

The Servant of the Lord—Introduction  
Isaiah 40-53

## The Servant of the Lord—Introduction

Christ, or in Hebrew, the Messiah is found throughout the Old Testament. Indeed, a case can be made that from creation to glorification, the Bible is about Jesus Christ. In the book of Judges, the Angel of the Lord was a sometime visitor to Israel. He is usually identified as the “pre-existent Christ.” He is the manifest person of the Godhead. His deity did not take on flesh and blood until the “incarnation.” But, in the Old Testament, He was manifested visually to men and women and described as having features like a man. We know from the New Testament that the Old Testament sacrifices looked forward to Christ’s work on the cross. Jews today often gloss over Isaiah 53 and similar passages. But those that do study Isaiah chapter 53 are forced to compare the person described there to the person of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Some Jews believe in Jesus Christ as their redeemer, savior, after honestly reading that chapter.

There are some passages in the Old Testament that the New Testament quotes multiple times. Repetition is emphasis. But what is being emphasized? That Jesus Christ is the Messiah. As the Old Testament tells us in a variety of passages, the Messiah is King and Servant. Both are evident in the book of Isaiah. This study looks narrowly at Jesus as the Servant. There are four poems in Isaiah known as the Servant Songs. This study will look at those. They are referenced in the New Testament to show Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecies.

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,**

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**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 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,

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**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.**

Another perspective of this can be seen in the characterization of the Gospels. They 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 previous 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 Samson as a Nazirite. However, Mary, the mother of Jesus, was told that her son would be a king and sit on David’s throne forever. He was a Nazarene, not a Nazirite.

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**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.”**

The concept of Yahweh as king is common in the Old Testament. I have quoted more than once the passage from 1 Samuel 8:7 where God tells Samuel that the people rejected God as their king. There are other passages that use the concept of Yahweh as king (1 Samuel 12:12; Psalm 93; 95-99; Isaiah 33:22; 43:15; Ezekiel 20:33 and perhaps Zephaniah 3:15). This is not a study of that concept, so I will not go into detail. But you should be aware of that concept. It is what the Jews have been looking for, and not a servant. As a result, Jews disavow Jesus Christ as the Messiah.

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:

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**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!**

**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.

Before proceeding to the texts, the word for servant must be put into context. What does it mean? How is it used?

First, it is necessary to understand the Old Testament word for “servant.”

Before proceeding, we must ask the question, what is a “servant” in the Old Testament. The Hebrew word can indicate, slave, servant or subject

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(as of a king). Duane Lindsey says, “The word ‘ebed can refer to a slave (Ex. 21:20-21) or a vassal king (2 Sam. 10:19), and individual subject (Gen. 21:25) or a tributary nation (1 Chron. 18:2, 6, 13). In all those cases the term refers to a person or group characterized by dependence and servitude.”

Slavery in America is considered a crime against humanity. Yet, in times past, in certain places, it served a function. In some cases, a person might seek voluntary slavery. Someone described it as the ancient world’s method of declaring bankruptcy. Of course, there are many instances in which a person was captured and sold into slavery against their wishes. Take Joseph, for instance. So the term servant or slave has a broad meaning and must be interpreted in context. Leviticus talks about a Jew’s slavery. Here is Gordon Wenham’s description from his commentary on Leviticus:

“In our minds slavery conjures up pictures of slave ships from Africa and oppression on plantations. Slavery in Israel was intended to be very different, as these laws make clear. It was somewhat akin to imprisonment in the modern world, and served a roughly similar purpose of enabling a man who could not pay a fine to work off his debt directly. In some respects it was less degrading and demoralizing than the modern penitentiary; for one thing the man was not cut off from society as he would be in prison. Ideally one of his relatives should buy the debtor and so pay off the debt (vv. 39-43).”

“If this is not possible, because none of his relatives has enough money at that moment, they should still try to redeem him later if their funds permit (vv. 48-53). If this proves impossible he is to be freed in the year of jubilee (vv. 40-41, 54).”

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Per Duane Lindsey:

“The term “servant of the Lord” occurs twenty-two times in the Old Testament (Lindsey). “It refers to Moses seventeen times, Joshua two times, and David two times (in the superscriptions to Pss 18 and 36). The final instance refers to the national servant Israel in Isaiah 42:19. The similar expression “the servant of God” refers to Moses four times. More frequent expressions are “his servant” or “my servant,” with the pronoun referring to God.”

“Many individuals in the Old Testament were called “servants” of God or Yaweh, particularly those chosen by Him to accomplish tasks related to His covenant people. Abraham, the recipient of the Abrahamic covenant, was called Yahweh’s “servant” (Gen. 26:24; Ps. 105:6), as were his descendants Isaac (Gen. 24:14) and Jacob (Ex 32:13; Ezek. 37:25), to whom the Abrahamic covenant was reconfirmed. Moses, the mediator of the Sinaitic covenant, which constituted Israel a vassal nation under Yahweh, was identified as Yahweh’s “servant” (Ex. 14:31; Num. 12:7; Deut. 34:5; 1 Kings 8:56), as was his successor, Joshua, who led the people into the land of promise (Josh. 24:29).”

Duane Lindsey goes on to explain that both specific kings and specific prophets were also referred to as “servants” of Yahweh.

