

# OpenTheo

## Isaiah - The Servant of Yahweh



### Isaiah - Steve Gregg

Isaiah, one of the most discussed books in the Old Testament, contains four passages commonly referred to as the "servant songs." These songs, including the well-known Isaiah 53, refer to the servant of Yahweh, a figure scholars have not come to a complete agreement on. While the passages seem to be referencing the exiles returning from Babylon to Judah, they are also seen as referencing the sufferings of the Messiah and the redemption of Israel, both spiritually and physically. The speaker suggests that the servant is not Israel but rather a person who serves to liberate Israel and bring light to the Gentiles.

### Transcript

In this session we're going to be looking at a very important feature of Isaiah, which Old Testament scholars have discussed a great deal, and not having reached a complete agreement among themselves, because there is something slightly confusing about the information. And that is the subject of the Servant of Yahweh, or as it will read in your English Bible, the Servant of the Lord. And the Lord will have all capital letters in the English translation, suggesting that the name Yahweh stands behind the text.

The Servant of Yahweh. Now, servants of God, the term servant of God, is not unusual in the rest of Scripture. Even a servant of Yahweh God is not that unusual.

But, Isaianic scholars, that is people who have studied the book deeply, have discerned that there's certain passages in Isaiah that speak of a distinctive servant of Yahweh. In the Old Testament, any prophet was called a servant of God. And even in the New Testament, Christians are called servants of God.

But, there's this particular, almost technical term, the servant of Yahweh, that occurs in certain contexts in Isaiah. It is not restricted to, but it is contained in, four passages that are usually referred to as the servant songs. Isaiah's four servant songs.

There may be a fifth. Not all scholars are agreed about whether there's a fifth or not, but essentially there's general agreement about the presence of four passages in Isaiah that are called the servant songs. And the identity of the servant is what is most debated.

In some of the songs, the servant is clearly a reference to Israel. Israel is the servant of Yahweh. In some of them, according to at least Christian belief, the servant is the Messiah.

And there is a distinction that can be found. Now, modern Jewish scholars usually apply the servant songs all to Israel. One of the most famous servant songs in our, most popular and well-known to Christians, is Isaiah 53, which we recognize as a very specific depiction of the rejection and sufferings of the Messiah.

But, because it is not said to be the Messiah, but it is said to be the servant of Yahweh, and since there are passages that identify the servant of Yahweh with Israel, the Jewish, standard Jewish interpretation, at least since the time of Christ, is that Isaiah 53 is not about the Messiah, but it's about Israel, personified. The suffering of the servant is the suffering of Israel for the redemption of the world, rather than the suffering of the Messiah for the redemption of the world. And so there has been disagreement.

Many non-Jewish scholars have felt there's some validity to this argument, and you can certainly see why there would be as we begin to look at these, because there are passages where the servant of Yahweh is specifically said to be Israel. But the Christian view is that while it is true the servant of Yahweh in some of these passages is Israel, that Israel is a type of Christ. We have seen lots of things in the Old Testament that are types of the New Testament in our study of Isaiah.

We've emphasized especially the Exodus motif and the return of the exiles from Babylon as types of the salvation which Christ brings. And in that sense, we would be seeing in the case of the Exodus, Moses would be a type of Christ who brings about deliverance. In the case of the returning exiles, Cyrus, who brings about deliverance, is a type of Christ.

We'll see him in some later lectures in Isaiah. Cyrus will be prominent. But also it would appear that the early Christians believed, and I would say correctly, that Israel itself is a type of Christ.

Christ is the new Israel. So that Israel was the chosen people in the Old Testament, and if you wish to be among the chosen people, you had to be in Israel. But Christ is the chosen one in the New Testament, and if you wish to be among the chosen people, you must be in Christ.

Being in Christ is the new in Israel. And so Israel needs to be understood to be a type of Christ. We saw, for example, there are passages which at one level seem to be talking about exiles returning from Babylon back to Judah, and yet the New Testament will pick them up and use them as references to us being saved through Christ.

