

## The Servant Songs of Isaiah

In the ever growing clear vision of the Messiah, the Hebrew prophet introduces Yahweh's Servant (42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12). It is a message of God's saving grace. God's eternal purpose is redemption, and He works out that eternal purpose in history. The climax is Isaiah chapter 53 has been "the most important text in the Old Testament."

As you proceed through the servant poems, a careful reading reveals the clear image of a person. There is a growing connection and transition between the nation and a person as an innocent, substitutionary sufferer.

Many scholars have noted the comparison between these poems/songs and Jesus' ministry. Jesus began His public ministry by meeting the needs of hurting people and preaching the good news of the kingdom of God. As time passed and he was rejected he concentrated on teaching His disciples. After Peter made his great confession of faith in Christ, he began to make a steady emphasis in His teaching on His coming rejection, death and resurrection. The life of Christ comes to a grand fulfillment of Hebrew prophecy in His vicarious, substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of Israel and the world and His resurrection.

### The Introduction of the Chosen Servant in (42:1-4)

**Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights.  
I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations (42:1).**

Yahweh introduces His Servant. The stress in this introductory poem is on the character, method and mission of the Servant of Yahweh. The Servant is divinely chosen, called, anointed, equipped and commissioned. The LORD sustains Him who is to be a prophet, priest and teacher.

The humble, gentle Servant willingly assumes His responsibilities. He is characterized as gentle and unobtrusive in manner, yet strong and resolved (vv. 2-3). A silent spiritual

influence is at work until the mission is accomplished. He will keep at the task until it is finished. "He will not be disheartened or crushed, Until He has established justice in the earth" (v. 4a,b).

Matthew quotes verses 1-4 with slight variation in Matthew 12:18-21 attributing it to Jesus' ministry in Israel. Jesus did the Father's will and obeyed Him fully. He could do something Israel could never do because He was completely under the control of the Holy Spirit all the days of His life. God has placed His Spirit on Him, which is clearly a Messianic characteristic (cf. 61:1; Matthew 3:16; 4:1; Luke 4:14, 18-21; 3:22).

The task of the Servant is to establish "justice in the earth." This is the task of Immanuel, God with us. Only God could accomplish such an awesome responsibility given to the Servant. When Jesus returns at His Second Coming, He will bring justice to all the nations of the earth. Israel's achievements were never at such a high level. Indeed, she was characterized as being unrighteous. However, the heavenly Father declared, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased"(Matthew 3:17; 17:5). There are sufficient arguments in the New Testament for maintaining that

The Mission of the Servant (49:1-6).

Here the Servant is seen as a prophet addressing His call and commission for the restoration of Israel and the redemption of all mankind.

The "LORD called Me from the womb," meaning before I was born, as He did Jeremiah (v. 1). He has equipped Him with wisdom from God's Word (v.2), and protected Him. The Rabbis had a saying concerning the names of the six persons who were named before they were born: Isaac, Ishmael, Moses, Solomon, Josiah and the name of the Messiah. Jesus Christ existed long before the angel told Mary that she would become pregnant by the Holy Spirit and bear a son and call His name Jesus (Matthew 1:18-25; John 1:1-3).

Why is the Servant called "Israel" in this passage (v. 3)? We know from the context

that the nation is not being referred to because it will be the Servant who will bring the people back to God. The Messiah is called "Israel" here because He fulfills all of God's expectations for the nation. His mission is to restore Israel and to bring light to the Gentiles (v. 6). The Messiah-Servant will receive the worship He deserves when He returns at His Second coming (v. 6; cf. Philippians 2:9-11).

I will make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth (v. 6).

The apostle Paul and Barnabas witnessed the rejection of the gospel by a Jewish audience. Paul said to these individuals, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46). Then he quoted to them the words of Isaiah 49:6. Furthermore, "when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48). Paul uses this verse to support his identifying the Servant as the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The Servant of the Lord is the "light of the world," and the One who brings salvation to the end of the earth (John 8:12). People all over the world, Jewish and non-Jewish, walk in darkness until Jesus Christ comes into their lives. He alone is salvation to all who believe on Him (Acts 4:12).

The devout man named Simeon, filled with the Holy Spirit, saw the infant Jesus in the Temple, took Him into his arms, and "blessed God." He said, "For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, Which Thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, and the glory of Thy people Israel" (Luke 2:30-32). Simeon and Luke understood this to be fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

A Steadfast Obedient Servant (50:4-9)

We encounter the suffering of the Servant for the first time in these songs. He experiences unbroken fellowship with God. The desire of His heart is to do the will of

God. In spite of suffering, He will remain unfaltering in His faith in God. He is determined to do God's will even though He will be rejected by His people.

