

## Lesson 31 Isaiah 49:1-50:3 The Second Servant Song

### Introduction

Isaiah		
<small>"He will lift up a standard for the nations...he will set a sign among the peoples."</small>		
Book of the Servant 40-55		
The Greater Deliverance 49:1-55:13		
The Second Servant Song 49:1-50:3	The Third Servant Song 50:4-52:12	The Fourth Servant Song 52:13-55:13
A The Servant's double task: Israel and the world (49:1-6) B Comment: the task confirmed (49:7-13) C Zion: despondent and unresponsive (49:14-50:3)	A The Servant: responsive, buoyant, obedient and suffering (50:4-9) B Comment: obedient and self-willed (50:10-11) C Zion: summoned to respond (51:1-52:12)	A The Servant: successful, sin-bearing and triumphant (52:13-53:12) B Comment: Israel and the world (54:1-55:13)

Alec Motyer. *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (InterVarsity Press, 1996).

We have arrived at the heart of Isaiah's Gospel. Israel will need a great deliverance to escape Babylon and rebuild Jerusalem. Israel is going to need an even greater deliverance to escape the bondage of the human soul. The Book of the Servant began in Isaiah 40:1 with God's exhortation, "Comfort, O comfort my people." In the development of that section God's compassion was shown to extend from Israel to all nations. The next major section, the redemption of Israel, emphasized the necessity that national redemption must be accompanied by redemption from sin if the Jews are to truly walk with God as His people. The third major section developed the reality of national redemption from Babylon. That's what we've been calling, "the great deliverance." That section gave us detail on how God would deliver His people through a foreign servant named, Cyrus. This fourth and final section will get into the "how" of greater deliverance, explaining how spiritual redemption is made possible through a new kind of servant.

Isaiah has left this question of "how" hanging out there ever since the first chapter, where God promised to make the scarlet sins of Israel white as snow; though red like crimson, they will be like wool. The question "how?" was still left hanging in the vision of chapter 6, where the touch of a flaming coal took away the impurity of the prophet's unclean lips. We know he was purified. We just don't know how that works. It is the unanswered "how" of chapter 19: how can God say of both Gentile and Jew, "Blessed is Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel my inheritance."? How do the enemies of Yahweh and enemies of each other come together as one body at peace with God? It is the "how" of spiritual redemption promised in 44:21,

I have wiped out your transgressions like  
a thick cloud,  
Return to me

and your sins like a heavy mist.  
  
for I have redeemed you.

How are those transgressions wiped out? How does God do it? How does He purify, atone for, wipe away human sin? How does God bring enemies together as one, and bring that one man into His presence to worship? It is not enough for God Himself to reign as the divine-human King. God has explained to us, if He is going to gather to Himself a Kingdom people, God must also make that people pure and good. How does that happen? We are going to see that it happens through a new kind of servant. Just as we had a new kind of king, we need a new kind of servant, a divine-human servant.

We are going to get from Isaiah the clearest explanation of how that can be found in the Old Testament. We do not get it right away all in this chapter. Isaiah builds to it through a succession of three Servant Songs. Each Servant Song is accompanied by a comment from God regarding the Servant. The first two parts also include a comment regarding the response of Israel. That's what the structure is going to be, Servant Song; comment from God regarding the Servant song; then comment regarding the response from Israel.

The number of the songs in this section might be a little confusing. We have three parts and each part begins with a Servant song. But our first Servant Song occurred back in 42:1-4. So, now, in this section the first part does not start with the first Servant Song. It is the second Servant Song. And the second part will begin with the third Servant Song; and the third part will begin with the fourth Servant Song. That fourth Servant Song is the famous of all the Servant Songs, and that's what we're building towards.

Each of the Servant Songs includes a spiritual need that must be met and that will be met by a servant. Each of the Servant Songs also describes that servant as a new kind of servant. This is not the servant Israel, described as blind and wanting. This is not the servant who comes with military might to defeat Israel's earthly enemies. This is a different kind of servant of whom we get a growing picture as we move through each song.

