

The Servant of the Lord—Introduction

Jesus was the Servant of the Lord, obedient to the Father. We know this because the New Testament tells us this.

Philippians 2:5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,

Philippians 2:6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,

Philippians 2:7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.

Philippians 2:8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Even Jesus Himself says the same the same thing.

Mark 10:45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

And Jesus said that the Old Testament Scriptures were written about Him:

Luke 24:44 Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written

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about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

Luke 24:45 Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,

Luke 24:46 and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day,

Luke 24:47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

The Gospels are characterized by the way they individually portray Jesus:

Matthew: Jesus as the King

Mark: Jesus as the Servant

Luke: Jesus as Son of Man

John: Jesus as Son of God

The Gospel of Mark is said to characterize Jesus as “the Servant.” in the quote from Mark 10:45, Jesus Himself says this.

So where did Jesus get this idea? Or why would the Gospel think to characterize Jesus as “servant?” The New Testament is founded upon the Old Testament. Jesus’ work on the cross and the provision for salvation is manifest throughout the Old Testament.

Like Samson, Jesus was dedicated to a mission from God the Father from birth. The Angel of the Lord, the pre-Incarnate Christ, instructed Samson’s parents to raise him as a Nazirite. However, Mary, the mother

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of Jesus, was told that her son would be a king and sit on David's throne forever.

Luke 1:30 The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God.

Luke 1:31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus.

Luke 1:32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David;

Luke 1:33 and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.”

How does Jesus go from being designated a king to being a servant? It comes from the Old Testament.

The New Testament is near meaningless were it not for the Old Testament. And we know that information about Jesus is all through the Old Testament. He tells us this:

John 5:39 You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me;

Luke 24:25 And He said to them, “O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!

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Luke 24:26 Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?”

Luke 24:27 Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

In order to understand where Jesus got the idea that He was a servant and not just a king, we need to visit the archives of the Old Testament. One of the books that explains this is Isaiah. In particular, there are four poems, sometimes called the Servant Songs that are prophecies of Jesus as the “Suffering Servant.” Herman taught extensively on one of those which is found in Isaiah chapter 53. It is the most well-known of the four. There are three other songs in the book of Isaiah as well. Before we look at those, we must understand something about the book of Isaiah.

Isaiah was a “major” prophet who lived during the reigns of the Kings of Judah Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah and Manasseh. Traditionally, Isaiah’s ministry was dated 750-680 B.C.

Isaiah 1:1 The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz concerning Judah and Jerusalem, which he saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

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King of Judah	Reign (According to Unger)
Uzziah	791-740 B.C.
Jotham	750-736 B.C.
Ahaz	736-716 B.C.
Hezekiah	716-687 B.C.
Manasseh	696-642 B.C.

Dates overlap indicating “coregencies.”

“Major prophet” is partly a reference to the size of the book of Isaiah. But also, because of the size, Isaiah covers many important topics. It is a book often quoted or referred to in the New Testament.

The book of Isaiah is divided into three general sections (Unger):

Outline
Prophecies from the Standpoint of Isaiah’s Day, Ch. 1—35
Prophecies Concerning Judah and Jerusalem, ch. 1—12
Prophecies Against Enemy Nations, ch. 13—23
Prophecies of Kingdom Establishment, 24—27
Prophecies Concerning Judah and Assyria, ch. 28—35
Historical Interlude, Ch. 36—39
Prophecies from the Standpoint of the Exile, Ch. 40—66
Comfort in the Message of Redemption, ch. 40
Comfort in the Lord’s Vindication, ch. 41
Comfort in the Lord’s Servant, ch. 42
Comfort in National Restoration, ch. 43—45
Comfort in the Downfall of Idolatry, ch. 46—48
Comfort in the Prophecy of Messiah-Redeemer, ch. 49—57
Comfort in the Prospect of Israel’s Future Glory, ch. 58—66

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The first section and second sections concern issues in Isaiah's time. The third section deals with prophecies in the distant future from Isaiah's perspective. As you can see from the outline, the third section deals with "comfort."

