

Isaiah 49:1-6
A Prophets view of Christ, His Calling and His Work

What a great gift that we have as the people of God that He has not only given us His revelation but then He has preserved that word for thousands of years amidst a variety of events, many at times which were orchestrated to destroy what we have so readily accessible to us today. I bring this up only to show how important all of Scripture is to the Christian today. We live in a time when people desperately seek for the quote "Will of God" and yet are not content with what He has revealed in His word to be sufficient for all of life. Others, find themselves content with the Word yet place inordinate emphasis on one part of another, missing the rich blessings that tie together the unity of Scripture. But we know that by the grace of God we have been given hope through our salvation, brought into the covenant of our spiritual forefathers and it is incumbent upon us to reflect on what the promises, blessings and teachings of that covenant are, for these are God's gifts to His people....God's gift to us. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:12-13, "that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." Notice, Paul writes that we were without hope since we were without God, for that is the place of all who stand outside this covenant. Thankfully He doesn't leave us with just the question but also provides the answer in that Christ has brought us near, has made us children of Abraham and heirs of the promise.(Galatians 3:29) Having been brought near, having been brought into the blessings and promises of the covenant people by Christ, we now have the privilege of, among other things, being able to look back at the expectation of our spiritual forefathers as they prophesied by the inspiration of God to see what they foresaw concerning the Messiah. Today, we will look closer at the words of one Old Testament prophet Isaiah, one who I believe is rightly called the evangelical prophet or the St. Paul of the OT for he was given the privilege of seeing so prophetically clear a picture of our Messiah. The prophecies that Isaiah gives I believe will challenge you, first to be thankful that God's grace extended to the Gentiles so that we are now part of the Abrahamic covenant, second, to open your eyes to the calling and work of the Messiah and lastly to seek diligently what our own call is and how it is intertwined with that of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

We must start, as Isaiah does, with the intended audience that he is speaking to since it is clear that the prophecies described here are intended for a much wider audience than merely the Jewish people. The word coastlands(isles, countries, islands) draws an immediate contrast with that of "the Land" or the City or Temple, which were common ways of describing Israel. Isaiah uses this word 12 times, interestingly a word that is dominated in use by the prophets with Isaiah leading the way. It hearkens back to the Mosaic description of Noah's son Japheth's line given in Genesis 10:5, "From these the coastland *peoples* of the Gentiles were separated into their lands, everyone according to his language, according to their families, into their nations." Important to remember here is that just prior to this statement, Noah's curse on Canaan and his blessing on Shem and Japheth indicated the close tie that would someday come between Shem's line(Israelite heritage) and Japheth's line---something that will play into Isaiah's later prophecy.(Genesis 9:26-27.) In the next portion of the same verse, Isaiah emphasizes the

scope and unique nature of the intended audience again by the phrase, you people from afar. This reminds us of Peter's words in Acts 2:39 where he is emphasizing that the promises of the covenant were available to his audience(Jews), their children and to those afar off, once again emphasizing the Gentile inclusion in the covenant. But this opening verse does more than just highlight the scope of the audience because it, like all of the Christian life demands action on behalf of those that hear the word. Notice the command, Listen---and take heed. We are called always to be doers of the word and not merely hearers and by the end of this sermon today I guarantee that although there is much in the passage that is important from a merely prophetic standpoint, there is included in its words something that we will need to heed and obey.(We cannot just be admired with the prophetic aspects and miss that there is a call to action consistent with other parts of biblical revelation.)

From this point Isaiah moves into the first of three "calls" in these six short verses. Generically speaking, the call itself is important because we know that no man can take upon himself an office of God without that call of God on his life.(He can, but there will be severe consequences) The author of Hebrews points out that even Christ Himself was subject to the call of God, "And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, *but it was He* who said to Him: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You." Specifically though as to this call, in using these words concerning the call from the womb, Isaiah clearly links the Messiah and His prophetic office to others whose callings were described in similar ways in each Testament. Jeremiah 1:5 states, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations." Galatians 1:15, "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called *me* through His grace" (We see this idea of the call, a calling by the Will of God.)And so we have learned here already in one verse, the audience of the message, an expectation of action on the part of the people(so we need to see where action will be required) and a prophetic insight into the calling of the Messiah into His office which was fulfilled in the life of Christ by the commission by the Father.

