

The Church in the World

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If you will, take your Bibles and look with me in Isaiah 49. I'm going to read from verse 13 down to verse 26 and speak with you concerning the church in the world. The church in the world. The word "church" actually comes from a German word "kirche" and it means literally "the gathered ones." In the original, it means "the called out ones." So when we're talking about the church, whether in the Old Testament or New, we're talking about those sinners whom God has purposed to save from all eternity, chosen. Their names may not be written on any earthly roll but certainly are written on the roll of the Lamb's book of life and I ask you, if you wanted to be on any roll, which one would you rather? Some earthly moth-eaten registry that's going to fade with that congregation or written in the Lamb's book of life? But they have been redeemed by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's the book of the Lamb slain as we saw in Revelation 13 in our study Tuesday night. He wasn't slain from eternity but the book, their names were written from eternity in the book of the Lamb who is now slain and they are called.

Now, that's the ongoing process that's taking place as far as the building of God's church. There are no new names being written down in glory but certainly they continue to be called out wherever they are in the world through the preaching of the Gospel by the Spirit of God to the one who redeemed them and who chose them and all of this is foretold, prophesied right here in Isaiah 49. Now, it uses the picture of Israel of old as a type of the people of God who had been taken away in the captivity and the Lord would bring back and reestablish in the land but Israel was a type, a picture, just like we read in Psalm 122. Jerusalem was a type and picture of that people that Christ should come and redeem. So keep that in mind as we read this here in Isaiah 49, beginning with verse 13,

13 Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the LORD hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted. 14 But Zion said, The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.

Now, here's the response to such a thought.

15 Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. 16 Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands;

thy walls are continually before me. 17 Thy children shall make haste; thy destroyers and they that made thee waste shall go forth of thee. 18 Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to thee. As I live, saith the LORD, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee, as a bride doeth. 19 For thy waste and thy desolate places, and the land of thy destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants, and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away. 20 The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell. 21 Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been? 22 Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles [in other words, to the nations], and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders. 23 And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me. 24 Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered? 25 But thus saith the LORD, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children. 26 And I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh; and they shall be drunken with their own blood, as with sweet wine: and all flesh shall know that I the LORD am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob.

So if I could break this down into three parts, it would be simply this: in verses 13 through 17, we see the church in the world typified. When it speaks of the Lord's people and those that the Lord has comforted. How does he comfort his people? Well, with his presence; with his grace; and with the revelation of Christ; his shed blood. So we see that typified there concerning, at that time, the children of Israel but the type and picture of Christ's church. In verses 18 to 23, we see how the Lord has purposed to prosper his church in the world. I know there are some, like the title of this Bible, the editors have put in "The restoration of Israel." There are some who constantly are looking toward Jerusalem; they are looking toward the mid-east and they are trying to figure out signs politically, economically, socially, that indicate that God is going to once again gather people back to Israel and that that physical land over there once again become a kingdom of Christ. Well, if you did nothing but just read what this prophecy is about, you would know that the physical land of Israel could never contain the number of people that Christ has purchased and the Spirit is bringing into his kingdom. They can't even contain the number of natural Jews that are trying to go back over there. They're fighting over land right now trying to find more room. There are still more Jews outside the land than in the land and if all of those should ever go back, the land couldn't contain them. Just the Jews,

and you're talking to me about some earthly spiritual kingdom that's going to somehow have Jerusalem again as its center? A people that when the Lord took out and showed Abraham he said, "Look at the number of the stars of heaven." From the beginning of time until Christ comes again.

You see, we all think that he's coming immediately and so some people say, "Well, you know, how can that number that he has redeemed represent the stars in heaven?" Well, who said he's coming immediately? This whole world may go on for another 100 million years as far as we know, where everybody's thinking is, "Okay, it's tomorrow. It's today. It's tomorrow." No man knows the hour, but I do know this: that Christ will not come again until that last one that God has chosen and Christ has redeemed is called. There is not going to be one waking up in heaven and surprised to be there. He's going to teach every one of his own.

Even here, you can see in verse 20, for example, the prosperity of the church is far beyond any kind of physical land or physical seed because it says, "The children which thou shalt have," it says, "after thou hast lost the other." Actually it's saying that God would set aside the physical Jew; those children have been lost, they've been blinded. "Shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell." If it were a physical land, it would be too strait. There wouldn't be enough room. Then when we got down to verse 22, "Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the nations." So clearly here is a prophecy of the prosperity of God's church, Christ's church, in the world that goes well beyond the parameters of a physical land of Israel that measures, for the most part, 70 miles wide and 120 miles long. That's from here to Ruston wide and then maybe down to Alexandria. You're going to put all of this population into a physical realm and call that the kingdom of God? That's foolishness. So we need to understand the Scripture from that perspective.

