

The Church of the Servant King

www.cotsk.org

Prophecy Series

(Proph14Y_Prophecy in the Prophets_Isaiah_Chps46-66)

Chapters 46-66 – Introduction

These last twenty-one chapters of Isaiah are filled with eschatological references. As I read these eschatological passages in the remainder of the book of Isaiah, I see even more clearly how the Jews of “religious” Israel and Judah found a basis in Scripture (albeit a misplaced basis) for becoming self-righteous. By the time of Jesus, this self-righteousness had become institutionalized and a part of the very infrastructure and fabric of every facet of social structure in Jewish culture. Jesus threatened to rip this infrastructure apart with His revolutionary teaching. Thus, He became the focus of that infrastructure’s ire and hatred.

In these chapters, some of the eschatological references refer to the execution of judgment by the Lord which we know will occur at His 2nd Advent. Other eschatological passages in these chapters refer to the blessings the nation will experience during that future era we know as the Messianic kingdom. Included among those blessings is the exalted status among the Gentile nations that a redeemed Israel will enjoy. If one were to read no other eschatological passages in the Bible other than Isaiah, one might get the impression that the Gentiles would not be very blessed in the Messianic kingdom. However, we know from a number of other Old Testament passages that Gentiles will be greatly blessed during the kingdom era.

Chapters 40-48, the subject of the previous lesson, dealt prophetically with Cyrus and his role in the Jews’ return from Babylonian captivity. The next nine chapters (49-57) deal primarily with the Servant-Messiah fulfilling His ministry of restoring Israel as a covenant people to the land just prior to the dawn of the Messianic kingdom. These chapters (49-57) could be divided into four parts:

- ✓ Salvation is extended to the Gentiles due to Jewish rejection of Him (49-50)
- ✓ The believing remnant is exalted (51.1-52.12)
- ✓ The Servant will be abased and is exalted later (52.13-53.12)
- ✓ The Servant will save both Jews and Gentiles in the Millennium (54-57)

Consider the following sample list of eschatological passages selected from these twenty-one chapters:

- ✓ Isaiah 49.1-26 – The Servant is a Light to the Gentiles
- ✓ Isaiah 54.11-17 – Blessings of righteousness and peace in the kingdom
- ✓ Isaiah 55.12-13 – Blessings upon nature
- ✓ Isaiah 60 – Gentiles bring blessings to a future Jerusalem as a center of world-wide worship
- ✓ Isaiah 65.17-25 – a description of the new heavens and new earth

Isaiah 52.13-53.12 – The Fourth “Song of the Servant”

Introduction

Next to Psalm 22, this passage in Isaiah is perhaps the most vivid description of the Messiah’s Servant role in the Old Testament. Three other passages in Isaiah focus upon the Servant and together, the four passages comprise what is commonly referred to as the “*Servant Songs*.”

- ✓ *Isaiah 42.1-4* – He will not fail in establishing justice for all (Jews and Gentiles).
- ✓ *Isaiah 49.1-6* – focuses upon deliverance provided by the Servant – He restores Israel and gives light to the Gentiles

- ✓ *Isaiah 50.4-9* – emphasizes the God given wisdom possessed by the Servant with very vivid descriptions of His rejection (v. 6) in spite of His sinlessness (v. 5)
- ✓ *Isaiah 52.13-53.12* – the suffering and death of the Servant

Our focus will center upon the fourth of these Servant Songs in this study. These verses are centered between two declarations of God's coming salvation (deliverance) of Jerusalem and the inhabitants of Judah, e.g. 52.7-12 (a call for Jews to depart from captivity and return to the land) and 54.1-10 (God pledges His faithfulness and promises future spiritual productivity by the descendants of the exiles).

Remember that Isaiah is prophesying about the deliverance and the return from Babylonian exile which was to occur approximately 150 years later as a result of Cyrus the Great's decree in 539 B.C. releasing the Jews from their Babylonian imposed exile so that they could return to the land and reconstruct their Temple – an event which was finally accomplished in 516 B.C. As we have seen on so many occasions in our study of Isaiah's prophetic passages, Isaiah often couches his prophecies of a more imminent nature in poetic language that also alludes to events of a more distant nature.