In this lesson, we will cover the Second Servant song in 49:1-6, God's comment confirming the Servant in 49:7-13, and the comment regarding Israel's response in 49:14-50:3. Before we jump into the text, let us start with a reminder of what we already know about the Servant from the first Servant Song in 42:1-4 and the accompanying confirmation from the Lord in 42:5-9.

The need highlighted in that song is justice on the Earth. That need is mentioned three times through the song, "He will bring forth justice for the nations... he will faithfully bring forth justice... he will not be disheartened or crushed until he has established justice in the earth." The need is not limited to Israel. This Servant will be "a light to the nations."

The Servant is described in terms that point us toward a unique kind of Servant. God describes him as "One in whom my soul delights. I have put my Spirit upon him." That language of justice and of the spirit of connect this new kind of servant with the new kind of King from our previous book. In Isaiah 9:6 we were told this new King would establish His ever-increasing Kingdom with justice and righteousness. We were also told in 11:2 that "The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him." There is another phrase that makes this Servant stand out. We were told He will be appointed as a "covenant to the people." That's odd language. How is a person a covenant? It's something unique.

Along with the unique way the Servant is described, we learn more about Him as His task is explained. The need is a need for justice, but it does not sound like the implementation of political or military justice. This Servant does not carry out His mission through force.

<sup>2</sup> "He will not cry out or raise *His voice*,  
<sup>3</sup> "A bruised reed He will not break

Nor make His voice heard in the street.  
And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish;

What will He accomplish? He will be a light to the nations, He will open blind eyes, He will bring out prisoners from the dungeon, and He will release those who dwell in darkness. The Lord ends His confirmation of the Servant with the declaration that He is declaring new things, before they come to be. That may mean that God is simply declaring ahead of time the future details about the Servant to come. It can also mean that He is pointing ahead with some details to a revelation that will only be fully made known at that future date. When this Servant shows up, it will be a new thing.

That's what we know so far about this Servant, this "covenant of the people." Let's see what Isaiah now wants to reveal in the second song and following comments. Let's start with just the text of the song, Isaiah 49:1-6.

### **The Second Servant Song: The Servant's Scope is Israel and the World (49:1-6).**

<sup>1</sup> Listen to Me, O islands,  
The LORD called Me from the womb;  
<sup>2</sup> He has made My mouth like a sharp sword,  
And He has also made Me a select arrow,  
<sup>3</sup> He said to Me, "You are My Servant,  
<sup>4</sup> But I said, "I have toiled in vain,  
Yet surely the justice due to Me is with the LORD,

And pay attention, you peoples from afar.  
From the body of My mother He named Me.  
In the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me;  
He has hidden Me in His quiver.  
Israel, in Whom I will show My glory."  
I have spent My strength for nothing and vanity;  
And My reward with My God."

<sup>5</sup> And now says the LORD,  
To bring Jacob back to Him,  
(For I am honored in the sight of the LORD,  
<sup>6</sup> He says, "It is too small a thing that You should  
be My Servant

who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant,  
so that Israel might be gathered to Him  
And My God is My strength),  
To raise up the tribes of Jacob

and to restore the preserved ones of Israel;  
I will also make You a light of the nations

So that My salvation may reach to the end of  
the earth."

The need described in this song is to bring Jacob back to the Lord, to gather Israel to God. Jacob is to be raised up, Israel is to be restored. That language might apply to the national redemption of Israel. But we ended chapter 48 with the warning that there is no peace for the wicked. Israel had failed to experience *shalom*, the well-being or peace that comes from faithful obedience to God. And the language here is more relational than the language of national restoration. The focus is not on returning to the land and rebuilding the city. The focus is on returning to God, being gathered to Him. Recognizing the relational emphasis explains verse six. It is too small a thing to restore Israel. The need is universal.

I will also make You a light of the nations

So that My salvation may reach to the end of  
the earth."

