

Isaiah 51:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And I have put my words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art my people.

Analysis

And I have put my words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art my people. This verse reveals the Servant's prophetic office—God places His words in the Servant's mouth, creating a perfect prophetic mouthpiece. The phrase "I have put my words in thy mouth" appears in Moses' call (Deuteronomy 18:18) and Jeremiah's commission (Jeremiah 1:9), establishing continuity in prophetic succession culminating in the ultimate Prophet, Christ.

"Covered thee in the shadow of mine hand" depicts divine protection during the Servant's mission. The shadow metaphor appears in Psalm 91:1 indicating security, and in Isaiah 49:2 where God makes the Servant "a polished shaft" hidden in His quiver. This protection enables cosmic renewal: "plant the heavens, lay the foundations of the earth"—language echoing original creation (Genesis 1), now applied to new creation through the Servant's work.

From a Reformed perspective, this prophecy points to Christ who perfectly speaks God's words (John 3:34, 8:28) and through whom new creation comes (2 Corinthians 5:17, Revelation 21:5). The purpose clause—"say unto Zion, Thou art my people"—establishes covenant relationship as the goal of new creation. Christ's redemptive work restores the covenant declaration: "I will be their God, and they

shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33, Hebrews 8:10). The new heavens and earth provide eternal dwelling for God's redeemed people.

Historical Context

The language of planting heavens and laying earth's foundations alludes to Genesis 1 creation account. Jewish theology understood that God's word has creative power (Psalm 33:6, 9—"he spake, and it was done"). The Servant's words, being God's words, participate in this creative power, bringing new creation into being.

The declaration "Thou art my people" recalls Exodus 6:7, Leviticus 26:12—the covenant formula establishing Israel's relationship with Yahweh. The exile threatened to annul this covenant (Hosea 1:9—"not my people"), but Isaiah promises restoration and expansion. The New Testament applies this to the church, including Gentiles: "which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God" (1 Peter 2:10). The new creation inaugurated by Christ's resurrection awaits consummation at His return (Revelation 21-22).

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does Christ as God's perfect Word challenge your trust in Scripture's authority?
2. In what ways have you experienced God's protective 'shadow' during your mission?
3. How does the promise of new creation affect your engagement with present environmental or social issues?

Interlinear Text

וְאֶשׁ ׀	דְּבָרִי	בִּפִּי יְךָ	וּבִצִּי ל	יָדִי ׀
And I have put	my words	in thy mouth	thee in the shadow	of mine hand
H7760	H1697	H6310	H6738	H3027
כִּסִּיתִי יְךָ	לִנְטֹ ׀	שָׁמַיִם ׀	וְלִיסֵד	
and I have covered	that I may plant	the heavens	and lay the foundations	
H3680	H5193	H8064	H3245	
אֶרֶץ	וְלֵאמֹר ׀	לְצִיּוֹן	עַמִּי	אֶתָּה׃
of the earth	and say	unto Zion	Thou art my people	H859
H776	H559	H6726	H5971	

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 59:21 (Word): As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever.

Isaiah 49:2 (Word): And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me;

John 17:8 (Word): For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.

Deuteronomy 18:18 (Word): I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.

Jeremiah 31:33 (Word): But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Isaiah 66:22 (Parallel theme): For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain.

Isaiah 50:4 (Word): The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.

Isaiah 48:13 (Parallel theme): Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens: when I call unto them, they stand up together.

Zechariah 13:9 (Parallel theme): And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God.

2 Peter 3:13 (Parallel theme): Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.