

The Scope of Salvation – Isaiah 49

Introduction – The language of captivity and deliverance continues in this chapter, but the scope of this salvific chapter is changing (Cyrus and Babylon are never mentioned again). The prophesied exile and return of Israel, the chosen servant, all of this, is itself a living prophecy of something that was then “*hidden in the shadow of God’s hand*” (v2) but is now manifest openly to us all. The scope and strength of God’s chosen Servant and His salvation, and the story by which this was going to take place (and now has) is the topic of this and many, many more chapters of Isaiah. There are global and personal implications here.

How Can Israel Be the Servant/Savior of Israel? (vv1-7) – We have to identify who is speaking in these verses. Verses 1-4 tell us that the speaker is the one who “*the Lord has called Me from the womb*” (i.e. Matt 1:22-23). “*He has made My mouth like a sharp sword*” (i.e. Rev 1:16). He is called, “*My servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified*” (i.e. John 17:5). Let the New Testament reveal to us that which was hidden (i.e. Eph 3:8-9). From the New Testament’s use of Isaiah 42:1-4 we already learned that Jesus is the Servant. Therefore, Jesus is Israel, the new Israel, through Whom the New Israel, the New Humanity, is saved. But one way of looking at His life is that it was a failure (v4) except for what God purposed through His vain ministry and death. And so in vv6-7 the LORD (the Father) speaks of the Servant (the Son). God’s purpose was far beyond redeeming ethnic Israel; His purpose was to give this Servant “*to be a light to the Gentiles...My salvation to the ends of the earth*” (v6). It might have looked as though the Redeemer was only one “*whom man despises...and abhors,*” but because of His work, “*kings...and...princes...shall worship*” (v7). Jesus, and His people, will teach kings and their nations how to worship the God and Father of Jesus Christ.

The Day of Salvation is Now (vv8-13) – Verses 9-12 repeat similar language from before about the Lord making the way of salvation smooth and accessible (out of exile and prison – v9). What is extremely helpful for us as Christians is that Paul quotes v8 in 2 Cor 6:2, but 2 Cor 5:17-6:2 should be read to understand all that Paul is saying as he applies this verse (and this passage, and the prophecies of Isaiah). What Isaiah 49 is proclaiming God will do, God did in and through Jesus in His death, burial and resurrection. These are not future promises for us; we are the manifestation of these promises working themselves out now, in this age. Because of this, the Lord commands all of heaven and earth to rejoice and sing (v13). The day of salvation is before us and the scope of that salvation is all of heaven and earth.

Forsaken But Not Forgotten (vv14-21) – But we respond just like verse 14 (and because it is there, it seems that it is expected). How can we believe that the world has been reconciled when it looks like we have been forsaken and forgotten by the Lord? So true in those days of exile, how often the church has felt that way in her history and even in pockets of the world today? And individually, how often might we feel this way? But God cannot forget His children, even more so than a mother could forget the nursing baby (v15). Like a great architect, He cannot abandon His plans for His church (v16). Like a jealous father, He will not rest until His daughter is decked out like a glorious bride (vv17-18). There are times where God does forsake us (as He did Jesus on the cross) but He never has forgotten us. Those times are His times where He is moving from desolation to overflowing, from barren to a number we cannot count, from destruction to unbelievable renewal (vv19-21).

None Too Far: The Scope and Strength of Salvation (vv22-26) – One commentator writes, “*the delimitation of the servant passages is difficult...*” Is there no end to His work of salvation? The Lord seems to go too far (if we compare what He promises to what we “see” in the moment). But He says, He will lift His hand in an oath to the nations (all nations), an emblem for the peoples (all peoples). And Jesus echoed, “*if I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all peoples to Myself*” (John 12:32). Those other authorities of earth (kings and queens) will carry His sons and daughters to the Lord, serving them in glad submission to the Lord (vv22-23). We do not yet see all in subjection to Him yet – but remember the writer of Hebrews, “*but we see Jesus...*” (Heb 2:9). We believe that there is no end to His authority, but do we believe that there is no end to the scope of His salvation? And then there is the promise of the strength of His salvation (v24): no prisoner is out of reach no matter how deep he or she is in the bonds of sin, no matter how mighty that captive appears. Israel’s enemies may think they were making themselves fat on the flesh of Israel; they will find in the end that they were gnawing on their own (v26).

Global Reflections on the Scope of Salvation – “*You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth*” (v6). “*I will give You as a covenant to the people, to restore the earth*” (v8). “*This place is too small for me*” (v20).

Personal Reflections on the Strength of Salvation – “*That You may say to the prisoners, ‘Go forth’*” (v9). “*Yet I will not forget you*” (v15). “*For I will contend with him who contends with you, and I will save your children*” (v25).

Take heart: “*Then you will know that I am the LORD, for they shall not be ashamed who wait for Me*” (v23).