So we see the church typified. We see the prosperity of the church prophesied. But also, verses 24 and 26, any objections to how the Lord might do this are answered. I like the way the Scripture answers objections to how it is the Lord has purposed to save a people from the world and deliver them. Even when it was said that Israel would be brought back from the land of Babylon, some wondered how. Babylon is too strong. Babylon is too powerful. And yet as history records it, in a night the Lord caused Babylon to fall when it was his time and raised up a man named Cyrus who put forth a decree to send Israel back. No one foresaw it except for the Scriptures. The Scriptures foresaw it.

We may even have the same question with regard to: how is God going to get his Gospel to sinners throughout this world, some in some very remote places? Is the fact that they are in a remote place too hard for God? Is the fact that they are a hardened lost sinner right now too hard for God? God would refer us back to this portion to see how he took and brought down a very mighty powerful king and kingdom in Babylon and delivered his people and the question is: is there anything too hard for God? Men tend to put conditions and say, "Well, he can't do that." Well, God says he'll have every one. In fact, Christ said that, "Of all that the Father has given me, I'll not lose one."

So this is the gist, if you will, of this portion that I've just read for you, but let's come back and look at the first part, how the church in the world is typified. The scope of these verses here in verses 13 through 17 is to show us the return of the people out of captivity in Israel, when they were to be taken away to Babylon. When Isaiah prophesied this, Babylon still wasn't even a power. This was to take place a couple hundred years later, but the Lord is laying out the map of what he would do. He would take this people into captivity for their idolatry but he would bring them back after 70 years. But what that is, is a type and picture of the eternal redemption that was to be wrought out by the Lord Jesus Christ and therefore would be a great occasion of joy to the Lord's people of his tender care for his church.

That's what's described when it says, "Sing, O heavens," verse 13, "and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the LORD hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted." That's describing not only the delivery of the children of Israel from Babylon but forward looking to the deliverance that Christ would bring about through his death. That's how his people are comforted. Just that little band of disciples after the Lord raised from the dead, he found them quaking in a room, shut up and he showed them his hands. He showed them his side and told them, "Fear not. Peace be unto you." It says Christ has revealed to the heart of the sinner that there is true rejoicing.

Now, there might be a time when even the Lord's people might say in verse 14, "The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." I know as the Lord began to deal in my heart and draw me to himself beginning that work of grace, I had a sense of being lost. I had a sense of being under condemnation and it went on for weeks. It went on for months. It affected my sleep. The thought that I had been raised in the ranks of Christendom, had been through school and even gotten my Master's degree and yet knew nothing. It's a very profound and astounding reality when the Lord shows you you're lost. You're exposed. People look at you and think you're just sick but as you lay bare before the Lord, the question arises, "Am I the Lord's or am I not? Has the Lord forsaken me? Has the Lord forgotten me?" Anybody ever been there?

That's the thought that the Lord brings to your heart. Until you've been lost, you'll never be found and there are far too many people that have come into a knowledge of the truth, learned some truth; can speak it just like you can go to a foreign country and learn to speak a language and pronounce certain words very well and yet still not be a native of that country. I fear that there are many that are that way. They pretend or profess to be the Lord's and yet have never been lost. But who is it that the Lord comforts? Well, he comforts his own. He speaks peace to the heart of his own and this is how he speaks peace. It's not through man's word but it's the Lord's word reassuring the heart.

The Lord asked the question, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?" Then says, "Well, okay, yes, a woman might." We've heard recently in the media of cases of mothers that give birth to a child and become irritated and go and throw them in the trash bin; put them in a trash bag and try to get rid of them. You sit there in horror and think how could a mother do that. Well,

that's depravity and so the Lord, lest anybody should use that as an example, says, "yea," verse 15, "they may forget, yet will I not forget thee."

The time that we begin to question the most whether we're the Lord's or not is when we're most aware of our own depravity and sin and we begin to even think that because of this sin or that, the Lord cannot love me. When he begins to expose our own nature, we begin to think in those terms, "Well, you know, if he were to judge me on that based on who I am as a sinner, he'd most certainly have to cast me off." Yet the Lord said, "yet will I not forget thee." Here is the blessed comfort, I believe, to all who are the Lord's in this world, his church in the world, is that the Lord never forgets them. I don't care how long one might wander in religion, might wander in darkness, might wander in lostness, if God has set his love upon them and Christ has redeemed them, he's going to get them. He's going to draw them.