Now we move into the heart of the passage which provides us extremely valuable word pictures describing the way in which the Messiah's work would penetrate the world. The first word picture that the prophet uses is one in which we are readily familiar with from passages in the New Testament. A sword is something that is normally thought of as powerful, slicing, penetrating and aggressive. A sword is not usually thought of as passive and here the Messiah is not seen as acting passively in the world. Hebrews 4:12 states, "For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Revelations 1:16, "He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. Revelations 2:16, "Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. Revelations 19:15-21," Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on *His* robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, "Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who

sit on them, and the flesh of all *people*, free and slave, both small and great." And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh." Although all of these quotes aid in interpreting what the prophet expected from the Messiah, the visual representation of our Lord pouring forth in spiritual conquest through His Word, His Truth, His doctrine which proceeds from His mouth provides exactly the right picture of what Isaiah is stating in his prophecy. But the Messiah is not merely described as a sword but later in verse 2 He is seen as a polished shaft. First we say He is polished because He is the sinless lamb of God, perfect in every way, polished and perfect. Peter describes Christ in I Peter 1:19 as "but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." But the Messiah is not just seen as spotless, for once again we have the picture of another implement of war, a shaft, an arrow, something that travels far and pierces sure, especially in the hands of a sovereign God. Again, scripture is not short of highlighting how the picture of an arrow correlates to the work of the Messiah. In Psalm 64:5-7, we see the arrow piercing the enemies of God to strike them down, "They encourage themselves *in* an evil matter; They talk of laying snares secretly; They say, "Who will see them?" They devise iniquities: "We have perfected a shrewd scheme." Both the inward thought and the heart of man are deep. But God shall shoot at them *with* an arrow; Suddenly they shall be wounded." Again in Psalms 45:5, "Your arrows *are* sharp in the heart of the King's enemies; The peoples fall under You." Zechariah 9:14, "Then the LORD will be seen over them, And His arrow will go forth like lightning. The Lord GOD will blow the trumpet, And go with whirlwinds from the south." So here we have the prophet providing us with two ways in which the Messiah would carry forth his work. First, as a sword His word would penetrate and drive into the deepest parts of man, leading to salvation and correction for the elect and if met with resistance it would lead to the death of the impenitent. Secondly as an arrow, His judgment would spread far to strike and pierce those for whom judgment was due. In both cases though, the prophet leads us to the only conclusion that can be drawn, that the Messiah is a King, and it is His right to extend and defend that Kingdom through His word and wise rule. Before I leave this verse, I must at least remark on the poetic style of the verse that I so carefully skipped over. Here we see that twice, once after each word picture we have the prophet describe the hiding of the Messiah. Now various commentators have seen different meanings in this passage, one being that Christ would only be revealed at the timing of the Father, another that the idea of Gentile salvation which will be discussed later is an OT mystery, something hidden from view and lastly that the act of hiding is a protection around the Son. There is some element of possibility in each of these cases but two seem to find direct support in Isaiah for their case. Isaiah 48:6 discusses the hidden things that God has revealed through the prophets and Isaiah 51:16 describes the covering of one with the shadow of a hand in a protective way. Based on the way the first phrase is used to describe hidden "things" and the other verses tie together the concept of personality being hidden, I would say that the prophet here is describing both God's sovereign watch over the Son and His leading of the Son during His ministry as the Messiah is revealed at various times and ways.

