus' understanding of [Psalm 110:1](#) which He used to silence the Pharisees ([Mtt. 22:44-45](#)) ? "Worship" is the word *chawah* meaning *to bow down, prostrate oneself, pay homage*. The hithpael stem indicates a reflexive voice: the princes will bow *by their own volition*.
- **"He has chosen You"**
Like the people of faith, the Servant is among the elect of God. "Chosen" is from a root meaning *to approve, to have the best, something select*. The contrast is clear: He Whom man and the nation despises, God delights in.

49:8 - Given as a Covenant

- **"I will... give you as a covenant"**
In an earlier Servant passage, Isaiah indicated that the Servant would be given "as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles" ([Isa. 42:6](#)). Malachi referred to the Servant as "the Messenger of the Covenant" ([Mal. 3:1](#)). From the New Testament, we know this to be Messiah Jesus, Whose blood ratified the New Covenant ([Luke 22:20](#); [Rom. 11:25-27](#)).
- **"to the people"**
As in ([Isaiah 42:6](#)), in this context "the people" refers to Israel. For we know that the New Covenant was given specifically to Israel ([Jer. 31:31-34](#)). It is no accident that Jesus was born a Jew, for He Himself said to the Samaritan woman, *salvation is of the Jews* ([John 4:22](#)). Through our identification with Messiah Jesus, born a Jew and the ratifier of God's covenant promise, the faithful of all nations participate in the New Covenant.

Again we see the impossibility of interpreting the Servant as Israel. In what way could Israel serve as a covenant? Especially when the primary referent receiving the covenant is Israel?

- **"to restore the earth... to inherit the desolate heritages"**

"Earth" is the word *Eretz* which can have either a global or local connotation (translated either as *earth* or *land*). It would seem there are two aspects of God's restoration set forth in this verse:

- 1. In the immediate context of Israel, the verse points to the fulfillment of the land covenant (Israel's restoration to the Promised Land). She shall finally and irretrievably inherit that which God has promised her--a specific plot of real-estate owned by God ([Ex. 32:13](#)).**
- 2. In the larger context set forth by the first verse ("Listen, O Coastlands... you peoples from afar"), the passage also points toward the restoration of the entire globe following its destruction as part of God's outpouring of wrath during the Tribulation period including the final restoration of man's dominion lost at the Fall. Once again, we see the *dual ministry* of the Servant with regard (1) to His People Israel and (2) the Gentiles.**

Application

- 1. The Servant is the Messiah of Israel, Jesus Christ** - The Servant is an individual with characteristics which are both human (born of a woman) and divine (shares God's glory, is worshiped). He is victorious through apparent failure. His shed blood serves as the basis for His being a covenant for the salvation of all people. *Are you resting in the salvation found in Christ?*
- 2. Jesus has Two Great Ministries** - Throughout the passage, we have seen *two* ministries of the Messiah. He serves as savior to all peoples. He also *restores Israel to God*, fulfilling Israel's promised inheritance. We must not forget that the full restoration of Israel described in Scripture remains unfulfilled and awaits His Second Coming.
- 3. The Weapon is the Word of God** - The Word of God is the weapon of those who know God. *To properly utilized a powerful weapon requires training* otherwise great damage results. *Are you training in God's Word so as to use it effectively and responsibly?*
- 4. Just Reward is with God** - We must not evaluate our effectiveness for God based on what we see. What often appears as failure in the eyes of the world is how God intends to gain victory. Like the Servant, we must leave the vindication of our work in God's hands.
- 5. The Servant Glorifies God** - Like the Servant, believers are chosen and called. We have a destiny in God. Let each of us ask: *are we truly serving God? Are we walking in a way which glorifies Him?*

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