The four songs are contained in chapters 42-53, in the third section.

These four songs are characterized by Duane Lindsey as follows (from his table of contents in his book "A Study in Isaiah: The Servant Songs.")

Characterization	Scripture
The Call of the Servant	42:1-9
The Commission of the Servant	49:1-13
The Commitment of the Servant	50:4-11
The Career of the Servant	52:13-53:12

The book of Isaiah is a large book in the Bible. It is categorized in the "Major Prophets" which also includes Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The whole book, by itself, it would be a daunting task to undertake. But, if taken in pieces, it is more manageable. One of those pieces, or threads of the fabric of Scripture running through Isaiah is the "Servant of the Lord."

I. Introduction

When someone mentions the "Suffering Servant" in the book of Isaiah, most will turn the pages of their Bible to Isaiah chapter 53. But, there are actually four "songs" of the Servant of the Lord in the book of Isaiah. These might not seem to be so important as a group except that they are quoted in key passages in the New Testament to show that Jesus Christ was the Messiah as the Suffering Servant.

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Isaiah chapter 53 has had a tremendous impact convincing unbelieving Jews that Jesus is the Messiah.

Herman taught from Isaiah 53. It is a very important, a very exciting and a very dramatic passage on the person and work of Jesus Christ. However, this study will start with Isaiah 42 which contains the first of the four “servant” songs. Isaiah 53 is the last of the four songs.

A. Context

The servant songs are situated in Isaiah chapters 40-60. These chapters differ dramatically from chapters 1-39. So much so, that many writers propose an author other than the 8th century B.C. prophet Isaiah ben Amoz. Instead, they see a 6th century writer, different from Isaiah ben Amoz, writing with the Babylonian captivity complete. Conservatives understand Isaiah 1:1 to apply to the entire book.

J. Sidlow Baxter in his “Explore the Book” summarizes the differences between these two parts of Isaiah:

- 1) Differences of Vocabulary
- 2) Differences of Ideas and Forms of Expression
- 3) Differences in Historical References

There is a longer explanation from a slightly different perspective that is also helpful in understanding the context in which these Servant Songs were written. I want you to have a good understanding of this context before proceeding. The following are quotes from an article David H. Roper wrote that is posted on the RayStedman.org website.

“The first section, Chapters 1-35, deals with Isaiah's times. He is speaking to his contemporaries. This section is set against the backdrop of the Assyrian period. Although Judah is powerful,

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wealthy, and influential, it is spiritually decadent. Isaiah speaks to these times and talks about the injustice of that period. Though God looks for righteousness and justice, what he sees is the cry of the oppressed, and Isaiah predicts that judgment is coming. "He will whistle [to use Isaiah's term] for Assyria." The Assyrians will be the rod that God uses to chasten his people. In those opening chapters Isaiah speaks very explicitly about the problems that exist in the nation and about the judgment that is coming."

"The second section of Isaiah, Chapters 36-39, is a historical bridge between the first and third sections and introduces at least one of the causes of the Babylonian captivity."

"In the third section, Chapters 40-66, Isaiah speaks about the Babylonian captivity, which is to take place at least 130 years after his time. He predicts its coming, tells them what it will be like, predicts the regathering to the land, the rebuilding of the temple, and the restoration of the nation in Judah."

"If the theme of the first 35 chapters is condemnation, the theme of these final chapters is comfort. Isaiah prepares God's people for the exile well in advance, and he comforts them in advance. It is so much like the Lord to prepare us for times of trial and to announce comfort even before we enter into these periods. This is what he does through Isaiah."

"In the closing chapters, 40-66, Isaiah talks about one who is designated as the Servant of the Lord, the Servant who will effect salvation, the one through whom God will accomplish his purposes in the nation. This one is very much the center of Isaiah's thinking, particularly in the section from Chapters 40 through 53. This song in the first four verses of Chapter 42 is the first of these references to the Servant of the Lord."

