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He Made My Mouth like a Sharpened Sword

49: 1-13

He made my mouth like a sharpened sword DIG: How is the Servant's mouth like a sharpened sword? How does that contrast with the Servant's type of speech in 42:2? Why does God the Father say Isra'el here, when He is referring to the Messiah? How do we know that He is really talking about the Messiah here and not the nation of Isra'el (49:5)? How was the Servant received by the nation of Isra'el in 49:4 and 7? How does this reflect the experience of Isaiah (30:9-11)? In His discouragement, what promises does the Servant receive from God? How is this related to the prophecy of 11:10? What does this imply about the identity of the Servant? What will happen for the exiles in the day of salvation? How will the nations learn of the LORD's covenant promises (45:1, 22-24)? How does Isra'el reflect the mission of the Servant (42:6)?

REFLECT: Does it help you or stumble you to see the humanness of Christ? Was Yeshua fifty percent man and fifty percent God, or one hundred percent man and one hundred percent God? What difference does that make? What examples can you think of in Jesus' life when His speech was gentle (42:2)? When was it cutting like a sword? Why the difference? When is it best to speak gently with people? To be strong and cutting? When was the last time the LORD displayed His splendor through you? Emotionally and spiritually, what does it mean to be a forsaken captive? What can cause you to feel that way? Right now, do you feel more like that or like a person coming home to a long-awaited reunion? Why?

If **the Servant of Isaiah** is the **God** of history and can control human events, why are **His** desires frustrated by **Jacob, His people**? Put another way, could **the LORD** have forced **Jacob** to do **His** will? Yes, **He** could have. But the reason **He** did not force **them** and is frustrated by **their**, and the world's, lack of faith in **Him** is that **He** gave us free will. We would not be who we are if we did not have free will. If we are truly human, we must have the ability to choose, and do things, which are even contrary to **Ha'Shem's** desire. Apparently **God** felt that, for reasons which were evident to **Him**, but which we can only partly understand, it was better to make human beings than androids. And evil was a necessary addition of **ADONAI's** good plan to make us fully human.¹⁸⁵ Far too many times,

people blame **Him** for their misery instead of recognizing it is the Adversary and their own sin nature that is the root of their problems. How could a loving **God** . . . you fill in the blank.

Therefore, the fact that **the Jews** chose to reject **Yeshua** does not mean that **Messiah** failed in **His** ministry. It is specifically *because He* is the **God** of history and can control human events that **all Isra'el will be saved (Rom 11:16)**. At the very end of the Great Tribulation, **all** the believing **remnant** living at that time in Bozrah **will be saved (Zech 12:10-14 to 13:1 and 9)**. But before that time, two-thirds of **the Jews** will reject **Him and perish (Zech 13:8)**. That is not what **He** would want, but because **He** gave us free will, **He** will allow men and women to make that choice. Some would view that as failure. But in the end, **ADONAI** will have **His** way.

This is the second of **Isaiah's** four **Servant** Songs (also see **42:1-17**, **50:4-9**, and **52:13 to 53:12**). **The sages teach that this is Isaiah speaking (representing the ideal Isra'el)**. **The Servant** is speaking in these verses. First, **He** calls out to **the Gentile nations** to listen to **Him**, saying: **Listen to Me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations. Before I was born the LORD called Me (49:1a)**. The words **hear this** should take us back to **48:16** where the transition from **Cyrus** to **the Messiah** took place. Now that same **Person** speaking in **48:16** is **the One** speaking in **Chapter 49** as **He** calls attention to the world to listen to **the Servant**. **He** says that before **He** was born **ADONAI** called **Him**. **He** was elected for the task to which **He** was given. The expression **before I was born** is one of election for a specific purpose. We find the same language in **Jeremiah 1:5**. And just as **God** separated **Jeremiah** from the womb to be a **prophet** of **Israel's** condemnation, **the prophet** to announce **the Babylonian** judgment, in the same way **the Servant** was elected to bring redemption to **them**.

