

YOU ARE NOT FORSAKEN

49 Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations: Jehovah called me before I was born; while I was still in my mother's womb, he made mention of my name. ²He has made my mouth like a sharp sword—he has hidden me in the hallow of his hand; he has made me like a polished arrow—he has concealed me in his quiver. ³He said to me, You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified. ⁴But I said, I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and to no purpose. But surely the justice I deserve is with Jehovah, and my reward is with my God. ⁵And now this is what Jehovah says—he who formed me in the womb to be his servant, [he who appointed me] to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel unto him, for I am honorable in the eyes of Jehovah and my God has been my strength—⁶indeed, he says, It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and to bring back those of Israel whom I have preserved. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, so that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.

⁷This is what Jehovah, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, says to the one whom men despised, to the one whom the nation abhorred, to the one who was a servant of rulers: Kings will see you and stand up; princes [will see you] and bow down, because of Jehovah, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you. ⁸This is what Jehovah says, In my [appointed] time I will answer you, and in the day of salvation I will help you. I will preserve you and make you to be the covenant [representative] for the people, to restore the land and to cause them to inherit their heritage that has lain desolate, ⁹to say to those who are captives, Come out! and to those in darkness, Come to the light! They will feed beside the roadways and will find pasture on every barren hill. ¹⁰They will neither hunger nor thirst; neither the desert mirage nor the sun will blind them; for he who has mercy upon them will guide them and will lead them to springs of water. ¹¹I will turn all my mountains into a roadway and my highways will be highly elevated. ¹²See! They will come from distant places—some from the north, some from the west, some from the land of Sinim.

¹³Shout for joy, O heavens; rejoice, O earth; burst into song, O mountains; for Jehovah has comforted his people and will have compassion upon his afflicted [children]. ¹⁴But Zion said, Jehovah has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me. ¹⁵Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion for the child to whom she has given birth? Yes, they might forget; but I will not forget you. ¹⁶Look! I have engraved you on the palms of my hands—your walls are continually before me! ¹⁷Your sons hurry back [to you]; but those who destroyed you and desolated you will depart from you.

¹⁸Lift up your eyes and look around: all [your sons] assemble themselves and come to you. As surely as I live, declares Jehovah, you will wear them all like [beautiful] ornaments; like a bride, you will deck yourself with them. ¹⁹With regard to your land that was laid waste and desolated and destroyed—surely, now, [O land,] you will be too narrow for your inhabitants; but those who devoured you will be far away. ²⁰The children of whom you were bereaved will say in your hearing, The land is too narrow for me; give me more space in which to live! ²¹Then you shall say in your heart, Who bore these [children] for me, since I suffered the lose of my children and was barren, I was sent away and rejected? Who raised these [children] for me? I was left [all] alone;

but these [children, from] where did they come? ²²This is what the Lord Jehovah says, See, I will beckon to the nations and I will give my signal to the [Gentiles]; then they will bring your sons in their arms and your daughters will be carried upon their shoulders. ²³Kings shall be your [foster] fathers and their queens shall be your nursing mothers. They will bow down before you with their faces to the ground and lick the dust off your feet. Then you will know that I am Jehovah—those who put their hope in me shall not be disappointed.

²⁴Can the plunder be taken from the mighty warriors, or can the lawful captives be released? ²⁵But this is what Jehovah says, Yes, the captive will be taken from the mighty warriors, and the plunder will be retrieved from the tyrant; for I will wage war against those who wage war against you, and I will save your children. ²⁶I will feed your oppressors with their own flesh; and they will become drunk with their own blood as [men become drunk] with sweet wine. Then all mankind will know that I, Jehovah, am your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob. (Isa. 49:1-26)

Introduction

Many years ago, in the midst of one of the numerous wars in Europe, a pastor and his family were forced to flee from their home. One night as they found lodging in a small village inn, homeless and afraid, his wife broke down and cried in despair. After seeking to comfort her, the pastor went out into the garden to be alone. There he, too, broke down and wept—he felt he had come to his darkest hour. But shortly thereafter he felt the burden lifted and sensed anew the LORD's presence—the LORD came to him in a special way and assured him that he was not forsaken. (*OUR DAILY BREAD*, 5/7/92)

There may be times in our lives when we feel that the LORD has forsaken us. But because the LORD is faithful, we may be assured from His Word that we are **not** forsaken—this is the message of Isaiah 49. In the words of the hymn writer:

The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not, desert to his foes.
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never, forsake.