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From: article by David H. Roper

<https://www.raystedman.org/thematic-studies/doctrinal-topics/the-servant-of-the-lord>

I will not elaborate further on these unless needed. The purpose here is to focus on the spiritual aspects of the Servant Songs and not on a debate on authorship. I assume that the book of Isaiah was written by Isaiah ben Amoz. Those commentators who are non-dispensational do not reckon time the way dispensationalists do, so they will see everything in Isaiah as past (from the perspective of the author). Some dispensationalists call these people “preterists.”

There is much historical narrative in chapters 1-39. One of my favorites is Isaiah chapters 36-39 concerning Hezekiah and the invasion of Sennacherib.

Immediately after the Hezekiah narrative, chapter 40 starts with God speaking. Then in verse 3, there is a passage that John the Baptist uses to alert his audience to the 1st Advent of Jesus Christ. This is certainly future to Isaiah.

Matthew 3:1 Now in those days John the Baptist *came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying,

Matthew 3:2 “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Matthew 3:3 For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said,

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**“The voice of one crying in the wilderness,
‘Make ready the way of the Lord,
Make His paths straight!’” (Isaiah 40:3)**

Mark 1:1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Mark 1:2 As it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

**“Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You,
Who will prepare Your way;**

**Mark 1:3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness,
‘Make ready the way of the Lord,
Make His paths straight.’”**

Luke 3:1 And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins;

**Luke 3:4 as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,
“The voice of one crying in the wilderness,
‘Make ready the way of the Lord
Make His paths straight.**

**Luke 3:5 ‘Every ravine will be filled,
And every mountain and hill will be brought low;
The crooked will become straight,
And the rough roads smooth;**

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Luke 3:6 And all flesh will see the salvation of God.’’

John 1:23 He said, “I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as Isaiah the prophet said.”

The passage from Isaiah chapter 40 is so important that all four of the gospel accounts includes it. And they all refer back to the book of Isaiah for what John the Baptist proclaimed.

B. Unfulfilled Prophecies

Some commentators have spent some time researching and thinking through the prophecies of Isaiah. John Goldingay has this to say:

“It seems likely that the community recognized that many aspects of the book’s vision for its future had not found realization in its experience. The preserving of the material that now constitutes chapters 40-55 may presuppose that events in the 503 BC could be read as a partial vindication of them. But the partial nature of the vindication could then also make it both possible and necessary to look for their fuller realization. The fact that their vision was partly fulfilled provided grounds for holding onto it. The fact that it was not wholly fulfilled also provided reasons for holding onto it. And we know that in the Hasmonean period some Judeans saw the commission to prepare a way in the wilderness for Yhwh’s coming was indeed still future and might be imminent.”

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C. Four Servant “Songs”

The term “song” is used by some commentators. However, they are not actually “songs.” They are poems about the Servant. I have used the term “song” since it is an easy one to grasp and commonly used in the commentaries.

Here are the four Servant Songs:

- 1) Presentation of the Servant of the Lord (Isaiah 42:1-9)
- 2) Work of the Servant of the Lord (Isaiah 49:1-13)
- 3) Obedience of the Servant of the Lord (Isaiah 50:4-11)
- 4) Suffering and Triumph of the Servant of the Lord (Isaiah 52:12-53:13)

D. Immediate Context in Isaiah 40-41

Isaiah chapter 41 starts as a court case (Hebrew *rib*).

McComiskey (commenting on the book of Hosea): “The *rib* (or disputation form) in the Prophets is not static in its structure. It can be as spare in its formation as in Jeremiah 25:31 or as complex as in Micah 6:2-16. The *rib* here contains four elements: the announcement of the *rib* (4:1), the people addressed (4:1), the reason for the *rib* (4:1b-2), and the punishment given in response to the wrong they had done (4:3).”

