

Isaiah 49:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.

Analysis

This verse appears in the second Servant Song (49:1-6) and marks a dramatic expansion of the Servant's mission. God speaks: 'It is a light thing' (naqal, נָקַל)—too small, too easy, insufficient—if the Servant merely restored Israel. Though 'raising up the tribes of Jacob' and restoring 'the preserved of Israel' would be miraculous (reuniting scattered tribes, reviving the faithful remnant), God's purpose is far greater. The infinitely larger commission: 'I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles' (le-or goyim). This repeats 42:6, emphasizing the Servant's universal scope. The purpose clause defines the ultimate goal: 'that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth' (li-yeshuati ad-qetseh ha-arets). The Hebrew word for salvation (yeshuah, יְשֻׁעָה) shares the same root as Jesus's name (Yeshua), meaning 'the LORD saves.' The Servant becomes God's salvation personified, extending to earth's remotest corners. Paul cites this verse when turning to Gentile mission (Acts 13:47), recognizing its fulfillment in preaching Christ to all nations.

Historical Context

Second-temple Judaism debated whether Gentiles would share in messianic redemption or merely serve Israel. This prophecy, written 700 years before Christ,

declares God's intention: Messiah's work encompasses all humanity. Jesus's final commission reflects this: 'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations' (Matthew 28:19). The early church struggled to accept Gentile inclusion until Acts 10-11 (Peter and Cornelius) and Acts 15 (Jerusalem Council). Paul became the apostle to the Gentiles specifically to fulfill this Isaiah prophecy. Church history demonstrates progressive fulfillment—from Jerusalem to Rome to Europe to the Americas to Asia to Africa—as the gospel reaches every continent, tribe, and tongue.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does knowing God's plan always included all nations affect your view of evangelism and missions?
2. Are you settling for 'light things' in your spiritual life when God has greater purposes for you?

Interlinear Text

וְאָמַר	לֹא	לְקַل	מְהִיּוֹתָךְ	לְ	כִּי	כִּי
And he said	It is a light thing		H1961	H0	that thou shouldest be my servant	
H559	H7043				H5650	
לְפָשָׁר יְבִשְׁרָאָל	וְנִצְרָא לְ	שְׁבָטִים	בְּשְׁבָטִים	אֶת	לְפָקִים	
to raise up	the tribes	of Jacob	H5336	of Israel	and to restore	
H6965	H7626	H3290		H3478	H7725	
לְהַקְרִיב וְתַתְמִתְתִּיב	לֹא וְ	מִן	גַּוְעַד	וְתַתְמִתְתִּיב		
I will also give	thee for a light	to the Gentiles	H1961			
H5414	H216	H1471				
בְּאָרֶץ	קָצֵה	עַד	נִשּׁוּעָת			
unto the end	of the earth	H5704	that thou mayest be my salvation	H3444	H7097	H776

Additional Cross-References

Acts 13:47 (Salvation): For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.

Isaiah 42:6 (Light): I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles;

Luke 2:32 (Light): A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

Isaiah 52:10 (Salvation): The LORD hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

Isaiah 60:3 (Light): And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.

Acts 26:18 (Light): To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

Isaiah 11:10 (Parallel theme): And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.

Isaiah 46:13 (Salvation): I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry: and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory.

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