

Is 49:3, 5-6

Jerome Biblical Commentary

1-6. The second Servant Song, addressed to the Gentile nations, presents the Servant as another Jeremiah: he is called from his mother's womb (Jer 1:5); he has a vocation to the Gentiles (Jer 1:10; 25:15ff.); he brings a message of both doom and happiness (Jer 16:19-21), of both suffering and purification (11:18-12:6); he reacts at times with heavy discouragement (Jer 14:17; 20:7). **1. called from birth:** Here we see in action the doctrine of God, first and last (41:4); God sets his chosen ones on the way of their vocation even before their birth: John the Baptist (Lk 1:15), Jesus (Lk 1:31), and the apostle Paul (Gal 1:15). **2. he made of me:** Lit., "he made my mouth" sharp in uttering the Word of God (Eph 6:17; Heb 4:12, Ap 1:16). It is not clear, however, why God concealed the Servant—to protect him or to let him feel the depressive insignificance of Judah (51:16; 59:21). **3.** The explicit mention of "*Israel*" creates a difficulty for those who interpret the Servant as an individual, for here he is referred to as the collective group of Israel. Even for the collective interpretation, however, the presence of the word "Israel" is embarrassing, for how can the Servant Israel have a mission to Israel (v. 5)?, There are also problems of Hebr grammar. North concludes that it is retained only with "justifiable hesitation" (*The Suffering Servant*, 119). The solution, perhaps, is in the mysterious fact that the Servant is the gathering of all Israelites, but especially of the saintly members of the people; such a person certainly has a mission to each sinful member of Israel (cf. Rignell, *op. cit.*, 161). **4.** This verse opens in strong contrast with the preceding one: "he [Yahweh] said to me" (3); "and I myself said [to him]" (4). The Servant honestly expresses his dejection over what seems to him a wasted ministry, "for nothing" (tōhû; cf. Gn 1:2; Jer 4:23; Is 41:29). The Servant learns to seek his only "reward" (mišpā; cf. 40:14) "with Yahweh," not that he loses all apostolic zeal but rather that he will trust God to reveal the fruit of it in his own time. This lesson is necessary, lest the Servant gauge the effectiveness of his work by human appearance (cf. 1 Cor 4:1-5) or seek the glory for himself (Phil 2:8-11; Jn 17:5). The question of 40:27 is now answered. **5.** The Hebr text is damaged and its thought confusing. The verse is sometimes split apart and placed elsewhere or even deleted entirely. **6.** God encourages the Servant by extending his mission "to the ends of the earth" (Gn 12:3; Lk 2:32; Acts 13:47; on the composition of 49:1-6, see C. H. Giblyn, *CBQ* 21 [1959] 207-12).

Haydock's Catholic Commentary

Ver. 1. Give. This fresh discourse continues to chap. lvi. 9., relating to the Messiah, who is introduced speaking to all the world, Acts xiii. 47., and 2 Corinthians vi. 2. Some apply a part to Cyrus, Isaias, or John the Baptist, as to his figures. (Calmet) --- The prophet

Hebr Hebrew

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has foretold the conversion of the Gentiles, as he now does, like an evangelist. (St. Jerome) --- Many Jews will embrace the gospel at the end of time. (Worthington)

Ver. 2. *Sword*, penetrating the very soul, (Hebrews iv. 12.) and slaying the wicked, Apocalypse i. 16., and 2 Thessalonians ii. 8. Without Christ, his ministers can apply this sword to little purpose. Cyrus cut asunder the bonds of the captives by his decree. (Calmet) --- Grotius improperly explains all of Isaias. (Houbigant)

Ver. 3. *Glory*. In the Church, God is adored in spirit and truth. Isaias is ordered thus to address the Israelites.

Ver. 4. *God*. He will reward the labours of his ministers, though the people be obstinate. The prophets and our Saviour frequently complain, chap. lxxv. 2., and Mark ix. 18.

Ver. 5. *Will not*. Hebrew, Septuagint, &c., "to be gathered." (Haydock) --- The original text, independent of the Masorets, may have the sense of the Vulgate. Yet there are other proofs of the synagogue's rejection. (Calmet) --- Protestants, "though Israel be not gathered, yet," &c. Marginal note, or "that Israel may be gathered, and I may," &c. (Haydock)

Ver. 6. *Earth*. St. Paul, explains this of Christ, (Acts xiii.) who said, *Go teach all nations*, Matthew xxviii. Isaias was one of his first preachers.

Word Biblical Commentary (Non-Catholic)

1–4 The *coastlands* and *distant peoples* are in Palestine. They are competitors with Jews for rights in the land and favors from the Persians. Israel based her claim on Yahweh's call and her heritage from Jacob, Joshua and David. Now she feels that her position has been eroded. Yahweh has protected her in exile but has shown no signs of allowing her to reconquer Palestine as Moses, Joshua, and David did. She still yearns for that role. This speech shows no recognition that it has now been assigned to Cyrus. (See the passages about Israel's new role in chaps. 40–48.) Instead she feels neglect and lack of support which seems to make further labor useless. V 4b is not a statement of trust, but a self-serving sigh of pseudo-piety (note the reference to *reward* from 40:10b).

5–6 A second speaker makes a parallel claim to having been called by Yahweh to be his servant. The assigned role to *restore Jacob* echoes that given to Cyrus in 45:4a and 13b. Then the assignment is expanded to include being a *light to the nations*. In context this refers to the other nations of Palestine. Chaos and disorder had reigned there for most of that century. Persia had not established firm control under Cyrus. Cambyses had taken some steps in that direction in order to make Palestine a support area for his conquest of Egypt. But with his death this progress was threatened. Darius is here promised a role as a beacon light to the nations whose fate is now bound up so closely

with the Persian Empire. *Salvation* is to be defined in such political and economic terms. Stable rule would in fact restore their economies and social orders. Westermann cites parallels in Psalms to show the theological relation of light to salvation.