

Advent Reading for Friday, December 15, 2017 ***“A Light for the Nations” (Isaiah 49:16)***

Today’s prophecy comes from the second of Isaiah’s four *Servant Songs*, this one pointing to the Servant’s mission and ultimate success. While the nation of Israel is sometimes referred to as God’s servant, the One spoken of in these *songs* is clearly identified as an individual, distinct from a personified group, such as the nation of Israel.

While there were a myriad of promises about His coming, Christ was not made known until *“the fullness of time”* (Galatians 4:4). In terms of Israel, the purpose of His coming was their salvation and ultimate restoration in fulfillment of the covenant promise, a purpose that will not be ultimately fulfilled until His Second Advent. But the mission of *God’s Servant* was not limited to Israel. He was to function as a light which would bring salvation to the Gentiles - all the nations of the world. It is here where we come to Isaiah’s incredible prophecy for today: *“It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light for the nations so that My salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”* (49:6).

The promise that God would provide salvation for all the nations was first revealed in the Abrahamic Covenant. When God called Abram to go forth from his father’s house and his own country, and go to a new land God would show to him, God promised to bless him and make him a great nation. He also promised to bless those who would bless him, and curse those who would curse him. But God concluded this important and unique covenant with the promise: *“And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed”* (Genesis 12:3). The word translated *families* may be translated *peoples, or ethnic groups*. When God promised through Isaiah *“I will make You a light for the nations that My salvation may reach to the ends of the earth”*, He was reiterating and reinforcing what He had previously promised to Abraham long years before.

When we turn to the New Testament to search for the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy, we find it in the early part of Paul and Barnabas’s first missionary journey. Their pattern was to go first to the Jewish synagogue with their message, and if the Jewish population was not large enough for a synagogue, they would find the place where Jews gathered for worship. Sadly, the Jews, for the most part, rejected the gospel they were preaching

(See Acts 13:42-46). It was at this point where Paul informed them, *“Behold, we are turning to the Gentiles, for so the Lord commanded us, ‘I HAVE PLACED YOU AS A LIGHT TO THE GENTILES, THAT YOU MAY BRING SALVATION TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH’”* (Acts 13:47). For biblical support for their decision, and in applying it to their circumstances, Paul turned Isaiah’s prophecy into a command from the Lord that they were to obey.

As we think of the application for us, we can be thankful that salvation has come to us as Gentiles! But we also think of our missionary responsibility, first to tell others and, second, to be involved in partnering with missionaries who are taking the gospel to those who have not yet heard and believed the good news.

Giving Thanks – Thank You for including us in the Abrahamic Covenant, and for bringing the gospel to us 4000 years later!