The Lord God has opened My ear; And I was not disobedient,  
Nor did I turn back. I gave My back to those who strike Me  
And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard;  
I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting (v. 5-6).

The people of Israel would be rebellious toward God's chosen Servant and treat Him cruelly. This is the consistent treatment of criminals in those days. Is this not the way in which God's Servant was treated before His enemies crucified Him? "Then they spat in His face and beat Him with their fists and others slapped Him . . . Jesus he scourged . . . And they stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. And after weaving a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they kneeled down before Him and mocked Him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' And they spat on Him, and took the reed and began to beat Him on the head, . . and they led Him away to crucify Him" (Matthew 26:67;27:26, 30). The scourging was terrible torture. They stripped the victim, tied his hands behind him, bent the victim double and tied him to a short post. The lash was a long leather thong, studded at intervals with sharpened pieces of bone and pellets of lead. The body of the victim was reduced to raw, bleeding flesh of inflamed and bleeding welts. Men often died under scourging and lost their reason. Few remained conscious to the end of a scourging. These words of the poet were fulfilled in the suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 22:63; John 19:1-3).

How does the Suffering Servant remain faithful? The Lord comforts, sustains and strengthens Him. He is a willing obedient sufferer who leans upon Yahweh.

For the Lord God helps Me, Therefore, I am not disgraced;  
Therefore, I have set My face like a flint, And I know that I shall not be ashamed.  
He who vindicates Me is near. . . (v. 7-8a). Behold, the Lord God helps Me;  
Who is he who condemns Me? (v. 9a,b).

The Suffering Servant (52:12-53:13)

How can a person possibly miss the vicarious, substitutionary, suffering of this pure and righteous innocent Servant? Isaiah sees Him wounded, bruised, chastised, pierced, plagued and cursed for our sins. The LORD God provides this perfect Substitute as an atonement that results in full redemption of the guilty sinner. When we study this passage in the light of history--the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ--it becomes quite evident that He is the Suffering Servant of Yahweh. Verses 4-6 read like an eyewitness account of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ at Calvary.

No where else in Hebrew thought do we find the idea emphasized of the innocent suffering vicariously for the guilty sinner. Israel is never said to suffer for others; she only suffers for her own guilt. She suffered captivity and exile because she was guilty. Here we find the innocent suffering for the guilty sinner. The Suffering Servant is the Suffering Savior.

Isaiah 54-66

The LORD God Reigns!

The song of salvation through the vicarious, suffering sacrifice comes to a great fortissimo of triumph. The Suffering messiah is victorious. The sacrifice is complete. The price of redemption has been paid in full. He has risen from the dead. He lives! "The Lord God omnipotent reigns!" History is in His hands. He causes all things to work for His redemptive glory. He is the sovereign God who transcends and controls history for His redemptive glory.

Isaiah begins chapter 54 with a glorious shout of joy because the Suffering Servant has accomplished our redemption. He says, "Shout for joy, O barren one, you who have borne no children; Break forth into joyful shouting and cry aloud, you who have not travailed . . ." (v.1). There is reason for this shouting. Those who are barren because of the captivity will now bear a tent full of children. They will have experienced God's blessings. "Enlarge the place of your tent; Stretch out the curtains of your dwellings, spare not; lengthen your cords, and strengthen your pegs . . .. Your descendents will

possess nations, and they will resettle the desolate cities" (vv. 2-3).

The LORD, the Holy One of Israel, is our Redeemer and He has had compassion upon His people. Even though He chastised Israel because of her rebellion, He has remained steadfast in His unshakable love.

### SING THE INVITATION (55:1-3)

Because He is Suffering Servant of Yahweh He can now offer an invitation for everyone to come and receive living water freely.

"Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk Without money and without cost.  
"Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,  
"Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live;  
And I will make an everlasting covenant with you,  
According to the faithful mercies shown to David (vv. 1-3).

Based upon Isaiah 53 everything has now been prepared. The word "Ho" in verse one expresses a deep sorrow on account of the unsatisfied spiritual thirst and toilsome labor.

The "water" speaks of spiritual satisfaction, and "wine and milk" is figurative of spiritual revival and nourishment (2 Peter 2:2). The true believer "longs for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation." The "waters" reminds us of the word of Jesus Christ in John 4:14; 7:37.

