

The Bible's Use of the Bible

Session 4: A Case Study: Isaiah 49 in Galatians 1

Author: Dr. Matthew S. Harmon | Session 4

Sponsored by: Biblecallearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Abstract:

In this instructional session, Dr. Matthew S. Harmon demonstrates how the New Testament frequently references Old Testament passages by examining **Paul's use of Isaiah 49 in Galatians 1**. Using a **step-by-step hermeneutical process**, Harmon identifies linguistic overlaps and shared themes that suggest Paul intentionally modeled his apostolic identity after the **Isaianic servant**. The lecture explores the **horizontal and vertical contexts** of these scriptures, showing how Israel's failure as a servant necessitated an individual, messianic servant to fulfill God's mission. Harmon argues that Paul views his ministry as an **indirect fulfillment** of prophecy because the resurrected Christ, the ultimate servant, lives and works through him. Ultimately, the source serves as a **methodological guide** for students to recognize how biblical authors weave earlier scriptures into new contexts to clarify their theological purpose.

Briefing Document:

Case Study Analysis: The Use of Isaiah 49 in Galatians 1

Executive Summary

This briefing document analyzes the hermeneutical relationship between Isaiah 49 and Galatians 1, based on the research of Dr. Matthew S. Harmon. The central thesis is that the Apostle Paul intentionally alludes to the "Servant of the Lord" imagery from Isaiah 49 to define his apostolic calling and mission to the Gentiles. Through a four-step exegetical process—identifying the allusion, studying the donor text, studying the receptor text, and determining the exegetical outcome—it is revealed that Paul views his ministry as an "indirect fulfillment" of the Isaianic servant's mission. Crucially, Paul identifies himself as this servant only because the risen Christ (the ultimate Servant) lives within him, a connection bridged in Galatians 2:20.

Step 1: Identifying the Allusion

The first phase of the analysis involves recognizing the points of contact between the "receptor text" (Galatians 1) and the "donor text" (Isaiah 49). While some allusions are subtle, several linguistic parallels suggest a deliberate connection.

Linguistic Overlap

The following table highlights the shared phrases and concepts between the two texts, particularly focusing on the Septuagint (LXX) translation of Isaiah:

Galatians 1:15-16	Isaiah 49:1-6 (LXX)	Shared Concept
"Set me apart from my mother's womb"	"From my mother's womb... he called my name"	Divine selection from birth
"Called me through his grace"	"To be called my servant"	Divine calling
"To reveal his Son in me"	"In you I will be glorified"	God's glory/revelation through a person
"Among the Gentiles/Nations"	"A light of nations/Gentiles"	Mission to non-Israelites

Subtle Echoes and Specific Terminology

- **"In Me" vs. "To Me":** In Galatians 1:16, Paul writes that God revealed His Son "in me" (*en emoi*). While many translations use "to me," the Greek construction suggests the sphere of Paul's life and ministry was the context for this revelation, echoing Isaiah 49:3: "in you I will be glorified." This is reinforced in Galatians 1:24, where Paul notes that the churches "glorify God in me."
- **The Term "Servant":** In Galatians 1:10, Paul refers to himself as a *doulos* (slave/servant). In the Septuagint version of Isaiah, *doulos* is used for the servant in Isaiah 49:3, whereas other servant passages in Isaiah (such as chapter 53) typically use the word *pais*.
- **Laboring in Vain:** Paul's concerns about "running or laboring in vain" (Galatians 2:2) mirror the servant's lament in Isaiah 49:4: "I have labored vainly... in vain and for nothing."

Step 2: Analysis of the Donor Text (Isaiah 49)

To understand how Paul uses the Old Testament, one must analyze the original context of the source material.

Horizontal Context

Within the book of Isaiah, there is a progression regarding the "Servant of the Lord."

- **Israel as Failed Servant:** In Isaiah 42, the nation of Israel is identified as the servant who is "blind" and "deaf," failing in its mission.
- **The Individual Servant:** In Isaiah 49, God raises an individual servant to succeed where the nation failed. This servant is commissioned to gather Jacob (Israel) back to God and to be a light to the nations.

- **Suffering and Vindication:** This mission is accomplished through suffering and eventual vindication, themes expanded upon in Isaiah 50 and 53.

Vertical Context and Reception

- **Pattern of Servants:** The vertical context suggests a recurring pattern of God raising individual servants (Adam, Moses, Joshua, David) with royal, priestly, or prophetic roles to create a "servant people."
- **Shift to Plurality:** In Isaiah 54, after the individual servant has completed his work, the text begins referring to the "servants (plural) of the Lord," indicating a collective group produced by the individual's labor.
- **Precedent in Acts:** Paul and Barnabas explicitly quote Isaiah 49:6 in Acts 13:46-48 to justify their turn toward the Gentiles, establishing that Paul habitually viewed his mission through this Isaianic lens.