This is not simply salvation from Babylon, just bringing Israel back. The need addressed in this song is spiritual and the scope is worldwide. God commissions this servant to restore Israel and the nations to Him. How does the Servant describe Himself in this song? "He has made my mouth a sharp sword... he has also made me a select arrow." The Servant has been selected by God for a specific task. He is God's sword, God's select arrow. And He has been reserved by God, kept hidden to perform this special task, "In the shadow of his hand he has concealed me... he has hidden me in his quiver." That last verset is one of those beautiful Isaiah images that communicates so well. "Hidden in God's quiver" implies both the special reserve with which God has protected the Servant, and the special task He is being reserved to perform. He is a special arrow, hidden in a quiver to be taken out, aimed, and released when God is ready.

The image of a mouth like a sharp sword connects this Servant to the word of God. His word will pierce. His word will be effective. That image could fit a prophet kept in reserve and sent forth to proclaim God's word. But more is going on here. This reference to the word connects back to the first Servant Song where we are told the coastlands wait for the Servant's law or instruction. He Himself has been called, "the Lord's covenant." Here he is called, "Israel." What kind of servant is this? Nothing in the context encourages us to believe Israel is the hidden arrow in the quiver. Israel is not the new thing God is doing. As a servant, Israel has been found considerably wanting. How does blind Israel become a light to the nations? Somehow, this servant embodies and fulfills Covenant. He also embodies and fulfills Israel. He reveals the word of God in a way that is piercing and effective.

How does this Servant fulfill the task of restoration and salvation? Again, His manner is curious. Before, we were told "a bruised reed he would not break." Now we hear the Servant saying,

<sup>4</sup> But I said, "I have toiled in vain,  
Yet surely the justice due to Me is with the LORD,

I have spent My strength for nothing and vanity;  
And My reward with My God."

There is an aspect of this Servant's task to restore Israel that will fail. Or at least seem to fail. But He will be vindicated by God, and He will be a light to the nations. We do not want to get ahead of ourselves, but I cannot help thinking about the prologue of John's Gospel. This is John 1,9-12,

<sup>9</sup> There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. <sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. <sup>11</sup> He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. <sup>12</sup> But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name,

Jesus is the true light. But the world did not know Him, and His own chosen people Israel did not receive Him. Though He came as King, He was rejected as King and crucified. It could be said that He toiled in vain. He spent His strength for nothing. And yet, through His crucifixion He secured salvation for the nations. And through His resurrection He is vindicated by God.

**The Lord's Comment: The task to Israel and the World is Confirmed (49:7-13).**

Moving from the second Servant Song, we now get the Lord's comment on the song, in Isaiah 49:7-13.

<p><sup>7</sup> Thus says the LORD, To the despised One, abhorred by the nation, "Kings will see and arise, Because of the LORD who is faithful,</p> <p><sup>8</sup> Thus says the LORD, And in a day of salvation I have helped You; And I will keep You and give You for a covenant of the people,</p> <p><sup>9</sup> Saying to those who are bound, 'Go forth,' Along the roads they will feed, <sup>10</sup> "They will not hunger or thirst, For He who has compassion on them will lead them <sup>11</sup> "I will make all My mountains a road, <sup>12</sup> "Behold, these will come from afar;</p> <p><sup>13</sup> Shout for joy, O heavens! Break forth into joyful shouting, O mountains! For the LORD has comforted His people</p>	<p>the Redeemer of Israel and its Holy One, To the Servant of rulers, Princes will also bow down, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen You." "In a favorable time I have answered You, To restore the land, to make them inherit the desolate heritages;</p> <p>To those who are in darkness, 'Show yourselves.' And their pasture will be on all bare heights. Nor will the scorching heat or sun strike them down; And will guide them to springs of water. And My highways will be raised up. And lo, these will come from the north and from the west, And these from the land of Sinim." And rejoice, O earth! And will have compassion on His afflicted.</p>
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This is Yahweh, the Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel speaking. This familiar awe-inspiring name combination creates an utter contrast with the despised and abhorred Servant. That's how He is described. Though we quickly see that He is not despised or abhorred by God. God affirms the Servant in His double-task of providing salvation to both Israel and to the nations. There is a simple chiasmic flow in this confirming commentary from God. According to Motyer, we start with a promise of world-wide effectiveness, first among Gentiles then with Israel. After that we see a world-wide gathering, first of Israel, and then of Gentiles. So we have Gentiles – Israel; Israel – Gentiles. The section ends with a song of world-wide joy.

