

Commentary on Isaiah 49:1-6
By L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Series*) for **Sunday, January 23 , 2011**, is from **Isaiah 49:1-6**. Five **Questions for Discussion** follow the *Bible Lesson Commentary* below. The **[International Bible Lessons](http://internationalbiblelessons.org)** can be read at: <http://internationalbiblelessons.org>. The lesson is also published each Saturday morning in [The Oklahoman](#).

Isaiah 49:1-6

1 Listen to me, O coastlands, pay attention, you peoples from far away! The LORD called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me.

Through Isaiah, God speaks to the Gentiles (non-Jews), for the God is the LORD over all the earth, all nations, and all peoples. This well known fact was surprising to some at the time of Isaiah. The Bible applies this verse to Jesus the Messiah. The angel told Joseph to name God's Son, Jesus. God had a plan to send Jesus into the world to redeem all who would trust in Him before Jesus was born of Mary. God revealed this plan to Isaiah and others in the Old Testament, though the prophets might not have understood this completely at the time. God had this

plan for Jesus before Abraham was born, and God has a purpose for all of His people before they are born.

2 He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away.

During Jesus' ministry, He spoke the truth, led some to faith in Him as Messiah and Savior, defeated Satan with the truths from His mouth, and called His disciples to follow Him and begin His church on Earth. His words are sharper than a two-edged sword. The warfare of Jesus in His first coming was spiritual warfare, though He did heal the sick and raise the dead. His heavenly Father protected Him from death until the time came for Jesus to die on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins.

3 And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified."

God called Israel to be a nation of priests to all the nations—to lead the Gentile nations to trust in and come to know the true God and be saved. Instead, Israel turned away from God to worship the false gods of the Gentile nations and failed in their assigned mission. When Jesus was born a Jew in the line of David, He came as God's Servant, Israel, to do what Israel as a nation had failed to do. He preached the true God to the Gentiles, and many came (and have

come) to believe in Him as Son of God and Savior. Jesus glorified His heavenly Father (read John's Gospel): "Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him'" (John 13:31).

4 But I said, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the LORD, and my reward with my God."

First spoken and felt, these words could well describe Isaiah's feelings, who perhaps felt he had labored in vain when neither the Northern Kingdom nor the Southern Kingdom listened to his preaching and repented. His reward was from God. Second, these words may describe the outward appearance of Jesus' earthly ministry in His first coming, which might have appeared as a failure to many; certainly to Saul before he was converted and changed his name to Paul. Remember, however, Jesus won a Samaritan woman, a Roman centurion, twelve disciples and other companions to saving faith in Him before His crucifixion and resurrection from the dead. Though rejected by many during His lifetime, His Father rewarded Him by His resurrection and His subsequent leading of many to glory. If our cause is with the Lord, no matter outward appearances on Earth, God will reward our service.

5 And now the LORD says, who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honored in the sight of the LORD, and my God has become my strength —

Just as God forms all of us in the womb, His Father formed Jesus in the womb for the express purpose of leading the Israelites and the Jews back to God. When God the Father raised Jesus from the dead and His followers preached the Good News of Jesus' life and ministry, death and resurrection, many Jews came to faith in Him; including some who had once persecuted Jesus and His disciples.

6 he says, “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

Isaiah keeps the focus on all Israel, the 12 tribes of Jacob, as well as the survivors of the destruction of the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and the destruction of the Southern Kingdom (Judah). Those from all 12 tribes would be restored in the Kingdom of God preached by Jesus. In addition, some from all the nations of the earth would come to believe in the true God. We recognize that Jesus came “as a light to all nations,” not only to the Jews. Today, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is still preached around the world, and

we look forward to His coming again. God spoke through Isaiah that the preaching of His Son only to the Jews was too small of a task.

Five Questions for Discussion

1. Do you find Biblical prophecy difficult or easy to understand? Why is some prophecy only truly understood after the predicted event takes place? What does that tell us about the fulfillment of prophecies not yet fulfilled as far as we know?
2. Why do you think some of these verses describe parts of Isaiah's ministry and also parts of Jesus' ministry.
3. Which truths in general in these verses might apply to any sincere follower of Jesus Christ today? How might some of these truths encourage a believer if he thinks his work is not successful?
4. How might you explain the fact that God had a plan for Isaiah and Jesus before they were born and when He formed them in the womb; yet, it appeared to some that their ministry in the name of God was a failure during their lifetime?
5. Why does the Bible (and why do believers today) emphasize that Jesus the Messiah came to save people from every nation on Earth? Why is this important?

How might taking this truth seriously impact our relationships with people of other nationalities? Pray today for more people to come to know the Lord and for His protection of His people everywhere.

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