Moving on, we see the next verse open with a call, this time a description of the Messiah as a Servant and not just any Servant but the only Servant one who will glorify God perfectly in all He does. Important in this call also is that the Servant is described as Israel, showing us here that the true Israel is the Messiah and those that are found in Him because it is only that Israel that can bring true glory to God. The prophet then goes on to describe what on first inspection could seem to be words of discouragement but instead they are merely prophetic words of what the Messiah would encounter in His work among the children of Israel. Such a prediction is not unusual for Isaiah heard much the same thing from the Father as he writes in Isaiah 6:9-10, "And He said, 'Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' Make the heart of this people dull, And their ears heavy, And shut their eyes; Lest they see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart, And return and be healed.'" So Isaiah is very familiar with the idea that the people would be not be receptive to his words and he tells us in this prophecy that the Messiah would "seem" to fare no better, at least from outward circumstances. Christ echoes this sentiment of a people unwilling to listen to their Redeemer when He states in Matthew 23:37-38, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate;" And it would seem to be true from a quick inspection that the Messiah was unsuccessful in His work for his herald John the Baptist was killed, His closest disciples fled from His presence and it seemed as if the whole city, religious leaders, Gentile leader and even the people had turned against Him. And yet Isaiah does not let us stop at merely looking at the external for he reminds us that our just reward is found ultimately in the LORD and this occurs when we work faithfully within the will of God. Christ tells us this very same thing in John 5:30, "I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me." And Christ also reminds us that our reward is ultimately found in Him, Revelation 22:12 "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me, to give to every one according to his work." And so we are reminded, as we so often must be as a people that tend to look at the short sided outcome rather than the eternal view, that just because it seemed that Christ had labored in vain did not mean that was necessarily the case. We have the benefit know of knowing and looking back to see that events surrounding the life of Christ were not accomplished in vain, these events happened according to the will and plan of the Father and today the kingdom of Christ grows throughout the entire world. And so this is an aid to us also today to remind us that our efforts glorify God when they are carried out according to His revealed will despite the immediate fruits, or lack of fruits at any given time. Faithfulness, not numbers, is the true test of whether we actually desire to find our reward solely in the LORD.

Verse 5 begins with the third and last call in this section that we are looking at. We saw where the first call identified the Messiah in a way similar to other prophets called by God. This was followed by the second call which identified the Messiah as the true Israel. This last call now provides for us a glimpse into the extent of the Savior's work in that He is called from the womb to bring Jacob back to him. Matthew 10:5-6 and 15:21-28 reinforce for us that this was indeed a part call of the Messiah's call. Moving on from the call, we come to one of the most difficult parts of the passage, and although there are translation differences which I will briefly discuss, the overall thrust of the

passage is not altered greatly in either case. My NKJV translation reads "...so that Israel will be gathered to Him", but for the following reasons, I defer to the translation used in the KJV which states, "And now, saith the LORD that formed me from the womb *to be* his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and my God shall be my strength." I believe that this translation is more accurate for the following reasons: first, the word *not* is included in the text reading and it is the margin note combined with theological inference driving the NKJV translation, and second, the KJV translation shows a striking parallel to verses three and four which emphasize glory and reward flowing from faithfulness to God, not visible results. In either case, as I previously stated, neither translation stops the flow and emphasis of the prophecy which is the extent of the Messiah's work. And it is the extent of the work that I want to get to next where Christ is seen as a light to the Gentiles and salvation to the ends of the earth. Isaiah 3 times mentions this idea of bringing light to the Gentiles, in this passage and in 42:6 and 60:3. Luke 2:32 parallels Isaiah 42:6 in the quote by Simeon who was granted by the Spirit to see his Messiah before dying. And so we reach the climax of this passage today observing that Isaiah reveals now to the coastlands the hope and promise of their salvation through the same Messiah that the Israelites had been hoping for as people of the covenant.

And yet we are not complete because I promised you three things at the beginning of the sermon. First was a renewed sense of graciousness for God sending His Son to save Gentile as well as Jew, and second was a taking a look at OT expectations for the calling and work of the Messiah. The last step which I still have not met is to explain what it is that the coastlands are called to heed, or to take action in. It may have occurred to some that although the Messiah is said to have brought His salvation to the ends of the earth that Christ did not actually physically accomplish this. And yet we know that such a salvation, such a spreading of the word, as the sword and the arrow of the Son is as sure as the Word of God. And here is where the NT gives us great insight into how we, as gentile believers in the 21st century fit into this piece of OT prophecy. Luke states concerning Paul and Barnabas, "Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.' "Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed." Luke here takes the Isaiah passage and instead of applying it to Jesus Christ, he applies it directly to two of God's servants. And remarkably, the same could be said about each and every one of us that are Christians today for we are one, in Christ and it is through His people that His salvation is being taken to the ends of the earth. Christ said in Matthew 28:18-20," And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age." Amen." This is our call given by our Savior and it is only through Him that we can go forth and bring salvation to the end of the earth. Hear the command ring forth Dominion Covenant Church, Listen and Heed your Savior today.