The servants world-wide effectiveness is a surprise. Despised and abhorred by the nation, he somehow becomes a Servant of rulers. That probably means rulers recognize Him as the Servant. Kings see and arise, princes bow down. The Servant's task may initially seem vain and fruitless. He may have been despised. But as a select arrow, He will not fail to accomplish the task for which God releases Him. He will see success because of the Lord who is faithful, because the Holy One of Israel chose Him.

Moving from verse 7 to verse 8, we shift from success among Gentile king and princes to success with to Israel.

<p><sup>8</sup> Thus says the LORD, And I will keep You and give You for a covenant of the people,</p>	<p>"In a favorable time I have answered You, And in a day of salvation I have helped You; To restore the land, to make them inherit the desolate heritages;</p>
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As in the first Servant Song, the Servant is called “a covenant of the people.” He will restore Israel to the land, because Yahweh helps Him in the day of salvation. This language sounds like national redemption, but the context of the song has pointed us to relational restoration with God. Restoration to the land is also the restoration of relationship.

World-wide effectiveness is followed by world-wide gathering. The chiasmic structure of Gentiles - Israel, Israel - Gentiles flows smoothly from the promise of the Servant’s effectiveness among Israel to the vision of a gathered Israel, in verses 9-10.

<p><sup>9</sup> Saying to those who are bound, ‘Go forth,’ Along the roads they will feed, <sup>10</sup> “They will not hunger or thirst, For He who has compassion on them will lead them</p>	<p>To those who are in darkness, ‘Show yourselves.’ And their pasture will be on all bare heights. Nor will the scorching heat or sun strike them down; And will guide them to springs of water.</p>
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The language, again, could be that of national redemption. They are being brought from Babylon home, to Israel. But it’s this language of the new exodus that also applies to spiritual redemption. Israel the people are journeying to the Promised Land. God has gathered them, He provides for them, He is bringing them home. The gathering of the Gentiles that follows in the next few verses indicates that something more is in mind here than the national redemption of Israel. This gathering is a gathering of a world-wide people. Verses 11-12.

<p><sup>11</sup> “I will make all My mountains a road, <sup>12</sup> “Behold, these will come from afar;</p>	<p>And My highways will be raised up. And lo, these will come from the north and from the west, And these from the land of Sinim.”</p>
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Scholars do not know what place the name, Sinim, refers to. The modern consensus is that Sinim is a reference to southernmost Egypt. That conclusion is based on a reference in the Dead Sea Scrolls. If so, Sinim points to the far south. If we take the reference to afar in the first verset of verse 12 to refer to the east, then Isaiah is moving around the points of the compass from afar, east, to those who come from the north, the west, and Sinim in the south. Or maybe Isaiah accomplishes the same idea by being intentionally vague with the first and last terms. “Afar” is simply, far off. And Sinim is some distant undefined location. Afar, north, west, and Sinim.

The leveled mountains and raised up roads imply a great gathering of peoples. That these peoples come from throughout the Earth is affirmed in a concluding hymn of world-wide joy. Verse 13,

<p><sup>13</sup> Shout for joy, O heavens! For the LORD has comforted His people</p>	<p>And rejoice, O earth! Break forth into joyful shouting, O mountains! And will have compassion on His afflicted.</p>
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Moving now from the Servant Song and the confirmation of the Lord, we turn to consider Israel’s response to this song.

### **Israel and the Song: Zion is despondent and unresponsive (49:14-50:3).**

The response is not encouraging. It is despondent and unresponsive. This is how our third section begins in 49:14.

<sup>14</sup> But Zion said, “The LORD has forsaken me, And the Lord has forgotten me.”