Also, **from My birth He has made mention of My name (49:1b)**. We have already seen this to be true in **7:14** when we had the first prediction of the virgin birth of **King Messiah**. **The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel. Chapter 49:1** is a reiteration of the truth of **7:14**. The fulfillment will come in **Mathew 1:21** and **Luke 1:31**. Throughout messianic prophecy we often have mention of the mother. Here it is implied when **the Servant** says: **From My birth He has made mention of My name (49:1c)**.

But there is not a single messianic prophecy in the TaNaKh that mentions the father of **the Messiah** because of the virgin birth. **He** had no human father. We see this in the two genealogies in the gospels. **Matthew's** genealogy traces the birth of **Christ** from **Joseph's**

perspective. The purpose of **Matthew's** genealogy is to show that if **Jesus** really was **Joseph's** son, **He could not be King**. But **Luke's** genealogy tells us about the birth of **Christ** from **Mary's** perspective. **Luke** shows why **Yeshua could be King**. **Jesus** was from the House of David, but apart from Jeconiah (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ**, to see link click [Ai](#) - **The Genealogies of Joseph and Mary**).



Next, we have **the Servant's** position. First, **the Servant Himself** says: **He made My mouth like a sharpened sword (49:2a)**. This expression means that **He** will have the ability to pronounce judgment. **He** will be decisive and be able to get down to the very root of the problem and pronounce it. A good example of this is found in the gospels (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ Jd** - **Seven Woes on the Torah-Teachers and the Pharisees**). There, **Jesus** denounces **the Torah-Teachers** and **the Pharisees**, for specific sins, especially the sin of leading the nation astray. Paul would later take **Isaiah's sharpened sword** motif and use it when describing **the armor of God** in **Ephesians 6**. When Paul said: **the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17)**, he was not describing a Roman soldier, but was either directly quoting or paraphrasing the TaNaKh. **His** point is that we should resist the Adversary as **Messiah** did in the wilderness, with Scripture.

Secondly, **the Servant** states **His** position: **in the shadow of His hand He hid Me (49:2b)**. This implies protection. Not only will **the Messiah** be given the ability to be incisive and pronounce judgment at the root of the problem, but **He** will also have the special protection of **God the Father**.

Thirdly, **the Servant** will be like a **polished arrow, concealed in His quiver (49:2c)**. This implies that **He** will always be available to be immediately used for anything that **God the Father** might call **Him** to do. Hence, this is **Messiah's** relationship with **ADONAI**.

ADONAI says of **the Messiah**: **You are My Servant, Isra'el, in whom I will display My splendor (49:3)**. Why does **He** say **Isra'el** here, when **He** is referring to **the Messiah**? We know this because of the context. If a rabbi disputed that this is a messianic prophecy, he would argue that it doesn't say "**the Messiah**," it says "**Isra'el**." But **the Servant** is

distinguished from **Isra'el** in the very same context. Look at **49:5a: And now the LORD says - He who formed Me in the womb to be His Servant, to bring Jacob back to Him and bring Isra'el to Him.** And also look at **49:6a: It is too small a thing for You to be My Servant, to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Isra'el I have kept.** Context. Obviously **the Servant** in this message is not the nation of **Isra'el** but **the Messiah**, because this **Person** fulfills what **Isra'el** should have done and **He** will be used to restore **Isra'el**. And since **the Servant** is distinguished from **Isra'el** in **49:5** and **6**, then **49:3** is not dealing with the nation of **Isra'el**. Therefore, what *does* **God the Father** mean when **He** says **You are My Servant, Isra'el, in whom I will display My splendor (49:3)?**

There are two ways we can look at it. First, **the Servant** could be the ideal **Israelite**. **He** will accomplish, as an individual **Jew**, what all **Isra'el** failed to do. In that sense **He** would be the true **Isra'el**. In other words, **He** will accomplish the calling of **Isra'el**. Secondly, **Isra'el** means *a prince with God* and who could be more of *a prince with God* than **the Messiah**? So, in **49:3** we are dealing with the ideal **Israelite**, and **He** is the true representative of the name because **Messiah** will indeed be a *Prince with God*. And **ADONAI** will be glorified in this **Servant**. Now where do we have a reference to this very prophecy? In **John 17:1-5**, **God the Father** is glorified in **His Son**. And here is the basis in the TaNaKh for that statement.