As we progress in our pursuit of knowing the Servant of the Lord, it becomes clear that there are three areas of spiritual knowledge that we must be familiar with to understand what is being discussed: dispensations and the angelic conflict

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(sometimes referred to as the spiritual warfare) and the meaning of “fulfillment.”

E. Angelic Conflict

Robbie Dean and Tommy Ice wrote a book on the “Spiritual Warfare” which I recommend. It is written with everyday Christians in mind. It is not filled with obtuse theology. I will quote from it:

“The Bible teaches that life has a dimension that goes beyond the material physical environment. This area centers on the immaterial part of your being—the real you—and your relationship to God. In opposition to God is Satan and a vast army of immaterial, rational creatures that are subservient to him. They have all been sentenced to eternal condemnation in the lake of fire (Matt. 25:41). Yet, that sentence has been postponed until the end of human history. Between the pronouncement of that verdict and the execution of the sentence lies the entire panorama of human history. Man was created to play a vital role in the resolution of this angelic rebellion. Man is the focal point. This is the essence of spiritual warfare.”

F. Dispensations

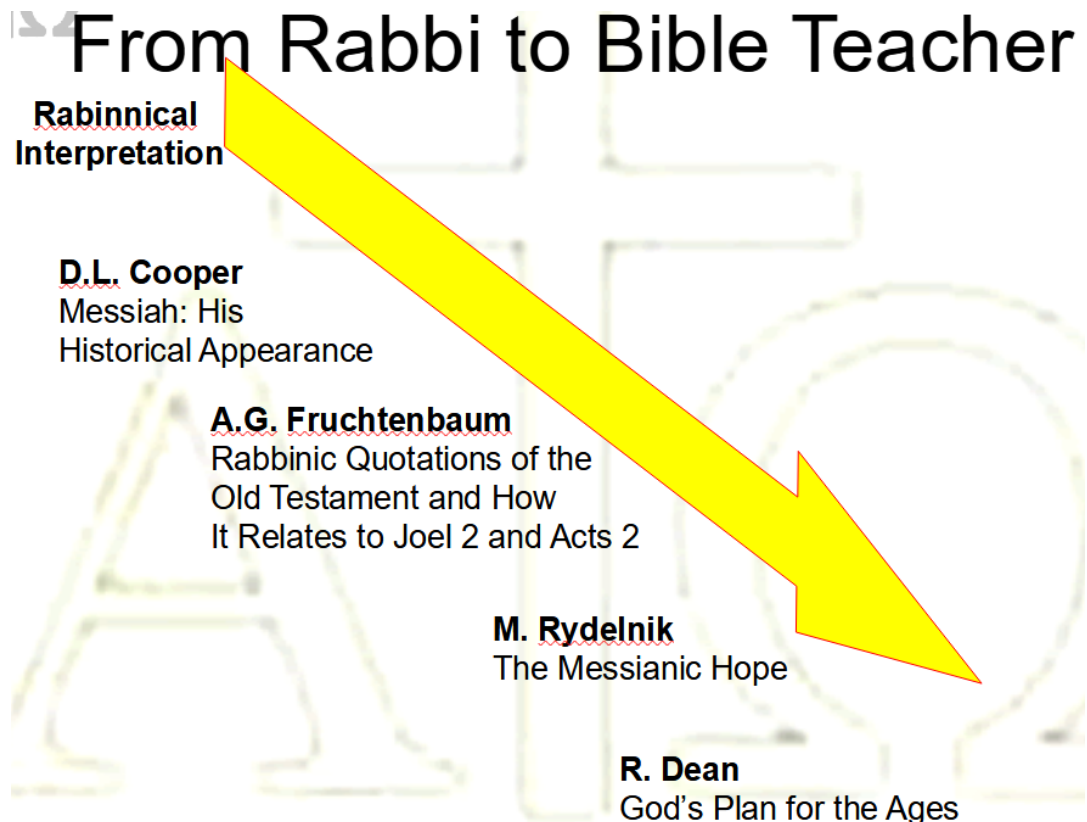
“Dispensations have to do with God's governing or administrating human history through a sequence of divinely directed administrations marked by distinct periods of time as He works out His plan to destroy sin and evil. It is an understanding of the meaning and purpose of history; but when you think of the words 'purpose of history,' that means history is going somewhere.” (Dean)