And the passage seems to have both ideas together. And these servant songs sometimes are a little that way. And so I'd like to look at those servant songs.

They are very distinctive Isaianic imagery, this particular servant. And I'd like to read these servant songs first of all. They're not all that long for the most part.

Most of them are only a few verses. And by the way, scholars do not agree about how long they are, because some of them make a passage of four verses be the servant song, but some say, well, no, there goes three more verses down. It's still part of the song.

Since the whole section of Isaiah that's prophetic is generally speaking poetic, it's hard to call one portion of it a song and the other part not, since it's all a poem. The whole prophecy is poetry. And so scholars have, they have no difficulty identifying the beginning of a servant song, but sometimes they don't find it easy to know precisely where it ends.

In my listing of them, I have generally speaking taken the longer view. That is, if there's a question whether the song ends at a certain verse or at a later verse, I'm pretty much in my consideration taking the whole, the longer section, including the additional verses that some people believe are part of it. In chapter 42, we have the first servant song.

Let me just read through these songs and we'll analyze them. Chapter 42, verses 1 through 7. Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my elect one, in whom my soul delights. I have put my spirit upon him.

He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. He will not cry out, nor raise his voice, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoking flax he will not quench.

He will bring forth justice for truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged, till he has established justice in the earth, and the coastland shall wait for his law. Thus says God, Yahweh, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk on it.

I, Yahweh, have called you in righteousness, and I will hold your hand. I will keep you and give you as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sin in darkness, from the prison house. I am Yahweh, that is my name, and my glory I will not give to another, nor my praise to graven images.

I read one verse beyond what I intended, but you can see this character that is in focus is called Yahweh's servant. And you would recognize as a Christian who's read the New Testament that a number of these verses actually are quoted in the New Testament and applied to Christ, so there's no ambiguity as to what the Christian interpretation is, that this is a prophecy about the Messiah. We will look at its details separately later on, but

let's look at the next servant song, chapter 49, verses 1 through 9. Listen, O coastlands, to me, and take heed, you peoples from afar.

Yahweh has called me from the womb. From the matrix of my mother he has made mention of my name, and he has made my mouth like a sharp sword. In the shadow of his hand he has hidden me and made me a polished shaft.

In his quiver he has hidden me, and he said to me, You are my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified. Then I said, I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing, and in vain. Yet surely my just reward is with the Lord, and my work is with my God.

And now, Yahweh says, who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, so that Israel is gathered to him. For I shall be glorious in the eyes of Yahweh, and my God shall be my strength. Indeed he says, it is too small a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel.

I will also give you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be my salvation to the ends of the earth. Thus says Yahweh, the Redeemer of Israel, their Holy One. To him whom man despises, to him whom the nation abhors, to the servant of rulers kings shall see and arise.

Princes also shall worship because of Yahweh who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, and he has chosen you. Thus says Yahweh, in an acceptable time I have heard you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you. I will preserve you and give you as a covenant to the people, to restore the earth, to cause them to inherit the desolate heritages, that you may say to the prisoners, go forth, and to those who are in darkness, show yourselves.

Then the next servant song, this one by the way we can see specifically refers to the servant as Israel in verse 3, but also in verse 5 it says that the servant is chosen to bring Jacob and Israel back to God. How could it be that Israel was the servant who brought Israel back to God? That is one of the things that makes these servant songs perplexing. Now chapter 50 verses 4 through 9 is the third one.

Isaiah 50 and verse 4. The Lord God has given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary. He awakens me morning by morning, he awakens my ear to hear as the learned. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, nor did I turn away.

I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who plucked out the beard. I did not hide my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God will help me, therefore I will not be disgraced, therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I will not be ashamed.

He is near who justifies me, who will contend with me? Let us stand together, who is my adversary? Let him come near me. Surely the Lord God will help me, who is he who condemns me? Indeed they will all grow old like a garment, the moth shall eat them up. Scholars generally feel, and I'm going to have to agree with them, this is the same person that is speaking in chapter 49, it would appear.