Because of His redemptive work on the cross He can offer us spiritual water that will quench our spiritual thirst. Jesus offers us the great invitation to come to Him and drink. Jesus said, ". . . whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life. . . If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'"

The one who comes and drinks of these waters must have an intense hunger for God. He must come like the prodigal (Luke 15:16ff). The only way to satisfy the soul is

obedient faith.

This is a marvelous picture of grace in the Old Testament. These blessings and gifts of divine grace are obtained by faith alone. The humble believer can receive this spiritual satisfaction by a sense of need and readiness to accept it. The apostle Paul stated it wisely, "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace" (Romans 11:6). "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The resurrected, glorified Savior offers the same invitation. "I will give to the one who thirsts from the springs of the water of life without cost" (Revelation 21:6). In Revelation 22:16-17, He said:

"I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star." The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.

What must a person do to receive this water that satisfies? God says,

"Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, According to the faithful mercies shown to David" (Isaiah 55:3). "Seek [acquire experiential knowledge] the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near" (v. 6). "Call" now while He stands ready with super abundance of grace to meet your need.

This "everlasting covenant . . . according to the faithful mercies shown to David" is the New Covenant (Jer. 32:40; Heb. 13:20). Who is Christ. How can God offer such an invitation to everyone, including the Gentiles? God's ways are not our ways (55:8-11; cf. 59:1-2). "Behold, the Lord's hand is not short that it cannot save; neither is His ear so dull that it cannot hear" (59:1). God established David's everlasting throne with the idea that behind David stood David's greater Son.

Don't blame God for the separation that sin brings. It is not God; it is "your iniquities"

that "have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, so that He does not hear"(59:2). Therefore the solution is quite clear. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the LORD, and He will have compassion on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (55:7). "Let him return to the LORD" "involves a complete right-about-face." Respond to this great invitation and receive His light.

### SEE THE LIGHT (60:1-7)

Chapter sixty is a blaze of light in the spiritual darkness that covered the whole earth. Jewish people and Gentiles are sitting in darkness of unbelief. The prophet shouts, "Arise, shine; for your light has come, And the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples; but the Lord will rise upon you and His glory will appear upon you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising" (60:1-3).

In the second servant poem Isaiah had declared, "I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (49:6).

Who is this "light" that has visited those dwelling in darkness? Who can penetrate the spiritual darkness that covers the earth? Again Dr. Luke writes, "Because of the tender mercy of our God, with which the Sunrise from on high will visit us, To shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:78-79, all capitalized words quote Old Testament). It is the heavenly glory of the Lord. It is Christ that flares up (Isaiah 6:3; 24:23; 40:5; 58:8).

The Light of the world, the Lord Jesus Christ gives us a perfect, plentiful, complete understanding of this great salvation. With the strong voice of the great I AM Jesus stated assertively, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life" (John 8:12).

Isaiah had promised, "The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them" (9:2). They saw the "great light" that illuminated their spiritual darkness when Jesus walked the land. Jesus is that "great light" (cf. John 1:4-5). He said, "I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone



who believes in Me will not remain in darkness" (12:46).

Gentiles are drawn to the light of Jesus. Even at the birth of Jesus non-Jews came to worship Him (Matthew 2:1ff). How insightful to compare Isaiah 60:19-20 with Revelation 21:4; 22:5. There is a wonderful day coming when we will no longer need the moon and the sun because "you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, and your God for your glory" (Isaiah 60:19). In the "new heaven and new earth" "the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God has illuminated it, and its lamp is the Lamb. And the nations shall walk by its light; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it"(Revelation 21:23-24). There will be no night there (v. 25) "because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever" (22:5).

#### SAVIOR'S SELF-IDENTIFICATION (61:1-2)

The speaker in Isaiah 61:1-2 is the Servant of the LORD, the Messiah whom we saw in chapters 42-53. What the speaker says is identical with what has already been said about Him (42:1; 48:16; 50:4; 42:7; 49:7).

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, Because the Lord has anointed me  
To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners; To proclaim the favorable  
year of the Lord And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who  
mourn.(61:1-2).

This is the most beautiful self-portrait of the Messiah. Jesus Christ saw Himself as the fulfillment of these grand passages in Isaiah. After reading aloud from the scroll of Isaiah 61:1-2 that was handed Him in the Synagogue at Nazareth, He rolled up the scroll and began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing (Luke 4:21). He announced that He was the one to fulfill this prophecy. It "stands fulfilled." The "favorable year" means the real year of Jubilee had arrived. The Messianic prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled that day. The age had arrived!

