

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

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## 49:1 - The Setting of Isaiah

- **Prophet to Judah**  
Isaiah was a prophet to Judah, the southern Kingdom, during the time of the divided kingdom. He lived during the reign of four kings: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (*ca.* 739-686 B.C., [Isa. 1:1](#)).
- **Captivity of Northern Kingdom**  
Assyria captured Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom during Isaiah's ministry (722 B.C.).
- **Commercial and Military Strength, but Moral Decline**  
Isaiah ministered during a time much like ours, when Judah was still commercially and militarily strong, but the society was in a state of moral decline.

## 49:1 - The Servant

- **The LORD'S Servant**  
A major theme of Isaiah concerns the *LORD'S servant* through whom God reveals Himself and gains glory. Identification of the servant is complicated by the fact that Isaiah applies the term *servant* to a variety of persons:
  1. Isaiah ([Isa. 20:3](#)),
  2. Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah ([Isa. 22:20](#)),
  3. David ([Isa. 37:35](#)),
  4. Jacob who is Israel ([Isa. 41:8-9](#); [19-24](#); [43:10](#); [44:1-2](#), [21](#), [26](#); [45:4](#); [48:20](#); [49:3?](#))
  5. a mysterious man ([Isa. 42:1-7](#); [49:3-7](#); [50:4-10](#); [52:13-53:11](#)).
- **Who is Isaiah's Mystery Man?**  
In the majority of places, the servant is identified as the nation of Israel. But what about the passages where this identity is not explicit? Some believe that these passages speak strictly of Isaiah himself or the Jewish nation, or perhaps the believing Jewish faithful among Israel.
- **Keys to the Puzzle**  
Among the characteristics which establish the identity of this individual, two keys rule out these common identifications:
  1. He will restore the "preserved ones of Israel" ([Isa. 49:6](#)),
  2. God gives Him as a *covenant* to the people. ([Isa. 42:6](#); [49:8](#)).Both of these factors rule out His identification as (1) Isaiah, (2) the nation of Israel, (3) the faithful remnant within Israel.

## 49:1 - Listen, O Coastlands

- **"Coastlands... peoples from afar"**

The term for "Coastlands" refers to islands and shorelines. We find it in passages describing the Phoenicians, the inhabitants of Tarshish, the distant coasts of the Mediterranean Sea. Here it has a global scope -- the abode of the most distant peoples. Those who are to listen are the same ones who, in a related passage, Isaiah says are to wait for His law ([Isa. 42:4](#)).

- **Hear O Gentiles**

Our passage begins almost like the famous *Shema Israel* : "Hear, O Israel..." ([Deu. 6:4](#)). The Servant's message here is almost a *Shema Goyim*, "Hear O Gentile Nations!"

- **Israel vs. the Nations**

Notice a distinction which will be evident throughout the passage: the distinction between *Israel* and *the nations*. Although most of what is said applies to *all nations*, (including Israel), different aspects of the message are emphasized with regard to each of these two groups.

## 49:1 - The Matrix of My Mother

- **"called from... the womb"**

The Servant is called from the womb. This speaks of His special destiny, known by God prior to His birth. His purpose and service of God was ordained before birth, like that of Jeremiah ([Jer. 1:5](#)) and the apostle Paul, whom God separated from his mother's womb far in advance of his conversion ([Gal. 1:15](#)).

- **"from the Matrix of My mother"**

"Matrix" can be translated: *inward parts*. While the Servant was literally within His mother, God *made mention of* (hiphil stem: "declared") His name. Here we begin to see problems with interpreting the Servant as the nation Israel or the prophet Isaiah. Although God formed and sustained Israel "from the womb" of Egypt ([Isa. 44:2](#), [21-24](#); [46:3](#); [Hos. 11:5](#)), the man Jacob was named prior to the incubation of the nation in Egypt. Nor is there any indication that Isaiah was named by God while in his mother's womb. Matthew records the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy regarding the Servant ([Mtt. 1:18-25](#)).

- **Born of a Woman**

Unlike the nation Israel which was formed and called out of Egypt, the *humanity* of the Servant is emphasized. This emphasis on the human birth of the Servant reflects the promise made to Eve to bring forth a Redeemer from her seed Who would crush Satan ([Gen. 3:15](#)). The great crucifixion Psalm, which the Servant quoted while on the cross, also emphasizes His humanity ([Ps. 22:6-10](#))

## 49:2 - Mouth Like a Sword

- **"mouth like a sharp sword"**

This speaks of the effectiveness of the Servant's judgments which rely exclusively upon God's Word. He wields "the sword of the Spirit" ([Eph. 6:17](#)) which 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 " ([Heb. 4:12](#)). In this, the Servant is the ultimate embodiment of the purpose of the nation Israel which is to speak forth God's truth ([Isa. 51:16](#); [Rom. 3:1-2](#); [9:4](#)). The Servant is the One Whom God predicted through Moses ([Deu. 18:17-19](#)). Isaiah also made mention of this attribute of the Servant ([Isa. 11:1-4](#)). The power of the Servant's mouth was revealed to John who saw Him in a vision of His glory, "out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword" ([Rev. 1:16](#)). We know from the New Testament that it is by God's spoken word that the Antichrist and the ungodly nations will be judged and overthrown at the Servant's Second Coming ([2Th. 2:8](#); [Rev. 19:15](#)).