Step 3: Analysis of the Receptor Text (Galatians 1-2)

The receptor text analysis examines how the allusion functions within Paul's specific argument to the Galatians.

- **Defending Authority:** Paul uses the language of Isaiah 49 to defend his apostolic authority and his relationship with the Jerusalem church leadership.
- **The "Key" in Galatians 2:20:** A vital connection occurs in Galatians 2:20, where Paul writes, "Christ lives in me." Here, Paul combines the "in me" language of Isaiah 49:3 with the sacrificial language of Isaiah 53 ("who loved me and gave himself for me").
- **Synthesis:** Paul explains that he is the servant of Isaiah 49 because the ultimate Servant (Jesus) dwells within him to fulfill the mission of being a light to the nations.

Step 4: Exegetical Outcomes

The synthesis of these texts leads to several critical conclusions regarding Paul's theology and self-understanding.

Indirect Fulfillment

Paul's use of Isaiah 49 is a form of **indirect fulfillment**. He does not claim to replace Christ as the promised Servant; rather, he sees his specific call as an apostle to the Gentiles prefigured in the servant's mission. His ministry is an extension of Christ's work.

Collective vs. Individual Identity

The analysis demonstrates an interrelationship between individual and collective identity:

1. **Christ** is the unique, individual Servant who obeyed where Israel failed.
2. **Paul** is an individual servant because Christ lives in him.
3. **The Church** becomes a "servant people" (the plural "servants" of Isaiah 54) because they are the sphere where Christ dwells and through whom He works to bring salvation to the ends of the earth.

Practical Implications

The use of Isaiah 49 in Galatians 1 indicates that Paul's understanding of the gospel was deeply rooted in the Old Testament scriptures. His encounter with the risen Jesus was interpreted through the lens of Isaiah's prophecies, leading him to conclude that his mission to the Gentiles was not a new invention but a long-anticipated stage of God's redemptive history.

Study Guide:

Study Guide: Isaiah 49 in Galatians 1 – A Case Study in Biblical Intertextuality

This study guide explores the hermeneutical relationship between the Old and New Testaments, specifically focusing on how the Apostle Paul utilizes the "Servant Song" of Isaiah 49 within his letter to the Galatians. It is based on the research and lectures of Dr. Matthew S. Harmon.

Short-Answer Quiz

Instructions: Answer the following ten questions in 2–3 sentences based on the provided source context.

1. **What is the first step in the process of analyzing how a New Testament author uses an Old Testament text?**
2. **Which specific resource does Dr. Harmon recommend for identifying allusions in the New Testament?**
3. **In Galatians 1:16, why does Dr. Harmon prefer the translation "revealed his son in me" over "to me"?**
4. **What is the significance of the Greek word *doulos* in Galatians 1:10 and Isaiah 49:3?**
5. **How does the Septuagint (LXX) use the term for "servant" differently in Isaiah 49 compared to other sections of Isaiah?**
6. **What is meant by the "horizontal context" of a donor text?**

7. **According to the source, what is the primary difference between the "servant" described in Isaiah 42 and the one in Isaiah 49?**
8. **How does Acts 13:46–48 serve as a precedent for Paul's use of Isaiah 49 in Galatians?**
9. **What transition occurs regarding the term "servant" between Isaiah 53 and Isaiah 54?**
10. **How does Galatians 2:20 reconcile the identity of the servant in Isaiah 49 with the suffering servant of Isaiah 53?**

Answer Key

1. **What is the first step in the process of analyzing how a New Testament author uses an Old Testament text?** The first step is to identify the allusion, which involves recognizing shared language and points of contact between the donor and receptor texts. This can be done by using cross-reference tools or highlighting overlapping phrases, such as "from my mother's womb" and "called."
2. **Which specific resource does Dr. Harmon recommend for identifying allusions in the New Testament?** Dr. Harmon recommends the *Connecting Scripture New Testament*, published by the publishers of the Christian Standard Bible. This tool is specifically designed to help readers identify subtle allusions and check their own observations against scholarly findings.
3. **In Galatians 1:16, why does Dr. Harmon prefer the translation "revealed his son in me" over "to me"?** The Greek expression is more naturally understood as "in me," suggesting that God's purpose was to reveal His Son within the sphere of Paul's life and ministry. This phrasing intentionally mirrors Isaiah 49:3, where God tells the servant, "in you I will be glorified."
4. **What is the significance of the Greek word *doulos* in Galatians 1:10 and Isaiah 49:3?** While "servant" or "slave" can be translated in various ways, the use of *doulos* in Isaiah 49:3 (LXX) to refer to the servant is unique within the book of Isaiah. Paul uses the same term in Galatians 1:10, likely anticipating his later defense and linking his apostolic identity to the Isaianic servant.
5. **How does the Septuagint (LXX) use the term for "servant" differently in Isaiah 49 compared to other sections of Isaiah?** Typically, the Septuagint uses the Greek word *pais* to refer to the servant, particularly in famous passages like Isaiah 53. Isaiah 49:3 is the only instance in the book where the term *doulos* is used for the servant, providing a specific linguistic link to Paul's self-description.