Luke 3:22; 4:1, 18 affirms to us that "the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily

form like a dove . . . and Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit . . . was led about by the Spirit in the wilderness . . . and Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit."

No one binds up the wounds of broken hearts like Jesus. In Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus issues an invitation and the only requirement is to be "weary and heavy-laden." He binds up the broken hearted and brings relief to the afflicted, suffering humanity. Jesus put the compassion of His loving heart into action. Luke 4:40 tells us, "while the sun was setting, all who had any sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and laying His hands on everyone of them, He was healing them" (cf. 7:13-15; 8:43-56; 13:11-15; 17:11-19).

It is interesting that Jesus ended His reading of this passage in Isaiah with "to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord." Isaiah, however, did not stop there. He continued, "And the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn" (61:2b,c).

Jesus ushered in the Gospel of grace and the New Covenant at His first coming. When He returns it will be "the day of vengeance of our God." Jesus foretold the coming of the day of vengeance upon the nation of Israel and Jerusalem in Luke 21:22-24. The Suffering Servant of Yahweh has been realized in the Son of Man who will reign as sovereign King.

#### SOVEREIGN KING REIGNS (65:17-66:24)

There will be a new heaven and a new earth. Isaiah brings his grand Gospel message to a climax when he sees the sovereign LORD God reigning throughout eternity as King of kings and Lord of lords. God reigns throughout eternity and He is in charge of the affairs of the nations. He makes a new everlasting covenant with those who accept His sovereignty and salvation. They live in a new city of incomparable beauty and complete security, the New Jerusalem, where the LORD God and the Lamb are the temple and the Lamb is the light (cf. Revelation 21:22-27).

This new work of creation demands the sovereign creative power which brought about

the original creation. "For behold, I create a new heaven and a new earth" (65:17-19). Isaiah's picture of the Messianic age penetrates regions beyond the spiritual horizon of any and all Old Testament prophets. This radically new creation will powerfully demonstrate the glory of God the Creator. It will be so dramatic that the old heavens and earth will not be remembered. All the ravages of sin and depravity will be remembered no more. We cannot imagine what is in store for all of creation (Romans 8:19-22).

The present system of universe will roll up like a scroll (Isaiah 34:4; Matthew 24:29; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 6:12-14; Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; Romans 9:19-21; Mark 13:25). He makes all things new. In the New Jerusalem, in the new heaven and new earth, the Lord God reigns!

From where Isaiah stood time and eternity, the age of grace, whatever the millennium may or may not be and the new heaven and new earth were not sharply focused. He saw the grand eternal landscape.

One bright morning we will see people gathered there "from every nation and all tribes and people and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes." We'll join in that heavenly multitude singing a new song:

"Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation . . . ." (Revelation 5:9). Oh, come Lord Jesus, come!

Isaiah ends his scroll with a striking contrast and reminder to every generation. Our future depends upon what we do with Jesus Christ today. For those who will humble themselves and believe in Him as their suffering Servant who died for their sins we will continue eternally before Him in His presence (66:22-23). However, for those who reject His offer of grace today there is eternal rejection and suffering (66:24).

One thing is certain, "All mankind will come to bow down before Me," says the LORD God (66:23). Before whom will they bow? Philippians 2:9-11 says it is at the name of

Jesus that every knee will bow and "every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." There will be no exceptions when He returns. The LORD God reigns!

When the famous composer George Frederick Handel was sixty years old he was going through extremely difficult circumstances in his life. He was probably at his lowest financially, physically and emotionally. He had been ruined by jealous rivals in the music world and creditors were threatening to jail him. He was partially paralyzed, experiencing clinical depression and at the point of giving up.

One day he received a letter and package from Charles Jennens. In it were papers on which were scribbled passages of Scripture. Handel mulled over those Scripture verses and began to write. Day after day he wrote. He walked about in his room, weeping, crying and writing. With tears flowing down his cheeks he cried, "Hallelujah!" Handel finally went to bed exhausted and slept for seventeen hours. He had completed the greatest song on the sovereignty of God ever written--the Messiah.

In London in 1743 the first audience that listened to Messiah was so deeply moved by it that when the "Hallelujah Chorus" was reached, the king of England and the people stood to their feet. "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth, and shall reign, King of kings and Lord of lords, forever and ever. Hallelujah!" Yes, He reigns forever and ever. Hallelujah!