Now our fourth servant song is in chapter 52, verse 13, through the entirety of 53. And this is of course the most well known of the servant songs, at least among Christians. We all know Isaiah 53, but we should understand that Isaiah 53 really begins three verses earlier.

The chapter division here is not as fortunate as we might wish. Isaiah 53 really should start where we presently have chapter 52, verse 13. And this servant song divides into five stanzas, and each one says something somewhat different about the servant.

But in verse 13 of chapter 52, behold, my servant shall deal prudently. He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high, 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.

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. Who has believed our report, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? The arm of Yahweh, of course.

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. He carried our sorrows, and we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

I'm sorry, I skipped one line at the beginning of verse 4. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, and 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 with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way.

And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted. Yet he opened not his mouth.

He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will

declare his generation? For he was cut off from the land of the living. For the transgressions of my people he was stricken.

And they made his grave with the wicked, but with the rich at his death. Because he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him.

He has put him to grief. When you make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed. He shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of Yahweh will prosper in his hand.

He shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. By his knowledge my righteous servant shall justify many. For he shall bear their iniquities.

Therefore I will divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong. Because he poured out his soul unto death, and he was numbered with the transgressors. And he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Now, some believe there is a fifth servant song. It seems clear that this other passage is messianic. It's in chapter 61.

It is like chapter 50. The one in chapter 50, it doesn't really mention the servant as servant, but it does seem to speak of the same individual. Now this passage is not generally included in the list of servant songs, but some feel it should be, and there is some justification for it.

Chapter 61, verses 1 through 3. The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me. To preach good tidings to the poor. He has sent me to heal the broken hearted.

To proclaim liberty to the captives, the opening of the prison to those who are bound. To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of the vengeance of our God. To comfort all who mourn.

To console those who mourn in Zion. To give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning. The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

That they may be called trees of righteousness. The planting of Yahweh, that he may be glorified. Now obviously the contents of this one are very, very close to the contents of the one in chapter 49, where it talks about the spirit being put on him, and him proclaiming release to the captives.

Now chapter 49 is a servant song clearly, and since those same features are mentioned in chapter 61, verses 1 through 3, it would seem we've got the same person in view. So it would seem justified, at least as justified to include this fifth one, as to include the third one that was in chapter 50, neither of which used the word servant, but both of which seem to describe the same person who is described elsewhere as the servant of

Yahweh. So we have this servant introduced.

We will have of course much to say about the specifics in these songs at some point, but we need to first of all just kind of try to follow the concept of what is meant by this servant. We find first of all that Israel is seen as a chosen servant of God, and this is found in Isaiah outside of the servant songs. That is, besides the passages we read, the servant is mentioned in individual verses elsewhere.

And chapter 44, for example, verses 1 and 2, we read, Yet hear now, O Jacob, my servant, and Israel, whom I have chosen. Thus says Yahweh, who made you, and formed you from the womb, who will help you. Fear not, O Jacob, my servant, and you, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.

Jeshurun is a poetic nickname for Israel. It was first used in Deuteronomy, but Jeshurun means my little righteous one. I'm not sure why that nickname was given, but the point is it's a nickname for Israel.

And we see very clearly it says Israel is God's servant, and God has chosen Israel. Well, there's no question about that. We recognize the nation of Israel is the chosen people in the Old Testament, chosen to represent God, chosen to carry forward God's purposes in the world.

And so this is in the context of that section of Isaiah, which talks about the Babylonian exile and God rescuing Israel. And it's like God has chosen Israel to make himself known through them, particularly through his deliverance of them. And later in this same chapter, verse 21, he says, Remember these, O Jacob and Israel, for you are my servant.

I have formed you. You are my servant, O Israel. You will not be forgotten by me.

I have blotted out like a thick cloud your transgressions, and like a cloud your sins. Return to me, for I have redeemed you. Sing, O heavens, for Yahweh has done it.

Shout, you lower parts of the earth. Break forth into singing, you mountains. O forest and every tree in it, for Yahweh has redeemed Jacob and glorified himself in Israel.