Good news does not always sound like good news. It often depends on the attitude of the listener’s heart and on whether or not the listener sees the described vision with the eyes of faith. The three parts of our passage have been marked at each point by a change of speaker. In 48:1 the Servant spoke, “Listen to me, O islands...” The next section starts in 49:7 with, “Thus says the Lord.” And this third section begins with, “But Zion said...” That, “But Zion said,” does not bode well. Zion does not hear God’s declaration with a submissive heart, or see this vision with eyes of faith. The Servant has spoken of the task set before Him to restore Israel and be a light to the nations. God has confirmed this task, “But Zion said, ‘Yahweh has forsaken me, and the Lord has forgotten me.’” Motyer comments, “The sense of anticlimax at 49:14 could hardly be stronger.... the complaining voice of

Zion contrasts sharply with the world song over the work of the Servant.”<sup>1</sup> Whereas 49:18 bursts with shouts of joy in the heavens, on earth and from the mountain tops, Zion laments, “I am forsaken, I’m forgotten.”

This response to the Servant Song is troubling; indicative of how Israel will in the future receive the Servant when He does come. Even so, the Lord takes time here to reassure Israel of two things. And these are two things we probably need to be reminding ourselves of personally. The suffering you have to go through does not mean the Lord has forgotten you. And the inclusion of all nations does not mean the Lord has forsaken you. Just because others are special to God, too, that does not mean that you are not special to God in your own unique role. And just because you go through trial and pain, that does not mean that God is not still working on your behalf; that God cares about you.

The underlying truths Israel needs to remember are truths about who God is and what God has promised to do. When suffering comes, when God seems distant, when we are not sure about our own relationship with God, we have to ask, “What do I really believe about God? Do I believe He is good? Do I expect Him to fulfill His promises?” The Lord God reminds Israel that He is not One who will forget His children; He conquers the enemies of His people; and He redeems His own.

*The Lord Does Not Forget His Children (14-21)*

This is who God is. And He is going to do these things in His time, but He is still going to do them. First, He is the one who does not forget His children. That’s the underlying truth of verses 14-21. In these verses, Isaiah personifies Jerusalem, the city of Zion, as a mother whose inhabitants are her children.

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| 14 | But Zion said, “The LORD has forsaken me,                             | And the Lord has forgotten me.”   |
| 15 | “Can a woman forget her nursing child<br>Even these may forget,       | And have no compassion on the son of her womb?<br>but I will not forget you.  |
| 16 | “Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of<br>My hands;            | Your walls are continually before Me.   |
| 17 | “Your builders hurry;   | Your destroyers and devastators<br>Will depart from you.  |
| 18 | “Lift up your eyes and look around;<br>As I live,” declares the LORD, | All of them gather together, they come to you.<br>“You will surely put on all of them as jewels<br>and bind them on as a bride. |

The city Zion is to lift up her eyes and look around. The people of Israel, her children, even more importantly God’s children, will come back to her. This is the promise, “As I live, declares the Lord, you will surely put on all of them as jewels and bind them on as a bride.” Zion, in a sense, is God’s betrothed, and her children are the wealth she displays as a pride. The image continues, promising not just some children, but an overflowing wealth of children.

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| 19 | “For your waste and desolate places<br>Surely now you will be too cramped for<br>the inhabitants,                             | and your destroyed land—<br>And those who swallowed you will be far away.   |
| 20 | “The children of whom you were bereaved<br>‘The place is too cramped for me;  | will yet say in your ears,<br>Make room for me that I may live here.’   |
| 21 | “Then you will say in your heart,<br>Since I have been bereaved of my children<br>and am barren,<br>And who has reared these? | ‘Who has begotten these for me,<br>an exile and a wanderer?<br>Behold, I was left alone;<br>From where did these come?’ ” |

God asks Zion to look with the eyes of faith past the time of exile; and barrenness; and oppression, to a promised time of abundance. This could be the promise of physical return, but in light of the

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<sup>1</sup> J. A. Motyer. *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996) 392.

language of Zion used previously in Isaiah this passage can be just as easily understood as looking ahead to a spiritually renewed Israel, to the new city of Zion, bursting with children.

*The Lord Conquers the Enemies of His People (22-26)*

The Lord does not forget His children. And the Lord conquers the enemies of His people. That's the promise emphasized in verses 22-26.