Then we come to the point where the **Servant** actually voices **His** frustration. If the **Servant** described in this passage is more than human, **He** is not less than human. Frustration and a feeling of futility, all too familiar to everyone who inhabits flesh, are part of the burden **He** came to bear.¹⁸⁶ The **Servant** is to be **God's** special instrument, to accomplish what all **Israel** failed to do. Notice, however, *how* **He** voices **His** frustration. **He** says: **But I have labored to no purpose; I have spent My strength in vain and for nothing (49:4a).** The phrase **no purpose** means *emptiness*. The phrase **in vain** here means *vapor*. The word **nothing** is the same word used in **Genesis 1:2** meaning **formless**. In essence what **He** is saying here is, "My work will be like a vapor that will vanish into thin air." Now *when* do you suppose **He** felt this way? At what stage do you think **He** might have prayed this type of prayer? It was probably in **His** agony of Gethsemane (**Mt 26:36; Mk 14:32; Lk 22:39**).

The Servant saw little evidence of change in **the Jews**. No fruit was visible because only a handful of men and women believed in **Him**. **It seemed like the whole nation was rejecting Him and He would not accomplish what He set out to do (John 1:11).** In fact, today Muslims use this verse to supposedly prove that Muhammad is the one true prophet because they say that **Jesus** admits here that **He** had failed in **His** mission. Is that

true? No, this merely shows **Jesus'** human nature. In **His** First Coming, **He** came as **the Lamb of God** to be slain for the sins of the world (**John 1:29**). But in **His** Second Coming, **He** will come like **the Lion of the tribe of Judah** and rule the entire world from Jerusalem (**Revelation 5:5**).

But we can see **the Servant's** faith when **He** says **yet**. This is the participle that means *nevertheless, or but surely*. **Yet, what is due to Me is in the LORD's hand, and My reward is with My God (49:4b)**. Too often we miss the two-sidedness of what is being said here. On the one hand, we often believe that if we really trusted in **God**, we would never have feelings of futility. But trust ultimately has to do with the final outcome, and of this the **Servant** is fully confident.¹⁸⁷ It is **ADONAI** (not the world or even the **Servant**), who will make the final judgment concerning **His** ministry. In other words, **the LORD** knows the situation and would reward **Him** in due time. Consequently, while **49:1-4** seems to be a prayer of frustration and discouragement, they actually display great faith. We see **God's** answer in the next two verses.

Then **the LORD** answers **the Servant's** prayer. **He** reiterates **the Servant's** original commission. **He who formed Me in the womb** (once again a reference to the mother) **to be His Servant (49:5a)**. There is a two-fold path to **the Servant's** original calling. First, **to bring Jacob back to Him (49:5b)**. There is a sense of conversion or redemption here. One aspect of **the Servant's** ministry is to bring salvation to **Isra'el**. Second, **gather Isra'el to Himself (49:5c)**. This speaks to the restoration of **Isra'el**. **The Servant**, then, had a two-fold commission, the redemption and the restoration of **Isra'el**. And **He** states the reason: **For I am honored in the eyes of the LORD, and My God has been my strength (49:5d)**. Therefore, **the Messiah's** commission is to restore the tribes of **Jacob** and **Isra'el** to **ADONAI**.

But in addition to **His** original commission, **He** adds something else: **It is too small a thing for you to be My Servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Isra'el I have kept (49:6a)**. **The Father** says to **the Son**, "I know it seems like no one is following You. And although it seems like **Isra'el** will not be saved, nor restored, quite the contrary, the day is coming when **Isra'el** will be saved and restored, *but it is too simple a thing for Me to use You to save only Isra'el; I am going to use You in a greater way. You will not only bring salvation to the Jews, You will also bring salvation to the Gentiles.*" **He** states: **I will also make You a light for the Gentiles (49:6b)**. This is the background to the statement by **Jesus: I am the light of the world (John 8:12)**. Not merely the light of **Isra'el**, **I am the light** for **Jews** and **Gentiles** alike. So, **the Servant** receives an additional commission to **bring My salvation (My Yeshua) to the ends of the earth (49:6c)**.