Isaiah began a crescendo in chapter 49 as he anticipates the salvation that God would provide to the exiles. That crescendo reaches its zenith with our passage, but not in the way that the readers would have anticipated. Isaiah's references to God's "mighty arm" of deliverance (50.2; 51.5, 9; 52.10) would have been interpreted with a paradigm of thinking that was more in line with Christ's activities at His yet future 2nd Advent – not His humiliation at His 1st Advent. Isaiah's readers from the 7th Century B.C. through the 1st Century A.D. expected that deliverance to come with overwhelming displays of power and glory. However, Isaiah turned that expectation on end when he reached the pinnacle of his case in 52.13-53.12. Contrary to the Jews expectations and our own, God's greatest power is manifest in the Servant-Messiah's offer of forgiveness and mercy to mankind in return for injustice and cruel rejection.

Beginning in Isaiah 52.13, the prophet devotes 15 verses to a description of a future Servant of God Who would be rejected and suffer at the hands of men while paying the penalty for our sins, thus providing a basis for the spiritual deliverance of all mankind, including that generation of Jews to whom Isaiah ministered. As we shall see, Isaiah's picture of this suffering Servant uses imagery that finds its fulfillment in Jesus. Even though Isaiah sometimes referred to Israel as a servant (e.g. 49.3), there are other occasions such as our passage in which he clearly refers to a unique person. As we will also see, New Testament writers clearly understood Isaiah to be referring to Jesus as the fulfillment of these passages.

Outline of the Passage

- ❖ The Father praises the work of the Servant (52.13-15)
- ❖ Isaiah speaks for Israel in a confession that it has despised Him (53.1-9)
- ❖ The significance of the Servant's death (53.10-12)

Exposition of the Passage

Isa 52.13 – Behold, My Servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted. (NASV)

Isa 52.13 – Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently, He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high. (NKJV)

- ✓ The Servant "prosper" or "deals prudently" – poetic language for accomplishing His mission given to Him by God the Father
- ✓ As a result of His success, the Servant would be "high," "lifted up," and "exalted." These are all terms ascribed to God Himself in Isaiah (see 6.1; 33.10; 57.15), thus the Servant

is equated with God (cf. Acts 2.33; 3.13, 26; Phil 2.9; Col 3.1; Heb 1.3; 8.1; 10.12; 12.2; 1 Pet 3.22).

Isa 52.14 – Just as many were astonished at you, My people, so His appearance was marred more than any man and His form more than the sons of men. (NASV)

Isa 52.14 – Just as many were astonished at you, so His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men. (NKJV)

- ✓ The nations of the world at the time of the Babylonian exile were “astonished” by the subjugation of a nation that was supposedly God’s elect representatives of Him to all the Gentiles.
- ✓ The Servant-Deliverer would also suffer humiliation
- ✓ Rather than appearing as the conquering avenger that the Jews so desired, the Servant would be made undesirable in appearance by the bruising that a Satanically blinded and inspired world would inflict upon Him.

Isa 52.15 – Thus, He will sprinkle many nations, Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him; for what had not been told them they will see, and what they had not heard they will understand. (NASV)

Isa 52.15 – So shall He sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; for what had not been told them they shall see, and what they had not heard they shall consider. (NKJV)

- ✓ The word for sprinkle is *yazzeḥ* and can be translated “sprinkle” or “startle”
- ✓ If “sprinkle” is the correct translation, Isaiah meant that the Servant would perform a priestly function of providing cleansing from sin to the world (cf. Lev 4.6; 8.11; 14.7; 1 Pet 1.1-2; Heb 10.22)
- ✓ If “startle” is correct, then Isaiah probably meant that since the Servant was such an unlikely candidate, He would shock the world with His claims and when God did exalt Him.
- ✓ Both meanings are correct and inherent in the word and Isaiah was using a double entendre here
- ✓ When God the Father exalts the Servant-Son-Messiah, even kings will be amazed. Kings and rulers were amazed at Jesus’ life, claims and miracles during His 1st Advent and at His 2nd Advent, kings and rulers will be equally amazed.