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G. “Fulfillment”

When the New Testament uses the word “fulfilled” it does not always mean a fulfillment of a specific prophecy. In the future, I may delve into this in more detail. But for now, here are two slides from that future presentation.

The development of the understanding of “fulfillment” started with Rabbinic interpretation. D.L. Cooper took that and reworded the terminology taking it out of the realm of Rabbinic interpretation and bringing it into the realm of Christian interpretation. Then present day Bible experts, A.G. Fruchtenbaum and Michael Rydelnik wrote books on this subject. I picked this up from Robby Dean:



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There are four ways the word “fulfilled” is applied in the New Testament according to these Bible experts:

Direct Fulfillment: Literal prediction and literal direct fulfillment.

Typical Fulfillment: A literal, historical event applied typologically.

Applicational Fulfillment: An historical event is used to draw out an application with reference to a future event.

Summary Fulfillment: No actual event is prophesied, but the fulfillment represents a summation of Old Testament prophecies.

Quoted from Dean's Lessons 15 & 16 of God's Plan for the Ages
- Dispensations (2014)

The full explanation of this will require an hour by itself. And this lesson today is just an introduction to the Servant Songs.

II. Presentation of the Servant of the Lord (Isaiah 42:1-9)

Isaiah 42:1 “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.

Isaiah 42:2 “He will not cry out or raise His voice, Nor make His voice heard in the street.

Isaiah 42:3 “A bruised reed He will not break And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice.

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Isaiah 42:4 “He will not be disheartened or crushed Until He has established justice in the earth; And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law.”

A. Context of Isaiah 42

According to one commentator, Goldingay, “Verses 1-4 comprise a presentation of Yhwh’s servant. His activity is future, but he is already available to be presented. To whom? Out of its context the answer might well be that he is being presented to the heavenly court or to the prophet. In the context of 41.21-29 he is more likely being presented to an earthly assembly of elders. Yet the court scene presupposes the presence of the gods who have been summoned for the debate. In this sense the servant is indeed being presented to the gods, and the prophet is part of the court scene.

B. Quoted in Matthew 12:15-21

From Robbie Dean:

“At that point Matthew says something very interesting. Matthew 12:17 NASB “{This was} to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet:” Matthew says the reason He wanted them to keep their mouth shut was because of the situation that was forecast and prophesied in Isaiah 42:1–4. We have this quotation. It probably doesn’t match the English translation because it is based on the Hebrew. The quote in the Greek New Testament is really based on the Septuagint (LXX), although there are some different problems with that. One thing we note about this is that this is the longest of Matthew’s quotations from the Old Testament. He quotes more from the Old Testament than any other gospel writer, and this is his

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longest. That means that there is something significant being said here.”

“The second thing that is interesting is that in the Septuagint translation, where in the Hebrew it says, “My servant”, the word “servant” is translated not with the word DIAKONOS (servant) but with the word PAIS, which is the word for child or son. So as Matthew quotes from the Old Testament, there is an indication here that this is “my son” or “my child”. There is a clear understanding from the translators of the LXX that the suffering servant was also the child of God. This is something that not too many people bring out or point out.”

III. Work of the Servant of the Lord (Isaiah 49:1-13)

Quotes: Eph 6:17; Heb 4:12; Rev 1:16; 2:12,16; 19:15

IV. Obedience of the Servant of the Lord (Isaiah 50:4-11)

V. Suffering & Triumph of the Servant of the Lord (Isaiah 52:12-53:13)