This statement in **49:6** is also the background to **Romans 11**, which is an expansion of this one verse, that **God** has a plan for **Isra'el**. **She** rejects **the Messiah**, but **Isra'el's** rejection temporarily opens up the gate of salvation for **Gentiles**. Look at **Romans 11:1-10**, Paul tells us how the nation of **Isra'el** rejected **Messiah**, although **Jews** individually are accepting **Him**. But then in **Romans 11-12**, Paul describes the ingrafted branches of **the Gentiles**. **Again, I ask: Did they (Isra'el) stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!** What **Romans 11** is doing is expanding the theology of **Isaiah 49:6**. In summary, **the Messiah** comes with the purpose of restoring **Isra'el**, **she** rejects **Him**, and **the Servant** is frustrated, but **ADONAI** says do not worry, the rejection is temporary. It is through the rejection of **Isra'el** that you will be **a light to the Gentiles**, and once **the Gentiles** are saved, **all Isra'el will be saved (Romans 11:26)**.

This is what the LORD says - the Redeemer and Holy One of Isra'el (49:7a). This is a summary of the entire ministry of **Christ**, including both **His** First and Second Comings. Then we are told about **His** rejection. **He was despised by the Gentiles and abhorred by the nation of Isra'el (49:7b)**. **The Creator** of the world becomes the **Servant of rulers** of the world. **He** also had to **give to Cesar** the things that were **Cesar's** during **His** lifetime (**20:20-25**). There will be a time coming, however, when this **despised and abhorred** **Kosher King will rise up** and be exalted. **Kings will see Him and rise up** in due respect. **Princes will see and bow down, because He is the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Isra'el. He will be the One who has been chosen by God (49:7c)**.

Therefore, **49:7** is an answer to the **Servant's** frustration in **49:4**, where it seemed that **He** had been rejected. Here **God the Father** says that the temporary rejection by **the nation** will give way to exaltation. A similar statement is made twice in **Chapter 53**. First, **He** says: **See, My Servant will act wisely; He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted (53:13)**. Then, **He** declares: **So, will He sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of Him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand (53:15)**.

Walk Through the Bible teaches that there is a *big idea* for each book of the Bible. For the book of **Isaiah**, the *big idea* is **groan to glory**. The **groan** is the temporary **near historical** rejection of **ADONAI** and the **Babylonian** exile; but the **glory** is the permanent **far eschatological** acceptance of **Yeshua** as **the Messiah** and **His** reign in the Messianic Kingdom. Because they do not see **the Messiah** in any of these verses, **the sages teach**

that Isra'el is in view here. From her lowest depths of degradation Isra'el will rise to the loftiest heights of respect and honor.

This section ends with the restoration of **the Servant (49:8-13)**. Remember that **His** original commission was to restore the people of **Isra'el (49:5-6)**. Nevertheless, when **He** came then, **she** rejected **Him** and the restoration could not be completed at that time. But **God** said this was part of **His** program to bring salvation to **the Gentiles**. However, once **the LORD's** mission among **the Gentiles** is completed by **the Servant**, then the restoration of **Isra'el** will be accomplished.

Isaiah, speaking with the voice of **ADONAI**, declares that **the Servant's** task is to make it possible for **the believing remnant** around the world to return to **Him**. **In the time of My favor I will answer You, and in the day of salvation I will help You**. The phrase, **in the time of favor**, reflects the idea of **the Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:8-54)**, when **the captives were set free**, and inheritance were restored to the rightful tenants under **ADONAI's** ownership (also see **62:2**). The word **answer** here has the sense of responding with support, as the parallel word **help** demonstrates. **I will keep You and will make You to be a covenant for the people, to restore the Land and to reassign its desolate inheritances (49:8)**. When the time for **Isra'el's** restoration comes, **Messiah's** prayer for **her** restoration will be answered. Then **God the Father** says that **He** will make **the Servant to be a covenant for the people**. It is by means of **the New Covenant** that **Isra'el's** salvation comes, because **the New Covenant** is dealing with the national salvation of **Isra'el** (see the commentary on [Jeremiah Eo - The Days are Coming, declares the LORD, When I Will Make a New Covenant with the House Judah and the House of Isra'el](#)).

