

Isaiah 49:1-2

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/isa/isa-49/isaiah-491-2/>

The second Servant Song of Isaiah begins with the LORD's Servant calling for the Gentiles and peoples from afar to listen and pay careful attention. He declares that He was given a mysterious mission by the LORD from before He was born.

The beginning of Isaiah chapter 49 is the second of Isaiah's four "Servant Songs." Each of these Servant Songs are prophecies about the Messiah, who is described as *My Servant*.

The Old Testament predicts both a suffering servant Messiah as well as a victorious king Messiah. Jewish tradition calls the suffering servant Messiah "Son of Joseph"—one who would suffer greatly prior to being elevated to the position of Israel's savior. Tradition calls the victorious king Messiah "Son of David" in expectation of the fulfillment of God's promise to place a descendant of David upon the throne of Israel forever (2 Samuel 7:12-16).

Some schools of thought held that there would be two messiahs ("anointed ones"). But Jesus reconciles the dilemma, as He fulfills both types. In *His* first advent on the earth, Jesus fulfilled the suffering servant prophecies. In *His* second advent on the earth, *He will* fulfill the conquering king prophecies.

This is the second "Servant Song" of Isaiah.

The first "Servant Song" of Isaiah is found in Isaiah 42:1-4. It prophesies that the Messiah will bring forth justice but will not be quarrelsome. He will be so gentle, "a bruised reed He will not break" (Isaiah 42:3). This Servant Song is quoted by Matthew as a demonstration of Jesus being the Messiah by virtue of having fulfilled this prophecy after He walked away from an escalating confrontation with the Pharisees over His healing on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:18-21).

The second "Servant Song" of Isaiah is found in Isaiah 49:1-26. As detailed below this Servant Song consists of four messages from the Servant and/or *the LORD*. The first section is the most prophetic of Jesus's life on earth. These four messages are:

- Isaiah 49:1-6
- Isaiah 49:7-13
- Isaiah 49:14-21
- Isaiah 49:22-26

The main part of this Servant Song is the first message (Isaiah 49:1-6) which is the Biblical text for this commentary. It is in the voice of the Servant as a message to the Gentiles.

At one point the Servant seems dejected over having apparently failed to accomplish His task to *restore Israel*. *The LORD consoles Him* that *it is too small a thing* for Him to only redeem Israel, He *will also* redeem the nations so that *the LORD's* salvation will reach the end of the earth. This means the Servant Messiah will save the Gentiles as well as Israel.

The Servant's dejection and *the LORD's* assurance in this Servant Song could be seen as foreshadowing Jesus the Messiah's despair in the Garden of Gethsemane hours before *Israel* rejected and crucified Him. Perhaps the message of this Servant Song was part of what was shared between Him and His Father as He prayed (Matthew 26:36-39).

The third "Servant Song" of Isaiah is found in Isaiah 50:4-11. It prophesies that the Messiah *will* rely upon the LORD for His vindication. *He will* set His "face like flint" towards obeying His Father's will (Isaiah 50:7). Luke alludes to Isaiah 50:7 when he wrote: "When the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined [literally "set His face"] to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51).

The crowd's mocking of Jesus on the cross also seems to be a fulfillment of this Servant Song. Compare the chief priest's taunts: "He trusts in God; let God rescue Him now, if He delights in Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God'" (Matthew 27:43) with Isaiah 50:10 "Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God."

Isaiah 52:13-53:15 is the fourth and most famous "Servant Song" of Isaiah. It is commonly known as "the Suffering Servant" passage. It prophesies that the Messiah will astonishingly be worshiped by the Gentiles even as He will be unrecognized, despised, and ultimately killed by Israel. The Messiah will be "pierced through for our transgressions... [and] "crushed for our iniquities"... [but] "by His scourging we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). This Servant Song also accurately predicts that the Messiah will die "with wicked men" but be buried in the tomb of "a rich man" (Isaiah 53:9). The LORD's "Servant will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities" (Isaiah 53:11). And because *He will* "render Himself as a guilt offering" (Isaiah 53:10), the LORD "will allot Him a portion with the great" (Isaiah 53:12).

The New Testament quotes this fourth "Servant Song" no less than six times: Matthew 8:14-17, Luke 22:35-38, John 12:37-41, Acts 8:26-35, Romans 10:11-21, 1 Peter 2:19-25. The New Testament both cites it as a proof of Jesus being the Messiah (Acts 8:26-35) and alludes to it as an example of what Jesus did for us that we should emulate (Philippians 2:5-10).

The Second Servant Song of Isaiah (Isaiah 49:1-26)

As mentioned above, the second Servant Song of Isaiah has four main parts.