I've had to deal with this in my own heart and the Lord has brought me comfort in thinking that for what sin would he ever cast me off if from eternity he saw me as a sinner and set his love upon me? And while I was yet a sinner, Christ died for me and while in darkness and blindness the Spirit drew me, knowing my state as a lost sinner, for what sin would he ever cast me off? That's the answer. It's an answer that works religion doesn't have an answer to. All that works religion can tell you is keep striving harder. Keep trying to work on it. Keep trying to better yourself. There is no hope there. All of my hope as a sinner before a holy God is that he will not forget one of his own and that my name was written upon the breastplate of my high priest when he went in and laid down his life and it would be sooner thought that Christ himself could cease to be the Son of God than for God the Father to ever cast off even one of his own for whom Christ paid the debt.

This little Jesus that men are preaching today that you'd better be right and do right and get right or else you'll end up in hell, is not the Christ of Scripture. That's not a Savior. For a Christ to have laid down his precious blood to purchase a sinner such as I am and that sinner end up in hell anyway, what kind of God would that be? That would be double jeopardy to spare not his own Son and then to cast me off in the end as a result.

Notice, just how plainly it is put here and this is what I want you to see. This is a prophecy addressed to the Lord's people throughout the world wherever they may be, he says, "Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands." Some people say when you look at your palm, that it says certain things. I don't believe the Scriptures here are in any sense of the word encouraging palm reading, but the fact that every palm has a distinctive mark that is unique to that person. Looking at the palm of your hand, it doesn't change over the years. I began doing this back when I was in high school, looking at the certain design in the palm of my hands. It is what it is. It's been there from the beginning. It doesn't change. When I think of the fact where Christ himself says that the Father has given sinners into his hand, not in the sense that they could somehow fall through and slip through the fingers but engraven upon the palms of his hands. Christ himself would have to be destroyed for any of his people to be destroyed. That's just how united he is with his people.

"Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls," you think about walls, that's what endures, "are continually before me." Who built those walls? Those are the walls of salvation. Well, that's Christ. When I think of the palm of my Lord's hands, I think about the nail pierced hands, not just that the names have been put there in election but those nail pierced hands that are the proof that when he died he paid the debt. You remember when Thomas doubted whether or not it was the Lord that the others had seen because he wasn't there at that time and the next time they met, the Lord came back and showed himself to Thomas. Do you remember what he said? "See my hands. Come put your hand in my side." He was pointing to his wounds and Thomas didn't need to do that. Seeing, you know, the Lord revealing himself to him, he said, "My Lord and my God." He bowed. Therein is our hope. It's not just in some eternal decree that, "Okay, my name was written in the Lamb's book of life," but as God is pleased to teach us of those wounded hands and show us how those hands were nailed to the cross and the debt paid, therein is our comfort and therein is our hope.

It says there in verse 17, "Thy children shall make haste." Sometimes we say that conversion comes slowly. Well, it appears to be so because as we pray for different ones as the Lord burdens us, it seems many times that things worsen before they get better. They become more hardened as you pray and you begin to wonder, "I wonder if they're even the Lord's." But the Lord has his time and if any are his, as it says here in verse 17, "Thy children shall make haste; thy destroyers and they that made thee waste shall go forth of thee." The idea there is they're going to let you go. Whatever is that is binding any one of the Lord's, when it is the Lord's time that they be turned loose, they'll be turned loose. Christ said, "I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

So it just appears that it's slow but, as one man told me years ago, "The Lord's timing is never late and it's never too soon. It's always right on time." Why was it that that thief on the cross did not see the Lord until his final breath? Well, it's because God purposed it. It was the right time. Why was it that Zacchaeus spent all those years in religion? Or Saul of Tarsus, why was it that he breathed out hatred and even killed people until such time as the Lord stopped him there on the road to Damascus? Well, it's because that was the Lord's time. Paul even said that, that "he had been separated from his mother's womb, but when it pleased God to reveal Christ in me," he said, "that's when I knew him." Then he didn't know the Lord. That's what you can testify to. So we see the church typified there, rejoicing. If the Lord has taught you of himself, you will rejoice coming to him.

In verses 18-23, here we see specifically two promises that are given for the prosperity of the church in the world. Back before the Lord opened my eyes to Christ and showed me that this matter of salvation is entirely his work from beginning to end, as a preacher I would strive. I would always think, "I've got to be doing something better. I've got to be praying more. I've got to be in the right spirit in order for the Lord to work in the people that he brings to hear me." So there was this constant conditional thinking that somehow if I wasn't right, then God couldn't be right. Do you see how foolish that is? That's idolatry.