6. **What is meant by the "horizontal context" of a donor text?** Horizontal context refers to the study of the surrounding verses, paragraphs, and chapters within the original book (the donor text). For Isaiah 49, this involves examining the flow of the book to see how the servant figure evolves from the nation of Israel to a specific individual.
7. **According to the source, what is the primary difference between the "servant" described in Isaiah 42 and the one in Isaiah 49?** In Isaiah 42, the servant is often a description of what Israel as a nation was intended to be, though they ultimately failed in that mission. Isaiah 49 introduces an individual servant who succeeds where Israel failed, fulfilling the role of bringing light to the nations.
8. **How does Acts 13:46–48 serve as a precedent for Paul's use of Isaiah 49 in Galatians?** In Acts 13, Paul and Barnabas explicitly quote Isaiah 49:6 to justify their mission to the Gentiles after being rejected by others. This demonstrates that Paul habitually used the lens of Isaiah 49 to explain the rationale and divine commission of his ministry.
9. **What transition occurs regarding the term "servant" between Isaiah 53 and Isaiah 54?** From Isaiah 40 through 53, the term "servant" is always used in the singular, representing either the nation or the individual Messiah. In Isaiah 54, the term shifts to the plural "servants," indicating that the work of the individual servant has successfully created a new, collective servant people.
10. **How does Galatians 2:20 reconcile the identity of the servant in Isaiah 49 with the suffering servant of Isaiah 53?** Paul states that "Christ lives in me," combining allusions to the glorified servant of Isaiah 49 and the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. This explains that Paul can be seen as the servant of Isaiah 49 only because the ultimate servant, Jesus, dwells within him to fulfill the mission of reaching the nations.

Suggested Essay Questions

1. **The Four-Step Hermeneutical Process:** Explain the four steps for studying the Bible's use of the Bible as outlined by Dr. Harmon. How does this systematic approach prevent "getting lost in rabbit trails" while still allowing for deep scholarly insight?
2. **Linguistic Precision and Translation:** Discuss the importance of using the Septuagint (LXX) and making careful translation choices (e.g., *doulos* vs. *pais*, and "in me" vs. "to me") when identifying allusions. How do these nuances change our understanding of Paul's argument in Galatians?
3. **The Evolution of the Servant Figure:** Analyze the "horizontal context" of the servant in Isaiah. Compare the corporate failure of Israel as a servant with the individual success of the servant in Isaiah 49, and explain how this trajectory culminates in the "servant people" of Isaiah 54.

4. **Indirect Fulfillment and Apostolic Identity:** Dr. Harmon describes Paul's use of Isaiah as "indirect fulfillment." Elaborate on this concept, explaining how Paul sees his own life prefigured in the Old Testament without replacing the primary role of the Messiah.
5. **Typology and Christology:** Explore the relationship between Jesus and Paul as "servants." Based on the source context, how does Paul's union with Christ (Galatians 2:20) allow him to apply messianic prophecies to his own apostolic mission?

Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Definition
Allusion	A subtle or indirect reference in a text to another text, often identified through shared phrasing or concepts.
AT (Author's Translation)	A translation of a biblical text made by the researcher/speaker himself rather than using a standard published version.
Donor Text	The original or earlier biblical text that is being quoted or alluded to by a later author.
Doulos	A Greek term for slave or servant; notably used in the LXX version of Isaiah 49:3 and by Paul in Galatians 1:10.
Exegetical Outcome	The theological "payoff" or the specific way a later author utilizes an earlier text to make a point.
Horizontal Context	The study of the immediate literary surroundings (verses and chapters) of a specific passage within its own book.
Indirect Fulfillment	A usage where a later author sees their own circumstances or ministry as being prefigured or anticipated by the language of an earlier text.
LXX (Septuagint)	The ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, which was frequently used by New Testament authors.
Receptive Text	The later biblical text that receives and utilizes the language or ideas of an earlier donor text.
Textual Variant	A place where different ancient manuscripts of a text show different wordings or spellings.

Typological Connection	A relationship between an Old Testament person, event, or institution (the type) and a New Testament counterpart (the antitype).
Vertical Context	The study of how a theme or text relates to the broader patterns and recurring motifs across the entire canon of Scripture.