There will be a removal of all obstacles for the return of the believing remnant to **the Land**. **He** lists four things here. First, **He** proclaims that **the captives will be free. To say to the captives, "Come out," and to those in darkness, "Be free" (49:9)**. That this will be done through **the Servant** is clear from **61:1-4**, where the agent of **ADONAI**, not **ADONAI Himself**, takes action. That passage reminds us while physical imagery is being used in both **49:9** and **61:1-4**, it is imagery of being held captive to spiritual blindness, ruin, loss and bondage. **The Adversary has blinded the spiritual eyes of unbelievers (Second Corinthians 4:4)**. But **the Servant's** ministry will not be to merely set them free from bondage and sin, but to lead them all the way back to **God's** presence.

Secondly, as the exodus from **Egypt** led to a journey under **God's** care (see the commentary on [Exodus Cr - I Will Rain Down Manna from Heaven for You](#)), so in this journey of the

heart back to **ADONAI** there will be ample provision. **They will neither hunger nor thirst** because spiritual food and water will be provided to them (**49:10a**).

Thirdly, they will be protected from the elements because neither **the desert heat, nor the sun will beat upon them. He who has compassion on them will guide them and lead them beside springs of water (49:10b)**. The journey will be under divine protection. **The LORD** will take **the Israelites** to **His** heart and under **His** care. The language is a combination of **Psalm 23** and the **Exodus**. **God will guide** and protect **them**, as **the pillar of cloud and fire** did (see the commentary on **Exodus Cg - After Leaving Succoth they Camped at Etham**). **Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil (Psalm 23:1-4)**. **He** will also lead them to **springs of water**, as in the wilderness (see the commentary on **Exodus Cu - Strike the Rock and Water Will Come Out**).

Fourthly, **highways** will be provided by **God** to return to **the Land**. Nothing will be allowed to stand in the way of the worldwide assembly. **I will turn all My mountains into roads, and My highways will be raised up (49:11)**. The main thoroughfare back will be **the Highway of Holiness** (see **Gm - The Highway of Holiness Will Be There**), but there will be other **raised highways** as well. Evidently the purpose of these supporting **raised highways** will be to transport **Jews** to the main **Highway** on **their** way to Zion. Nothing can stop **them**.

See, they will come from afar - some from the north, some from the west, some from the region of Aswan (49:12). **God** will bring **the holy ones (Deut 33:2-3; Job 5:1; Psalms 16:3 and 34:9; Zech 14:5)** to **Himself**. This return and restoration is not merely one from **Babylon** by a handful of **Judean exiles**; this gathering will be worldwide. **Some will come from Aswan**, which is a town in southern **Egypt**. **Ezeki'el 29:10** uses the phrase **from Migdol to Aswan**, which probably indicated all **Egypt**, just as **from Dan to Beersheba** meant all of **Isra'el**.

From here to the end of the book, the sages substitute the nation of Isra'el for the Messiah in their teaching. They picture this section of the book as returning from the Babylonian captivity, not the final restoration of Isra'el. Therefore, the sages teach that God's acceptance of the prayers of the exiles, their redemption from the captivity, and their safe and pleasant return to the homeland is in view here.

God's purposes in the earth center on the nation of **Isra'el**. When **she** is back in **the Land**, both the **heavens** and the **earth** can **rejoice**. **ADONAI** will do it all, the only thing **they** will have to do is sing! **Shout for joy, O heavens; rejoice, O earth; burst into song, O**

mountains! For the LORD comforts His people and will have compassion on His afflicted ones (49:13). It is not surprising that the possibility of universal redemption should issue in a call to praise here. This is a pattern that we see in **Isaiah**. In each case we see the work of **God** in salvation from sin, which is the motivating factor for universal praise. And every time, nature, the nature that was initially called to hear **God's** case against **His** people (**1:2**), is for the salvation that will come to the human race (**Romans 8:19-22**). For its own redemption is intimately connected with ours. This idea of cosmic redemption occurs in **65:17**, where the conclusion of the book describes **new heavens and a new earth.**¹⁸⁸