<p><sup>22</sup> Thus says the Lord GOD, And they will bring your sons in their bosom, <sup>23</sup> "Kings will be your guardians, They will bow down to you with their faces to the earth And you will know that I am the LORD; <sup>24</sup> "Can the prey be taken from the mighty man, <sup>25</sup> Surely, thus says the LORD, And all flesh will know</p>	<p>And set up My standard to the peoples; And your daughters will be carried on their shoulders. And their princesses your nurses. And lick the dust of your feet; Those who hopefully wait for Me will not be put to shame. Or the captives of a tyrant be rescued?" "Even the captives of the mighty man will be taken away, And the prey of the tyrant will be rescued; For I will contend with the one who contends with you, And I will save your sons. <sup>26</sup> "I will feed your oppressors with their own flesh, And they will become drunk with their own blood as with sweet wine; that I, the LORD, am your Savior And your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob."</p>
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This language, it also fits with national redemption. The promise is in verse 25, "For I will contend with the one who contends with you, and I will save your sons." That imagery is the imagery of military conquest. The people of Israel are scattered among the nations. They are prey of the mighty, captives in foreign lands. God promises to fight for them. Not only will they return to Israel, but foreign kings will bring them and even bow down to them.

And while the language, at first, works with national redemption, several phrases point us to something more than what is going to occur in the return from Persia. Kings have not bowed down to Zion. Israel gained a brief moment of sovereignty under the Maccabees in the first century BC, but in reality they were continuously dominated by a succession of stronger empires, Persian; Greek; and Roman, under which they were allowed to exist as a vassal state. Jews of the first century AD, during the time of Jesus, did not believe the exile had ended. They had the land. They had the Temple. They did not have independent, national sovereignty under the promised Messiah, the Son of David. So what do we make of this imagery? Three images in this text take on the meaning of a spiritual redemption, especially when we consider them from our vantage point, in the light of the ministry of Jesus Christ, who came first as the divine human Servant, and will come later as the divine human King.

The first image that stands out is that image of the bowing kings and princes. So that doesn't seem to have happened for Zion. How can that be said to be fulfilled? But this image is played out whenever men and women of power bow the knee to Jesus Christ as their Heavenly King and seek to aid in bringing His people home to spiritual Zion. And this has played out. Kings and princes have been among those who bowed the knee to Jesus. This is an aspect of His already established Kingdom. It's not established on Earth: Jesus reigns from Heaven. But it is a real reign. Every heart who bows before Him acknowledges His Kingdom authority. I believe this image will be further affirmed when Jesus comes physically to establish His Kingdom on Earth, and in New Heaven and New Earth kings and princes will also bow down in a very literal, earthly way at that time.

Second, the image of the mighty man used here is an image Jesus applied to Himself. Isaiah says, “Can the prey be taken from the mighty man, or the captives of a tyrant be rescued?” In the physical sense, we understand this image is a reference to human tyrants like Babylon, that hold captive the people Israel in their exile. But Jesus applies the same language to spiritual liberation from the Kingdom of darkness in Matthew 12:28-29.

But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can anyone enter the strong man’s house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong *man*? And then he will plunder his house.

Third, Isaiah repeats his image of a raised standard in verse 22, and that’s an image that has already taken on Messianic significance in the book of Isaiah.

<sup>22</sup> Thus says the Lord GOD,  And they will bring your sons in their bosom,  	“Behold, I will lift up My hand to the nations And set up My standard to the peoples; And your daughters will be carried on their shoulders. 
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If you can remember back all the way to the prologue of Isaiah, in chapter 5, the idea of a standard was first used there to communicate God’s judgment on Israel by a foreign army that would flock to God’s banner. It also had this language of a raised hand. God would raise His hand and He would raise His standard. He would whistle and Assyria would come, and execute judgment on Israel and on Judah. In chapter 11 that same image was used to refer to peoples rallying under a new standard, the Son of Jesse. The Messiah is a standard. In Isaiah the idea of a standard is going to work together with the idea of a sign, and we’re going to see in the last paragraphs a sign set for all peoples, for all nations to see. These three images of kings and princes bowing; of rescue from a mighty man; of a standard set up for all people to see, these images take us beyond the conquering of Israel’s physical enemies. This is beyond national redemption. To include a conquering of Israel’s we are being pointed ahead to spiritual redemption.