But the joy to know, because there are discouraging times. If you want discouragement, try being a preacher of the Gospel in this day and age. You'll be alone. You'll be isolated. You'll get hate mail. You'll get people questioning you. Unless the Lord has raised you up to preach the Gospel, it will wear you out. Just flat wear you out. But I find comfort in the fact that the Lord is going to get his work done with or without me. I say in spite of me. Whose sheep are they? They're the Lord's.

That's the call here you see in verse 18, "Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to thee." Again, he's speaking historically here of Israel where for a time they were in captivity. They were nothing and yet in a day, the Lord delivered them out of captivity, brought them back to the land, and built that temple again to where those of the nations who had before been their dominators now were their subjects. And spiritually speaking, those that come to Christ in spite of the opposition of the heart of men toward the Gospel, they gather themselves and come to thee but it's not based on any power in myself or you, it's based upon God purposing it to be so. I know for a fact you wouldn't be sitting here listening to me right now preaching this Gospel had the Lord not gathered you. There is not a lot of fanfare in how I preach. I don't have a lot of funny stories to tell, thankfully. I don't have a lot of interesting illustrations, thankfully. It's the word. It's the Gospel. You know that whenever you come that the Lord has purposed you come and sit and listen for one reason: to hear Christ exalted. That's it. Do you know what? I'm glad to have it so. If in the end people forget who Ken Wimer is, that's a good thing. Like John the Baptist said, "Christ must increase, I must decrease."

But he says to them, "Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to thee. As I live, saith the LORD, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee, as a bride doeth." We see here two promises: one in verse 17 that the church would certainly grow, where it says, "the children shall make haste." It was promised that the church would be enlarged, that it would include a number far beyond even physical Israel. That multitudes, in verse 18, would flock here it says "to thee," to the church, I say to Christ. And be made part of that body. You know, those that come to the Lord Jesus Christ as the Mediator, come to the church, they're described, as Bob read in Hebrews 12:22-23, the church of the firstborn, he's the firstborn.

We are gathered to him and so we lift up our eyes and behold. That's all we do. We behold what the Lord is pleased to do and the promise there is that he will do it. He will do his work. I know if we sit around in here in small numbers sometimes, you begin to wonder, "Is the Lord at work or isn't he?" Well, you're here. I'm here. That's a great work, the fact that I could even sit here as a sinner and rejoice in this message in Christ and him crucified. Whether anybody else believes it or not, I need it. I need it.

The danger comes when you try to make things happen. "Let's get this program started. Let's start a Thursday night visitation. We've got all these neighbors down this street we haven't bugged yet so let's go start pounding on doors and see if we can't get them out.

We're right here under the nose." That's how people start thinking in terms of making things happen and do you know what? When you start thinking that way, sometimes the Lord just let's you have at it and in bringing in people, you bring in all kinds of trouble. I'm just as happy to let the Lord do the sifting and me stay out of the way. He has raised me up for one thing: to stand before you and exalt Christ and feed the flock. Anybody you want to bring, you can bring. You invite them and if the Lord brings them great, but don't try to make things happen. It can only be trouble and sorrow in the end. Most congregations like that end up a little leaven leavens the whole lump. You start catering to people. Try to figure out what we've got to do better to get them here. Why they're not here. What are we going to do? The reason they're not there is because obviously they're not hungry enough. The Lord hasn't given them that desire and hunger to hear of Christ and him alone. But pray he never takes the desire away from you or me because that's why I'm here. I need him.

But the second promise that we see here is there in verse 18, that those that are added to the church won't be a burden, won't be a blemish to her, but rather a strength and an ornament. Do you see that? You know, when man tries to add, it becomes a burden. I know of some preachers that long ago gave up, if they ever did preach the Gospel, but they certainly aren't now and they've got all kinds of problems. When they get together with other preachers, they spend all their time talking about the problems in their church. Got this. Got that. Wearing themselves out.

Here the Lord said, "As I live, saith the LORD, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament." Is an ornament a burden? You ladies are wearing some ornaments around your neck, on your ears, if it was a burden, you wouldn't be wearing it. It's designed to beautify and that's how the Lord describes these that when they are brought, they will not be a burden. There is not going to be a division, even though they're being brought from other nations. The whole idea of Jew and Gentile getting along, that was novel, and yet the Lord says, "When I bring them, they will be an ornament," and notice, "and bind them on thee, as a bride doeth." It will be like a bride prepared for the bridegroom without any kind of blemish.

