

# ISAIAH 49:1-12

*THE SERVANT AS LIGHT AND COVENANT*





## ISAIAH 49:1-4

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.

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.

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

4 I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity;  
yet surely my cause is with the Lord,  
and my reward with my God."

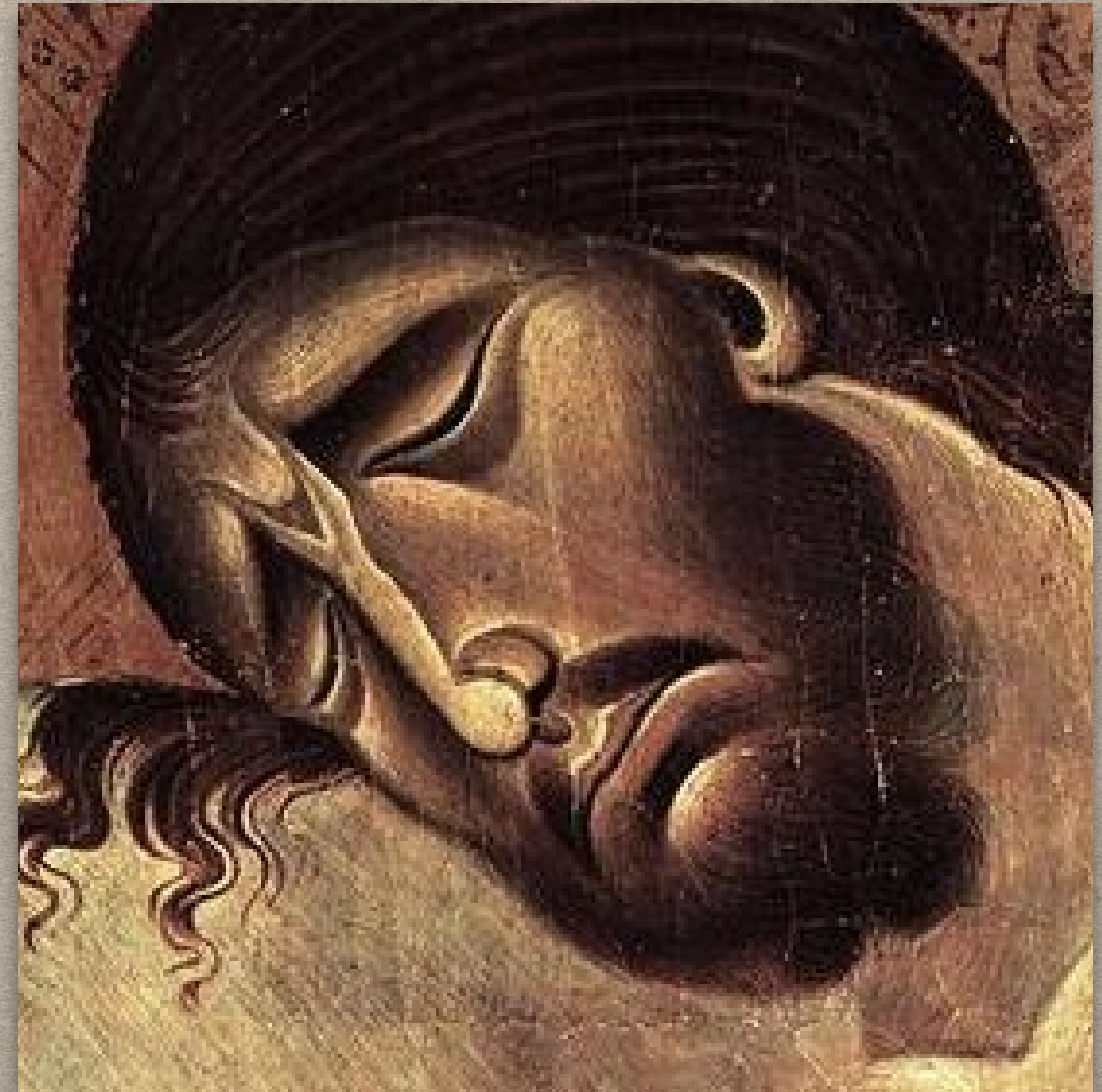


*"Listen...Pay Attention"*



# THE SERVANT OF THE LORD

- The author(s) of Isaiah
- The nation of Israel
- An unknown historical figure
- Identification misses the point



*"An enigma beyond resolution."*



“Likely the best counsel is that we give up the quest for identity of the historical servant and pay attention to the imagery and force of the poetry as such; that is, to move from historical to literary-rhetorical considerations. From such a perspective, it is enough to see that Yahweh has designated some human agent to be about the work of healing and emancipation in the world with particular reference to Israel. Such an approach permits us to attend to the text and to forgo questions of historical identity that in any case did not seem to interest the poet.”

*-Walter Brueggemann*

“A sharp distinction between individual and community is alien to second Isaiah’s thought. The evidence when taken as a whole suggest that the servant of Yahweh is a metaphor richly multivalent in meanings...(he) is both faithful individual and obedient community in the era in which God’s plan begins to unfold among those identifying completely with God’s will.”

*-Paul Hanson*



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—  
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."  
7 Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel  
and his Holy One, to one deeply despised,  
abhorred by the nations,  
the slave of rulers,  
"Kings shall see and stand up,  
princes, and they shall prostrate themselves,  
because of the Lord, who is faithful,  
the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."  
Zion's Children to Be Brought Home*

## ISAIAH 49:5-7



*"It is too light a thing..."*



...it is safe to say that contemporary communities of faith in North America have no excuse to retreat into narrow self-preoccupation when they compare their own prosperity and international influence with world hunger and ecological crisis. They need to re-capture the vision of the Creator-Redeemer whose purpose embraces the vastness of the universe and then translate that vision into bold new initiatives that challenge all areas of human knowledge. A narrower focus would be "too light a thing" to be worthy of a servant endowed with such resources and opportunities.

*-Paul Hanson*

*How you would finish this sentence:*

*"It is too light a thing to \_\_\_\_\_"?*





# ***"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."*

- Not a threat to "do more", but a signal to "see more", to listen more deeply
- Not saying "not good enough, get it right this time", but trusting God who says "I will give you."
- Not a diminishment of a thing, but a placement in a larger frame
- Not about devaluing the past or mourning past mistakes, but entering God's promised future
- Not "wrong", but incomplete





*“Light is the antitheses of darkness, disorder and chaos; and salvation is the counter to oppression, exploitation and despair. Full life and wellbeing are in the offing. Israel’s salvation is not intended for its own sake, but for the sake of others.”*



8 Thus says the Lord:

*In a time of favor I have answered you,  
on a day of salvation I have helped you;  
I have kept you and given you  
as a covenant to the people,  
to establish the land,  
to apportion the desolate heritages;  
9 saying to the prisoners, "Come out,"  
to those who are in darkness, "Show yourselves."  
They shall feed along the ways,  
on all the bare heights shall be their pasture;  
10 they shall not hunger or thirst,  
neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them down,  
for he who has pity on them will lead them,  
and by springs of water will guide them.  
11 And I will turn all my mountains into a road,  
and my highways shall be raised up.  
12 Lo, these shall come from far away,  
and lo, these from the north and from the west,  
and these from the land of Syene.*