I. You Are Not Forsaken: The LORD is Faithful to Remember Your Name (Isa. 49:14-23)

Verse 14 voices Zion's complaint, "*Jehovah has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me.*" Note: The holy city of Zion, being personified, is speaking on behalf of God's people themselves. Here is the accusation that Jehovah, the covenant God, has broken His covenantal vows of commitment to His people, vows expressed in such a passage as Deuteronomy 7:6, "*you are a people holy to Jehovah your God. Jehovah your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.*"

But in verses 15-16 the LORD tenderly assures His people that He cannot forget us nor forsake us. His compassion and care are greater than that of a mother for her infant child (vs. 15.) He cannot forget His children, redeemed by the blood of Christ, because we are engraved on the palm of His hands (vs. 16.)

The LORD now addresses Zion itself, assuring her that her children (the people of Israel) shall come running home and the invaders who ravished her land shall depart from her (vs. 17-18a.) Note: The return of the people of Israel to the Promised Land of Canaan (here designated by its spiritual name, "*Zion*") is not only an historical event performed by the LORD in His covenant faithfulness to His Old Testament people, it is also a prophecy and a type (i.e.; a living, historical model) of the gathering of all the LORD's redeemed into His heavenly kingdom at the final consummation and coming of that kingdom in all of its glory at the end of the age.

The LORD swears by Himself that Zion will clothe herself with all her children like a bride adorned in her wedding gown (vs. 18b.) Zion at present lays desolate and uninhabited, but the day is coming when she will not be large enough to accommodate all her children (vs. 19-20.) In New Testament terms and ultimate terms, here is the promise that the kingdom of God, including its holy population of all those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, shall come to a great consummation and fulfillment. Note our Lord's parable of the kingdom recorded in Matthew 13:31-32,

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. ³²Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches. (Matt. 13:31-32)

The future blessing to be bestowed upon Zion will be a joy and a marvel to her eyes (vs.21.) That is to say, the redeemed will stand amazed at what the LORD shall have accomplished and we will praise Him for the wonder of His works—in that day the redeemed will utter with awe-filled amazement the words first recorded in Numbers 23:23b, "*Now shall it be said of Jacob and of Israel, See what God has done!*" Note, also, Ephesians 3:20-21,

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen. (Eph. 3:20-21)

At the LORD's command, His people shall return to Zion out of their bondage, and Zion shall finally come to have dominion over the nations (vs. 22-23a.) On that great day we shall know that the Lord Jehovah is Jehovah—i.e.; He who is the covenant God shall prove Himself to be absolutely faithful to His covenant and to His people, He shall prove Himself to be all that He declares Himself to be.

Furthermore, we shall know that they who hope in Him (i.e.; those who put their confidence and trust in Him) shall not be disappointed; our confidence and trust in the LORD our God shall prove to be well founded.

Christian, the Word of God assures you that you are not forsaken: the LORD is faithful to remember your name. When you find yourself in a situation in which you feel as though you are abandoned, place your confidence in the sure Word of God as recorded in Isaiah 49:15-16,23

Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion for the child to whom she has given birth? Yes, they might forget; but I will not forget you. ¹⁶Look! I have engraved you on the palms of my hands—your walls are continually before me! ... ²³... Then you will know that I am Jehovah—those who put their hope in me shall not be disappointed. (Isa. 49:15-16,23)

Accept the counsel of the Psalmist when he confidently affirms, *“Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God”* (Psl. 42:11b.)

We may take comfort and confidence from such a passage as Galatians 4:6, *“Now because you are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, and he is crying out [to God], ‘Abba, Father.’”* God’s Holy Spirit, residing in the Christian’s heart, is constantly crying out to God on our behalf, identifying us as a child of God. Note, too, Ephesians 1:13b-14, *“having believed in him, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. ¹⁴He is a ‘deposit’ guaranteeing our inheritance, until the redemption of [God’s] possession, to the praise of his glory.”* The Holy Spirit is the divine “down payment,” identifying us and reserving us as God’s own possession, and guaranteeing that the LORD will return to claim us for Himself.