*The Lord Redeems His Own (1-3)*

The Lord does not forget His children. The Lord conquers the enemies of His people. And the Lord redeems His own. That’s the promise in our last three verses moving into a new chapter, chapter 50:1-3.

<sup>1</sup> Thus says the LORD, “Where is the certificate of divorce Or to whom of My creditors did I sell you? Behold, you were sold for your iniquities,  <sup>2</sup> “Why was there no man when I came? Is My hand so short that it cannot ransom? Behold, I dry up the sea with My rebuke, Their fish stink for lack of water  <sup>3</sup> “I clothe the heavens with blackness	By which I have sent your mother away? And for your transgressions your mother was sent away. When I called, why was there none to answer? Or have I no power to deliver? I make the rivers a wilderness; And die of thirst. And make sackcloth their covering.”
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The imagery here is harsh, just as the military imagery in the last section was harsh. We moved from the image of God’s enemies eating their own flesh to the image of God sending Israel away with a divorce certificate, or selling Israel as a slave into bondage. This harshness highlights two realities. Human wickedness deserves a strong response. God’s justice will deliver a strong response. The imagery of divorce matches the bride and the mother imagery of Zion at the beginning of this section. Israel, God’s bride, has been sent away. She is sent away for her transgressions. And through the book of Isaiah, those transgressions have been revealed as numerous, very serious, and persistent throughout generations.

We began in chapter 1 with an image of a beaten and bandaged Judah, spiritually numb to the discipline of God. They were a people of bloody hands, oppressing the most vulnerable in society:



widows and orphans. They are also described as one day being ashamed of the oaks they desired and the gardens they had chosen. That's a reference to spiritual adultery: sticking up foreign gods in sacred groves. The image of divorce here assumes the reality of spiritual adultery. Israel went her own way and sought out other husbands, other gods. And she did this persistently, this is not a one-time thing. And so God has released her, sent her away to her adulteries. Yet, in spite of Israel's ongoing sin and transgression, God has promised through the Song of the Servant to restore her. God is seeking to restore this wicked, wayward, rebellious Israel. Exile is not proof that God cannot protect Israel. Israel may lament that she has been forsaken and forgotten, but that perspective shows a lack of spiritual awareness. She was forsaken, but only momentarily and because of her own gross sin. God proclaims here that He never forgot her. He is telling Israel this in advance, so they'll know they're not forgotten. "I will restore you. I will make you a fruitful bride."

The problem has nothing to do with whether or not God is able to restore Israel, but whether or not Zion owns up and acknowledges that what happened to her was right and believes God's promise to restore. The language of this text implies indignation regarding Zion's faithless lament. God has just declared, "I am restoring you," and Zion has said, "I am forgotten. I am forsaken." Here, God is saying, "Do you think I cannot save? As I have just declared, I would. Is My hand so short that it cannot ransom? Or have I no power to deliver? Behold, I dry up the sea with My rebuke, I make the rivers a wilderness; their fish stink for lack of water and die of thirst. I clothe the heavens with blackness and make sackcloth their covering."

Those are an allusion to the plagues in Egypt. If God wants to strike a nation and save His people, God can strike a nation and save His people. Israel is not in exile because God has forgotten or forsaken them, and they're not in exile because Babylon is stronger. God can restore Israel from the exile of her own making. Yes, he can bring them back from Babylon. But can God redeem Israel from the sin of her own heart? Yes, He can do that, too. How? Through a select arrow that He has kept hidden in His quiver. Through a Servant that Israel is going to reject. God will keep His promises to Zion, but He will not limit His promises to Zion. He gives His Servant a double task, saying, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

How will the Servant accomplish these two tasks, to restore Israel and extend God's salvation to the ends of the Earth? More will be revealed in the third Servant Song coming up in our next lesson.