That's how the church is described. If you look over, hold your finger there and look over in Revelation 19:7. Do you see why I'm just as happy to let the Lord do his work? He's going to do it anyway. I get people coming to me and calling and saying, "Well, what do you think we ought to do about So-and-so?" Well, if the Lord has impressed you to do something, then do it but as for me, I know one thing: he has purposed me to prayerfully prepare for next Sunday and stand up and preach. And if the Lord will draw them great for her, if not, I know this: everybody is here today that's supposed to be here. There is not one person missing. You looking around trying to figure out where is So-and-so and how come they haven't been here in so long, do you know what? You're wearing yourself out. Why are you here? If you're needy, if you're hungry and Christ is the bread, do you worry about people that aren't here? I need him and I know that he's going to draw every one.

Here in Revelation 19:7, you see the same language is over here. Verse 13 says, "Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains." "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him." Who? Those sinners that he has redeemed and drawn by his Spirit to himself. "For the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready." Think of a bride adorned for her bridegroom. That's what we have in Christ. It's not what's under the dress that's important, it's the dress. It's the bridegroom. It's being adorned for that bridegroom.

And the Lord is describing here sinners. This is an amazing thing, sinners who will be an ornament. Sinners who will be as one prepared as a bride for that bridegroom. Do you know why the Lord is delighted with them even though you might fuss about them? Be careful who you fuss with, you might be spending eternity with them. It's because they are clothed in the very righteousness of God himself that Christ worked out and upon the completion of his death was imputed to their account. They are beautiful. They are beautiful in God's eyes.

So that's the promise and this is not some small feat. As I mentioned to you before as you read down there, whatever the waste and desolate places that were before now, as the Lord brings his people together, there is no earthly land that is going to be able to contain the number that God has purposed to save. God continues to do his work as you see there in verse 22, "I will lift up mine hand to the nations," and salvation is not a bridge that's there for you to cross if you will. No, as it's described here, the hand of God is not short that he might save. Here, "Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the nations, and set up my standard to the people." Who is God's hand? That's Christ. Who is his standard? That's Christ. "And they shall bring thy sons in their arms and they daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders. And kings shall be thy nursing fathers." I've often said that the Lord will prosper a business where you work and where I work, God will prosper a whole company for one of his elect's sake to feed them, to take care of them, to protect them. He'll prosper a nation for his elect's sake. That's what it's describing there. No earthly king is going to be able to stop what God has purposed to do. "And their queens thy nursing mothers." He nurtured Moses in Pharaoh's court, Pharaoh's house for 40 years. It was no obstacle to God to do his work. He turns the heart of the king however he will.

So all of these things are to remind us that this work is his to do and that brings me to the final point which I realize I've gone over but as we see there in verses 24 through 26, those who would object to say that certain situations are too difficult for the Lord. "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered?" That's the question. That's the objection. "Once that prey is in that lion's mouth, you're telling me it's going to come out safely?" Yes, that's what the Lord is saying.

"The lawful captive delivered?" You think about being a lawful captive, you were lawfully captive to Satan because you were a sinner. You were lawfully captive to God's law and that condemnation because you're a sinner. You were born in sin. You were born that way in captivity.

But look at verse 25. Don't you like the "buts" of Scripture? "But thus saith the LORD, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away," whatever has held you captive is going to be done away. He led captivity captive. "And the prey of the terrible shall be delivered," just like David delivering one of his sheep out of the mouth of that bear, that lion untouched. Whenever they put Daniel in the lions' den, the mouth of the lion was stopped. There is no case too hard for God. None. Some people talk about being hardened in sin, I was hardened in self-righteousness. There is no reason in the world I should be standing here today talking to you of the grace of God because I was raised just the opposite but when it please God to reveal Christ in me. I know this to be so.

The Lord said, "I will contend with him that contendeth with thee," not I will try to save my children, "I will save them." If you try to save your children, you're going to find out they'll become mean monsters. The more you talk to them, the more you badger them, the more you bug them, the more you argue with them about what they should be believing and doing, the harder they're going to get. Do you know why? Because that's you trying to save them. Leave them alone. Seriously, leave them alone. Take them as they are. They're lost and the sooner you admit they're lost, the better off they'll be knowing it. Don't try to go back to, "Well, you know, I raised you under the Gospel and you ought to be believing or doing something." That's you trying to save your children and do you know what? God may just let you. They have to be brought low just like you and I and see themselves as wretches before a holy God and know that there's no hope apart from Christ having done the work.

He says, "I will save thy children." That's my prayer. "And I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh." The Lord is going to remove all obstacles. "They shall be drunken with their own blood, as with sweet wine: and all flesh shall know that I the LORD am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One," notice, of who? "Of Jacob," that supplanter, Jacob. Certainly he is, the Lord is the Redeemer of sinners.