Isa 53.1-3 – Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. (NASV)

Isa 53.1-3 – Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. (NKJV)

- ✓ Expositors have called these verses the “holy of holies” of Isaiah’s book

- ✓ The question – “Who has believed our report?” – is Isaiah’s way of calling attention to the small number of the world’s population who are believers.
- ✓ The Jews of Isaiah’s era, as well as of Jesus’ day, could not believe that this “marred” and humiliated individual was the “arm of the Lord” that would deliver them
- ✓ Instead of appearing as a powerful oak tree, the Servant-Messiah will appear as a tender plant subject to the same afflictions that plague all mankind
- ✓ He arose to prominence during a period of spiritual drought in Israel, i.e. “parched ground”
- ✓ Jesus came as a baby of lowly origins, not as a king. He was not highly esteemed. Even John the Baptist did not recognize Jesus for Who He really was. When Jesus came to John to be baptized, Jesus blended with the crowds.
- ✓ Our culture is especially prone to ignore or dismiss those in spiritual service who undergo suffering and hardships as losers. Everyone wants to be associated with the popular religious activities that attract people in droves. However, the predominant pattern we see in Scripture of God’s most faithful people is a pattern of suffering, isolation, and even rejection by the masses.

Isa 53.4-6 – Surely, our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall upon Him. (NASV)

Isa 53.4-6 – Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. (NKJV)

- ✓ Isaiah emphasizes that the Servant was not stricken and afflicted for any sins of His own, but for “our” sins.
- ✓ This was contrary to what His onlookers may have initially thought
- ✓ Because the Hebrew word for “stricken” refers to being afflicted with leprosy, a tradition arose among many Jews that the Servant of Isaiah would be a leper.
- ✓ As the spiritual man or woman who heard or read Isaiah’s description of this Servant’s sufferings, they would have been directed immediately back to Genesis 3.15 where we find the first prophecy of the coming Deliverer – “He [the Seed of the woman] shall bruise your [Satan] head, and you [Satan] shall bruise His [the Deliverer’s] heel.”
- ✓ Is there physical healing in the Servant’s propitiatory sacrifice and His physical sufferings? During the believer’s life on earth, when there is physical healing, it is because it is the Lord’s will for that person’s life and suffering to be spared. However, ultimately, we are all healed physically with a resurrection body.

Isa 53.7-9 – He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due? His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was a rich man in His death because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth. (NASV)

- ✓ Isaiah prophesies that the Servant would not provide a defense for Himself although He had every right to do so.

- ✓ He was not a helpless victim, but One Who knowingly and willingly submitted to death
- ✓ All of the references to Christ as a sacrificial lamb in the New Testament spring from this passage in Isaiah
- ✓ While Israel and Judah deserved their suffering, their Deliverer-Servant did not
- ✓ While Isaiah wrote to his people and seems to indicate that the death and suffering of the Servant was for their benefit, other passages of Scripture indicate that His death and suffering was for the benefit of all (cf. 1 Jn 2.2).
- ✓ Isaiah indicates that both wicked men and rich men would be involved in the Servant's death and burial. Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus so he could bury Him in a new tomb he had purchased (see Matt 27.57-61)

Isa 53.10-12 – But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors.

- ✓ The offspring of the Servant are believers of all time. This is a reference to spiritual children, not physical.
- ✓ As Cyrus was God's agent through whom the Jews were delivered, so would the Servant be God's agent to restore humanity to God Himself.
- ✓ Believers share in the benefits associated with the Servant's sacrificial death by being assured of a place in eternity with God.
- ✓ Jesus was "numbered with the transgressors" although He was not one of them in order to accomplish salvation.