The first part is Isaiah 49:1-6. It is mostly a dialogue that is between the Servant and *the LORD*, as retold by the Servant.

The second part of this Servant Song is Isaiah 49:7-13. It is mostly in the voice of *the LORD*. It is a promise to His Servant that He will deliver Him and give Him as a covenant to restore His people.

The third part of this Servant Song is Isaiah 49:14-21. It consists of the people of Israel complaining to *the LORD* that He has forgotten them, and *the LORD*'s loving response.

The final part of this Servant Song is Isaiah 49:22-26. In it, *the LORD* again promises to redeem Israel, and that He will defeat her enemies.

This first section, Isaiah 49:1-6, will focus on the first part of the second Servant Song, which is the dialogue between *the LORD* and His Servant as retold by the Servant. Even though Isaiah quotes the Servant's retelling of His discussion with *the LORD*, the voice and perspective shifts back and forth between the Servant and *the LORD*.

The Secret Identity and Calling of the Servant

The Servant Song begins with the *LORD*'s Servant beckoning the *islands* and *you peoples from afar* to *listen to Me and pay attention* to His recounting of what was *said* between *Him* and *the LORD*,

*Listen to Me, O islands,
And pay attention, you peoples from afar* (v 1a)

The terms: *O islands*; and *you peoples from afar*, represent either the scattered remnants of *Israel* or the Gentiles—or both.

In both the Hebrew Text and the Greek Septuagint the words translated as *peoples* are terms

regularly associated with Gentiles. The Hebrew word is עַמִּים (H3816—pronounced: “leh-ome”). The Greek word is from ἔθνος (G1484—pronounced: “eth'-nos”). The English words “Ethnos” and “ethnic” are derived from ἔθνος. Both the Hebrew “lehome” and the Greek “ethnos” mean “nations” or Gentiles. It is interesting to consider that this Messianic *Song* begins with *the LORD*'s Servant (the Jewish Messiah) addressing the Gentiles who are *from afar*.

The Servant tells them to—*Listen to Me...And pay attention*—because He has something to tell them that will affect or matter to them. What He has to say is either very important, or it may be difficult to understand, or both—which is why He says *pay attention*.

After the Servant's address, He begins to describe Himself and His act of service or mission. The first thing the Servant says of Himself is:

*The LORD called Me from the womb;
From the body of My mother He named Me* (v 1b).

The LORD is *the LORD* God—YAHWEH. *The LORD called Me* (*His Servant*). When the *LORD* calls someone, *He* does so with an intended purpose.

- *The LORD called* Noah to build an ark to save a remnant of *His* creation from the flood of *His* wrath (Genesis 6:13-22).

- *The LORD called Abraham (Abram) to leave his home and go to a new land that He was showing him. In this new land, the LORD promised to make his descendants into a nation that would be as uncountable as the stars and that He would bless all the families of the earth (Genesis 12:1-5, 15:5). (As we will soon see, this Servant Song in Isaiah is an extension of the LORD's promise to bless the earth through Abraham and his Descendant, the LORD's Servant.)*
- *The LORD called Moses to be His prophet who would lead His people out of slavery. (Exodus 3:1-10). (The LORD promised to send a prophet like Moses to His people (Deuteronomy 18:18). This promised prophet is the Messiah, and the same Servant whom Isaiah prophesies of in this song.)*
- *The LORD also called Joseph, Joshua, Gideon, Samuel, David, and the prophets—all for His*

In Isaiah 49, the Servant confesses how He was assigned a special purpose (like Noah, like Abraham, like Moses, etc.) but that He was *called by the LORD* to this purpose before He was born. *The LORD called Me* even before His birth; He was *called from the womb*, when He was being formed inside *the body of His mother*.

This language calls to mind Psalm 139:13-16, where the Psalmist says: “You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother’s womb...and in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me.”

Jesus, the Messiah, was *named and called by the LORD* to His purpose,

“She [Mary, the mother of Jesus] will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”
(Matthew 1:21)

“The angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.’”
(Luke 1:30-33)

The writer of the New Testament epistle of Hebrews quotes from Psalm 40, which emphasizes that when Jesus entered into the body prepared for Him, it was for the specific purpose of doing His Father’s will.

“Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says,
‘SACRIFICE AND OFFERING YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED,
BUT A BODY YOU HAVE PREPARED FOR ME;
IN WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND *sacrifices* FOR SIN YOU HAVE TAKEN NO
PLEASURE.

