

Worship Material
Revealing the hidden
Material from Roots Bible Study
Sunday 18th January

Begin with an opening prayer

God, reveal to us today more of who you are.

Help us to see with fresh eyes
your plan for our lives, and for all of creation.

Amen.

Read Isaiah 49:1-7

Bible notes

Isaiah 49:1-7

The second of what are commonly known as four ‘servant songs’ makes explicit the call of God’s servant – here clearly identified as Israel (v.3) though also identified as a figure separate from Israel who calls Israel back to the obedience God expects (v.6). It is likely that this second figure is the prophet himself. It is his role as servant to call Israel – Jacob back to Yahweh (v.5), a task he feels that thus far he has failed in (v.4). Like many ministers, he surveys how little he feels he has achieved with this congregation. However, he affirms that God is strengthening him to achieve this task (v.5b) – so much so that he is given a second task, to be a light to the nations (v.6).

The servant must fulfil his first calling – to restore Israel – so that the second task can be fulfilled (v.6). The people of God are to be a lighthouse showing the world the light of God in such a way that rulers who have oppressed Israel in the past will come to learn God’s ways from her (v.7).

Israel is still not sure, however. It is her voice we hear in verse 4 (along with the voice of the prophet), complaining that she has laboured in vain, has no strength, and all her efforts will come to nothing. However, she is no longer saying what she said in 40:27, for now she knows God is with her and her confidence is flickering back to life.

Commentators point out that this complex poem, where several voices are being heard at once, is a hinge point in this longer section of Isaiah. From 40-48 the focus has been on restoring Israel/Jacob. From this point on the focus is on

Jerusalem/Zion (the original recipient of the call in 40:9-10) and on her renewed call to be the servant who shines to the ends of the earth.

The key here is bringing God's people back to God so that the kings who have oppressed her hitherto will stand and see her glory and come to the city set on a hill (Isaiah 2, 60).

Prayer

God of revelation and risk,
with Christians of all ages in all places
we celebrate that you are our strength and joy.
In searching, we find and are found;
from exile, we are guided to a place we can truly call home;
from darkness, you can shine light and unveil a new dawn;
and, in following you, our faith flourishes
and our lives reflect your love.

Amen.

A prayer to conclude

As we go out into the world,
may we see more of who God is.
May we be ready to listen to the words of Jesus.
May we have the courage to say to others, 'Come and see'.
Amen.