Now back to 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. “Major” refers to the size of the book. But, because the book is so large, it also covers many topics. 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**

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**saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.**

<b>King of Judah</b>	<b>Reign (According to Unger)</b>
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.” In other words, father and son both reigned as king. We see something like this in the country of Saudi Arabia today. The official king is king Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. But his ability to rule is hindered due to his health. So his son, Prince Mohammed bin Salman, has the real power. As Wikipedia says, “His son, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, is considered the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia, due to the King's poor health and his own political maneuvering.” So, for instance, in ancient Israel, king Hezekiah who had almost died and was then given an extra 15 years of life by God had some overlap in his reign with his son Manasseh. But during that extra 15 years, Hezekiah made some questionable decisions. Perhaps he was still in poor health which allowed Manasseh to be a king in training under Hezekiah. It didn’t help because Manasseh was one of the worst kings of Judah.



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The book of Isaiah is divided into three general sections (Unger’s Bible Handbook):

<b>Outline</b>
<b>Prophecies from the Standpoint of Isaiah’s Day, Ch. 1—35</b>
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
<b>Historical Interlude, Ch. 36—39</b>
<b>Prophecies from the Standpoint of the Exile, Ch. 40—66</b>
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

The first section (chapters 1-35) and second sections (chapters 36-39) concern prophecy and issues in Isaiah’s time. The third section (chapters 40-66) 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 “Servant” songs are contained in chapters 42-53, in the third section.

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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.”)

<b>Characterization</b>	<b>Scripture</b>
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 included in the “Major Prophets” which also includes Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The study of the whole book, by itself, 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. 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.

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### 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 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. prophet Isaiah ben Amoz. Instead, they see a 6<sup>th</sup> 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, 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

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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.”

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

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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 used to alert his audience to the 1<sup>st</sup> Advent of Jesus Christ. This is certainly future to Isaiah. Here are the New Testament quotations of Isaiah 40:3:

**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,**

**“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:**

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**“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;**

**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.”**

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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 prophet 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.”

### C. Four Servant “Songs”

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

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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, the angelic conflict (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



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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.”

Some call this resolution of the Angelic Conflict the “Appeal Trial of Satan.” A lesson on this topic will have to wait until a later date.

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)

In December 2019 I taught a class on dispensations. So, I will not delve into explanations of them. Jesus, in his first advent, lived in the previous dispensation under the Mosaic Law. He

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fulfilled many prophecies. There is yet the Tribulation, the completion of the previous dispensation, which dispensation was interrupted by the Church Age dispensation. Then there is the final dispensation, the Millennial reign of Christ in His second advent.

G. “Fulfillment”

When the New Testament uses the word “fulfilled” it does not always mean a fulfillment of a specific prophecy. In the past, I taught five lessons on this. But, I will briefly cover the concept here.

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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# From Rabbi to Bible Teacher

**Rabbinical  
Interpretation**

**D.L. Cooper**  
Messiah: His  
Historical Appearance

**A.G. Fruchtenbaum**  
Rabbinic Quotations of the  
Old Testament and How  
It Relates to Joel 2 and Acts 2

**M. Rydelnik**  
The Messianic Hope

**R. Dean**  
God's Plan for the Ages

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.

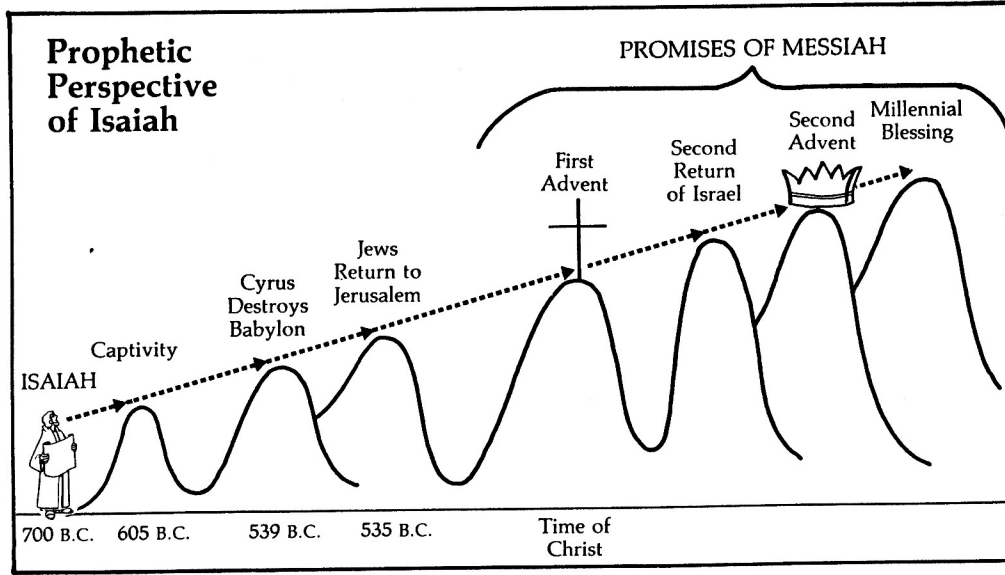
Applicational Fulfillment: An historical event is used to draw out an application with reference to a future event.

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)

And this lesson today is just an introduction to the Servant Songs.

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From Duane Lindsey