II. You Are Not Forsaken: The LORD is Faithful to Redeem Your Soul (Isa. 49:24-26)

The people of Israel recognized that they were being held captive by a mighty overlord (Babylon) and they acknowledged that they were lawful captives, and so they express their concern: *“Can the plunder be taken from the mighty warriors, or can the lawful captives be released?”* (vs. 24.) Israel is acknowledging the fact that the LORD consigned him to the Babylonian captivity as the just punishment for his sins.

In verses 25-26 the LORD replies to Israel’s concerns:

But this is what Jehovah says, “Yes, the captive will be taken from the mighty warriors, and the plunder will be retrieved from the tyrant; for I will wage war against those who wage war against you, and I will save your children. ²⁶I will feed your oppressors with their own flesh; and they will become drunk with their own blood as [men become drunk] with sweet wine. Then all mankind will

know that I, Jehovah, am your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.” (Isa. 49:25-26)

The LORD is “*the Mighty One of Jacob;*” He is fully capable of rescuing His people from their mighty captors because He Himself is the Almighty. Note that the LORD does not even address the question of His people being “*lawful captives.*” There is nothing lawful or righteous about the devil and his emissaries. It is the LORD alone who is righteous, it is His justice that was violated, and it is He who has provided the means of atonement: “*God presented [Christ] as a sacrifice of atonement ...²⁶He did it to demonstrate his justice ... so as to be just and the one who justifies the man who has faith in Jesus*” (Romans 3:25-26.) By means of Christ’s sacrifice the demands of God’s justice were fully met, and at the same time He is able to forgive and restore to Himself the man who puts his trust in Christ Jesus. Consider Zechariah 3:1-4; an Old Testament passage in which the devil appears as the accuser of God’s people, but the LORD proves Himself able to be our defender and justifier:

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of Jehovah, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. ²Jehovah said to Satan, “Jehovah rebuke you, Satan! Jehovah, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! ... ³Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. ⁴The angel said to those who were standing before him, “Take off his filthy clothes.” Then he said to Joshua, “See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you.” (Zech. 3:1-4) Joshua the high priest is the representative of all God’s people

Christian, the Word of God assures you that you are not forsaken: the LORD is faithful to redeem your soul. There are times when we can identify with the Psalmist in the awareness of our guilt:

I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. ⁴Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. (Psl. 51:3-4)

At such times we must also identify ourselves with the Psalmist in his confident prayer for forgiveness:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love, according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. ²Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. (Psl. 51:1-2)

Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. ²Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him ... ⁵ ... I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, I will confess my transgressions to the LORD—and you forgave the guilt of my sin. (Psl 32:1-2,5)

Let us place our confidence in the sure Word of God that declares, *“I, Jehovah, am your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.”*

III. You Are Not Forsaken: The LORD is Faithful to Reward Your Labor (Isa. 49:1-13)

In verses 1-3 we find the servant of the LORD announcing His divine calling to the world. He calls upon the distant islands and the Gentile nations to listen to him—the divine calling he has received from the LORD is of universal significance, it does not just relate to the nation of Israel, it has bearing upon all the nations of the world (vs. 1a.)

The servant declares that the LORD has sovereignly chosen him and called Him to be His servant (vs. 1b.) He compares Himself to a sharp weapon of war, fashioned by the LORD and prepared for His use (vs. 2.) In particular, it is his mouth that is like a sharp sword—his mouth shall speak the righteous Word of God with the piercing power of conviction and with the authority to save or to condemn. In fulfillment of this prophecy, note the testimony of our Lord Jesus Christ as recorded in John 12:48-49,

... he who rejects me, and does not receive my teaching, does have one who condemns him; the word that I have spoken, that [word] shall condemn him on the last day. ⁴⁹[This is the case] because I did not speak of my own accord; on the contrary, the Father who sent me, he has commanded me what to say and how to speak. (John 12:48-49)

The servant now reports the LORD’s testimony to Him: *“You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified”* (vs. 3.) Here Israel is once again reduced back to one individual, but it is not the great forefather, Jacob; rather, it is his one great descendant, Jesus Christ—the One who proves to be a true and faithful servant of the LORD, and the LORD acknowledges Him as such. Note the testimony God the Father makes with regard to Jesus as He prepares to go to the cross in submission to the Father’s will for the redemption of His people:

Now my soul is troubled; and what shall I say? Shall I say, “Father, save me from this hour”? But it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸“Father, glorify your name.” Then there came a voice out of heaven, saying, I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again. (Jn.12:27-28)

But now in verse 4 the LORD’s servant raises his complaint. He reports that the LORD affirmed, *“You are my servant [acknowledging His faithfulness], ...I will be glorified in you”* (the promise that His work will be successful and wholly acceptable to the LORD, with the result of bringing glory to the LORD.) But, the servant goes on to protest, *“I have labored in vain.”* He has faithfully fulfilled his calling, but there appears to have been no results, he sees no fruit. He has served the LORD faithfully, but far from being rewarded with an abundance of

faithful disciples, he has been forsaken and crucified: *“all the disciples deserted him and fled”* (Matt. 26:56b.)