## 49:2 - He Has Hidden me

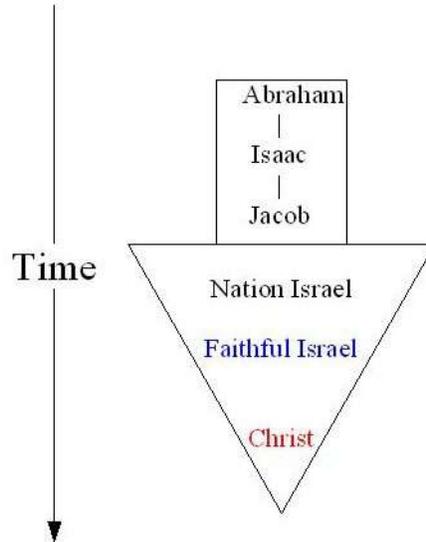
- **"in the shadow of His hand He has hidden Me"**  
"He has hidden" is the word *chaba* which emphasizes protection, used of relief from the heat of the day under the shadow of a roof. It is in the hiphil stem which emphasizes the LORD'S active involvement as protector. "In His quiver He has hidden me." Here, the word for hidden is *satar*, emphasizing concealment, but also protection and safety. **The Servant is concealed!** This is seen by the progressive nature of revelation within Scripture. Mysterious passages give only tantalizing hints of the nature of God's unique Son (e.g., [Ps. 2:7-12](#); [Pr. 30:4](#)). Other mysterious passages speak of the "Angel of the LORD" who appears at key junctures in Israel's history, but never reveals His name ([Gen. 32:29](#); [Ex. 23:21](#); [Jdg. 13:6,18](#) cf. [Rev 2:17](#); [3:12](#); [19:12](#)).
- **"a polished shaft"**  
"Shaft" is the word *chets* meaning "arrow." "Polished" is from root meaning *sharpened*. The Servant is compared to a *select arrow* (NASB), one that has been polished so as to be extremely *sharp* (HCSB, NET). Among the various arrows that God has within his quiver, this arrow is His most effective weapon, reserved for a very special purpose and guaranteed to overcome His foes.

## 49:3 - My servant, O Israel

- **"O Israel"**  
Since the term *servant* is applied to a variety of persons within Isaiah:
  1. Isaiah ([Isa. 20:3](#)),
  2. Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah ([Isa. 22:20](#)),
  3. David ([Isa. 37:35](#)),
  4. Jacob who is Israel ([Isa. 41:8-9](#); [19-24](#); [43:10](#); [44:1-2](#), [21](#), [26](#); [45:4](#); [48:20](#); [49:3?](#))
  5. a mysterious man ([Isa. 42:1-7](#); [49:3-7](#); [50:4-10](#); [52:13-53:11](#)),how are we to understand the use of the term "Israel" here?

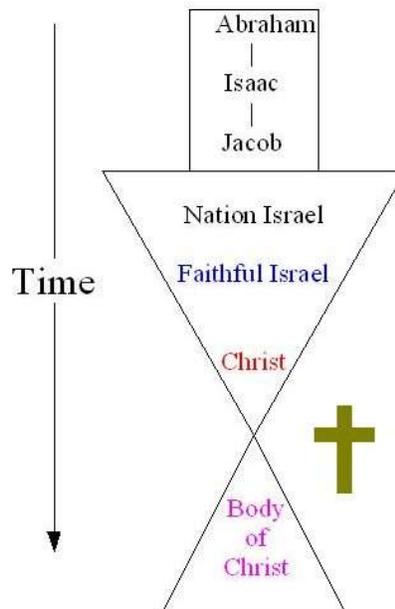
## 49:3 - The King of Israel

- The king of a nation is sometimes called by the name of the nation itself.
- In His person and work He epitomizes the calling of the nation (Ex. 19:6 cf. 1Pe. 2:9).



## 49:3 - The Ministry of His Body Beyond the Cross

- Many things which are said concerning the Servant also apply to His Body which ministers in His absence.



## 49:4 - Labored in Vain

- **"Then I said... "**  
In view of the subsequent "yet surely," the waw-consecutive "then" is best translated as *but* (NASB, HCSB, ESV, NET). There is an intentional contrast between the calling of the Servant and *the apparent failure of His work*.
- **"I said"**  
Literally: "But I, *even I*, said..." Even the speaker Himself wondered. Here we see a great mystery--the tension between the deity and humanity of the Servant ([Mtt. 26:38](#)).
- **"I have labored in vain... spent my strength for nothing"**  
His toil was intended to produce fruit, but resulted in apparent emptiness and vanity (*riq*) He appeared to have spent His strength "for nothing " (*tohu* - which described the state of the earth prior to God's creative act, [Gen. 1:2](#)). This is often the pattern of God Who is shown to be strong through *perceived* weakness.

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