

The Songs Of The Servant #1

Introduction. Isaiah began prophesying about 740 B.C. and ended in 700 B.C. God, through Isaiah, gives us a clear picture of what was to happen, not only in the immediate future for Israel, but how God was going to bring the Messiah, His "Suffering Servant," into the world.

Isaiah's discussion in chapters 40-66 is the Babylonian captivity and the reasons for it, and finally the restoration from it. However, there was going to be a greater deliverance than from Babylon, and there would be a greater deliverer than Cyrus.

The term "Servant Songs," of which there are four (42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12), is something of a misnomer, for there is no evidence they were ever sung. Through the prophetic word the reader's eye is directed away from the pagan gods to God's servant (cf. 41:8-10), in whom the servant mission of Israel finds perfect expression. We are given a view of Christ's life and character in the days of His flesh, His tenderness as well as His power, and the great deliverance He would bring, not only for the Jews, but for all the world.

I. ***The Servant Has A Mission (Isaiah 42:1-9)***

- A. The first "song" describes the work of a special, ideal servant who accomplishes God's purposes for Israel and the nations. This song depicts the servant as a just king who brings justice to the earth and relief for the oppressed. Christ applied these verses to Himself (Matthew 12:15-21).
- B. The Servant was to be chosen by God (Isaiah 42:1).
 1. Not just anyone could perform this task.
 2. God would delight in this One, and a demonstration of this delight was the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Christ (Matthew 3:17; 17:5; John 1:29-34).
- C. He stands in sharp contrast with worldly conquerors (Isaiah 42:2).
 1. King Cyrus is introduced later (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1). The Servant's demeanor is different than ordinary men.
 2. Jesus did not enter into violent disputes with false teachers; He used the power of words (John 7:46).
- D. Christ would have pity on their low estate (Isaiah 42:3).
 1. He would not crush men or quench their spirit (Matthew 5:1-12; 9:36).
 2. He would not bind burdens hard to bear (Matthew 11:28-30; 23:4; Acts 15:5, 10).
- E. Already the element of suffering in the servant's experience, which finds fuller and fuller expression until it achieves dominance in the fourth song, is gently suggested in vs. 4.

- F. The tremendous power of creation is now channeled for the support of His servant. Ancient Near-Eastern prisons were extremely dark; but this verse teaches that the servant gives liberty as well as light (cf. Isaiah 61:1-2; Luke 4:18-19).

II. ***The Servant Has Great Difficulties (Isaiah 49:1-13)***

- A. The "Servant" is the speaker in these verses. He did not take this duty upon Himself. The Lord called Him into this service.
- B. The Lord knew His Servant from His mother's womb -- this rules out the possibility of the Servant being the nation of Israel.
- C. The Servant was to "restore the preserved ones of Israel" (Isaiah 49:6). Paul was among this remnant (Romans 9:1-8; 11:1-5).
- D. Christ is the light to the Gentiles (Isaiah 9:1-2; Matthew 4:12-16; Acts 13:46-48).
1. Jesus reminded the Syro-Phoenician woman that he had been sent to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:22-24).
 2. When the disciples were sent on the "limited commission," they were explicitly told not to go to the Gentiles (Matthew 10:5-6). In the "great commission" they were sent to all nations (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15).
- E. In the day when God provides salvation for His people, He will come to the aid of His Servant. He will do so at an acceptable time. The acceptable time is now, the gospel age (2 Corinthians 6:2).
- F. To those in the bondage of sin, God says, "Go forth" and "Show yourselves." Take your stand -- declare yourself to be on God's side (Romans 6:17-18). The Lord will make the way for them. The people from all parts of the earth will respond to the Servant's call. In response, the heavens, the earth, and the mountains break forth into singing, for through the Servant "God has comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his people."

III. ***The Servant Will Suffer (Isaiah 50:4-9)***

- A. Although there is no explicit reference to the Servant here, there are many links with the other songs. The divine title "Lord God" also binds this third song together, occurring in four of six verses.
- B. The Servant is prepared to uphold and encourage those who are weary with words of truth. The Jews were weary with sin, and a burden of the law could they not lift; the Gentiles were laden down with idols and all the evils that typically accompany them.
- C. Servants of God have always had difficulty (Isaiah 50:5; cf. Matthew 5:10-12).
1. Israel is rebellious, but God's Servant is responsive even when a destiny of suffering and shame is the subject of God's word to Him.

- He does not draw back but "offers" His body to the tormentors (cf. Jonah 1:3).
2. The striking language of Isaiah 50:6 calls to mind the suffering of our Lord before His journey to the cross (Matthew 26:67-68; 27:26-31).
- D. No reason is given in this section of scripture for His suffering -- we are left to wonder why He had to suffer, which will be more fully explained in the next "song."
1. Who would challenge the Servant's innocence (Mark 14:55-56; John 8:46)?
 2. The one who vindicates Him is always near (cf. John 8:29; 16:32; Romans 1:3-4).
- E. The Servant has violated neither God's former teaching in the law nor His own teaching; He has not mistreated any fellow man. The Servant concludes by saying of those who would condemn Him, "Lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up." The enemies of the Servant will fade away and come to nothing.

Conclusion. It is so impressive to see the work of the Savior specified in the Bible. It establishes confidence in His person and work, and builds faith in the One in whom we have put our trust and we obey from the heart. It will only increase tonight as we assemble and study Isaiah 53, which is the pinnacle of Old Testament prophecy.

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