‘THEN I SAID, ‘BEHOLD, I HAVE COME
(IN THE SCROLL OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME)
TO DO YOUR WILL, O GOD.’”
(Hebrews 10:5-7)

Next, the Servant reveals details about *the LORD*’s mysterious purpose for the Messiah.

*He has made My mouth like a sharp sword,
In the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me;
And He has also made Me a select arrow,
He has hidden Me in His quiver (v2).*

He [the LORD] has made My [the Servant’s] mouth like a sharp sword.

This may mean that the Messiah will speak revealing words of truth that cut *like a sharp sword*.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus the Messiah is first called the Logos, or the Word (John 1:1-14). He is the prophet like Moses, foretold in Deuteronomy 18:15 who speaks the LORD’s words and message. And the author of Hebrews describes the word/message of God as “sharper than any two-edged sword” (Hebrews 4:12).

When Jesus, *the LORD*’s Servant, spoke, He often cut straight to the main issue both in His general teachings and in His interactions with people. And Jesus repeatedly emphasized how He only spoke the words His Father put in His *mouth* to speak (John 7:16, 12:49, 14:10) and how He was given works to accomplish while He was on the earth (John 5:36, 6:38). When Jesus called out the hypocrisy of the religious leaders, they certainly acted as though it cut them like a *sharp sword* (Matthew 12:14, 15:12, 21:45-46).

The Servant says: *In the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me.*

The expression *in the shadow of His hand* means underneath *the LORD*’s *hand* as if the LORD’s hand were covering something and no one could see or know what was beneath it. But the LORD knows what is *in the shadow of His hand*.

This line indicates how the Messiah’s identity will be unknown. It will be *concealed* from the people, especially those who love only themselves and do not love *the LORD* or use their gifts to serve other people. The Messiah’s identity will be *in the shadow of the LORD*’s *hand*. Part of the reason the Messiah was not recognized was because the rulers were not expecting Him to be a servant (Mark 2:16).

Jesus’s Messianic identity was not recognized by most people,

“He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.”
(John 1:10-11)

And when Peter confessed that Jesus was “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16), Jesus told him that he was blessed “because...My Father who is in heaven” had revealed this to him (Matthew 16:17).

The Servant repeats these mysterious sentiments with another military metaphor to describe His purpose and secret identity.

And He has also made Me a select arrow,

He has hidden Me in His quiver.

In this metaphor, the Messiah is a select arrow of the LORD, hidden in the LORD’s quiver. This metaphor suggests how *the LORD has* an intended target in mind toward which *He* will aim and shoot the Messiah. Few if any are aware of the LORD’s mysterious target.

With these statements, the Servant reveals that in addition to having His identity *concealed in the shadow of the LORD’s hand*, He *has also* been saved and *called to a select* and secret purpose—possibly only known to *the LORD*.

The opening lines of this Servant Song has already hinted at the fact that this purpose has something to do with the Gentiles: *Listen to Me, O islands And pay attention, you peoples from afar* (v 1). And the conclusion of this portion of the Servant Song confirms this hint: *I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth* (v 6).

Other Servant Songs in Isaiah also prophesy how the Servant Messiah will redeem the Gentiles.

From the first Servant Song (Isaiah 42:1-4):

“He will bring forth justice to the nations.”
(Isaiah 42:1)

“The coastlands will wait expectantly for His law.”
(Isaiah 42:4)

From the fourth Servant Song (Isaiah 52:13-53:12):

“Thus He will sprinkle many nations,
Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him.”
(Isaiah 52:15)

In Ephesians, the Apostle Paul seems to have understood his appointed mission (as a steward of God’s grace and the Lord’s ambassador and to the Gentiles) in light of Isaiah’s mysterious/*hidden* prophecies that the Messiah will also redeem the Gentiles. This is evident when Paul describes “his insight into the mystery of Christ” (Ephesians 3:4) which was not known to previous generations (Ephesians 3:5).

The mystery of the Messiah, “to be specific [is] that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (Ephesians 3:6).

The LORD has hidden Jesus, the Messiah in *His quiver*, as an archer would set aside *a select arrow* for a special purpose. That special purpose was a mystery, until the Gospel of Jesus was taken to the Gentiles. The Gentiles can become fellow heirs of the kingdom. The great revelation was that the believing Gentiles would be full-fledged members of the body of Christ. Further, they would also be fellow partakers of the promised inheritance if they walked faithfully with Him (Romans 8:17).

Biblical Text

**¹ Listen to Me, O islands,
And pay attention, you peoples from afar.
The LORD called Me from the womb;
From the body of My mother He named Me.
² He has made My mouth like a sharp sword,
In the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me;
And He has also made Me a select arrow,
He has hidden Me in His quiver.**