Nevertheless, despite the bitter things he has experienced, the servant places his trust in the LORD: *“But surely the justice I deserve is with Jehovah, and my reward is with my God”* (vs. 4b.) He is confident that the LORD will bestow upon him the reward for his faithfulness. The resurrection, the ascension, and the work of the Holy Spirit in restoring a vast host of souls to God through Him would prove his hopes to be true and well founded, note Revelation 7:9-10,

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰And they cried out in a loud voice: Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb. (Rev. 7:9-10)

In verses 5-6 the servant himself reports the LORD’s reply to Him. *“I am honorable in the eyes of Jehovah.”* That is to say, His person and His labor are well pleasing and acceptable to the LORD. Note Matthew 3:16b-17, which records God the Father’s testimony with regard to Jesus at the time of His baptism, (which act symbolically declared Christ’s willingness to identify Himself with sinners and undergo the judgment of death on our behalf),

... the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming upon him; ¹⁷and there came a voice out of the heavens, saying, This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. (Matt. 3:16b-17)

The servant goes on to confess, *“my God has been my strength.”* The LORD will sustain His servant in times of hardship and discouragement and opposition, enabling him to fulfill his ministry. Note Jesus’ testimony to His disciples just prior to His arrest,

Listen, the hour is coming, in fact it has come, when you shall be scattered, each one to his own home, and shall forsake me. However, I am not forsaken, because the Father is with me. (Jn. 16:32)

The servant now reports the LORD’s promise to give him a great reward for His faithful service: not only Israel, but multitudes of Gentile peoples shall be brought to God through Him (vs. 6.)

The LORD Himself pledges to honor His servant who has been despised by the world (vs. 7.) The LORD is speaking as *“the Redeemer of Israel”* and *“his Holy One”*—in His righteousness He must honor and reward His righteous servant, which He in fact did, as the Apostle Peter affirms,

God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. ²⁵ David said about him: ... ²⁷you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. (Acts 2:24-25a, 27)

The faithful servant of the LORD, the one who was despised by man and a servant of tyrants, shall finally be recognized and honored by the kings and princes of the world, note Philippians 2:9-11,

... God exalted him to the highest position and bestowed upon him the name that is above every name; ¹⁰so that before the name Jesus now possesses “every knee should bow”—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—¹¹“and every tongue confess” that Jesus Christ is Lord unto the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:9-11)

As verse 7d indicates, the promises of the LORD are sure, *“because of Jehovah, who is faithful.”* Note that the LORD pledges to fulfill His promises to His servant in His *“[appointed] time”*—and until the time of fulfillment He shall preserve Him (vs. 8.)

Christian, the Word of God assures you that you are not forsaken: the LORD is faithful to reward your labor. There may be times in our lives when we are tempted to entertain such thoughts as those expressed in Malachi 3:14-15,

You have said, “It is futile to serve God. What did we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before Jehovah of hosts? ¹⁵But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly the evildoers prosper, and even those who challenge God escape.” (Mal. 3:14-15)

On such occasions may our hearts be comforted and reassured by the Word of the LORD:

Then those who feared Jehovah talked with each other, and Jehovah listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared Jehovah and honored his name. ¹⁷“They will be mine,” says Jehovah of hosts, “in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him. ¹⁸And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.” (Mal. 3:16-18)

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; knowing that your labor for the Lord is not in vain. (1 Cor. 15:58)

Conclusion

Just like that German pastor from so many years ago, there may be times when we break down and weep and feel a sense of being forsaken by the LORD Himself. But just as the LORD drew near to that dear Christian brother in a special way and reassured him that he was not forsaken, so may the LORD draw near to us. May this present passage of Scripture be used by the Holy Spirit to remind us and assure us that the LORD is faithful: 1) He is faithful to remember your name; 2) He is faithful to redeem your soul; and 3) He is faithful to reward your labor for Him.