Now this is no doubt referring to the rescue of Israel from, or of Judah from Babylon, at least its first layer of meaning. From what we've seen already in the past in our studies on Isaiah, it would appear that there's probably at least the second layer of meaning here of the spiritual Israel redeemed also. But here he's still talking about Jacob and Israel being redeemed, being rescued, and God having blotted out their sins, which suggests really that the reason I sent you into Babylon is because of your idolatry and your sins.

I couldn't bear it anymore. The stain of your sins was so offensive to me, I couldn't do anything except send you into captivity. But now I've put that behind me.

You've been purged through the 70 years of judgment. Your sins are no longer an issue. I'm ready to rescue you, redeem you, and start over with you.

And that is the context of these statements, but you can see in them that the servant is the nation of Israel. Also in chapter 41, again these passages are not in the servant's songs, but they are passages where the servant is mentioned as Israel. Chapter 41, verses 8 and 9, says, But you, Israel, are my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the descendants of Abraham my friend, you whom I have taken from the ends of the earth and called from the farthest regions and said to you, You are my servant, I have chosen you, I have not cast you away.

Now when he says I've called you from the farthest regions and taken from the ends of the earth, again it's first layer, meaning it seems to be that he's called them from the far regions where they had been driven during the Babylonian exile, from the remnant back to Jerusalem. But as we have seen, this whole concept of bringing back the remnant is also picked up in the New Testament and assumed to be a reference to what's going on now in Christ saving people. So you've got both of these meanings, but nonetheless, though there are both meanings, we can't rule out the first meaning, that this is the nation of Israel that first of all is described in this way.

Also in chapter 48, in verse 20, this is unambiguous, Go forth from Babylon, flee from the Chaldees, with a voice of singing, declare, proclaim this, utter it even to the end of the earth, say, Yahweh has redeemed his servant, Jacob. So the servant of Yahweh is Jacob, Israel, and in this case it's very specific. He's talking about redeeming them from Babylon, telling them, leave Babylon, go home, go back to Israel from the land of the Chaldees.

The early, most frequent reference is the servant of Yahweh is Israel, and in the particular context of God rescuing them from Babylon in most cases. Now in chapter 43, verses 10 through 11, and once again, this is not in one of the servant's songs, but it does mention Israel as the servant. It indicates the reason that God is rescuing them from Babylon, at least one of the reasons, is he intends for this to be a witness apparently to others, the nations of the faithfulness of Yahweh, of the fact that he is God, that he conquered Babylon and released his people, and therefore he is superior to the gods of Babylon.

In Isaiah 43, verses 10 and 11, he says, you are my witnesses, says Yahweh, or the Jehovah's Witnesses would translate it, you are my witnesses, says Jehovah, which is an equally good translation, although maybe not as good a vocalization of the tetragram, but this is actually the verse that the Jehovah's Witnesses have, that line printed on the cover of the Watchtower magazine, however, the rest of the verse doesn't help them much. It says, you are my witnesses, says Yahweh, and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me, and understand that I am he. Before me there was



no god formed, nor shall there be after me.

I said this doesn't help JW as much, because they believe Jesus is another god that was formed after Yahweh, and God says there was no god formed before me, nor will there be any formed after me. There's only one god, not two. Jesus is not a god, separate from Yahweh.

Even I am Yahweh, and beside me there is no savior. Now, this is what Israel is called to witness to. They are chosen to be God's servant and God's witness, that he is the savior and that he is the only god.

Their deliverance from Babylon, apparently, was to be a graphic demonstration of that fact. However, there is this element in the book of Isaiah that Israel, which was chosen to be God's servant and God's witness, kind of drops the ball, fails in that task. In chapter 42, in verses 18 through 20, it says, hear you deaf, and look you blind, that you may see who is blind but my servant.

Now, the servant here, of course, is apparently Israel still. Or who is deaf but my messenger whom I send. Who is blind is he who is perfect and blind is the Lord's servant.

Seeing many things but you do not observe. Sounds like Sherlock Holmes, you see but you do not observe. Opening the ears but he does not hear.

Now, what this seems to be saying is God has chosen his servant to be a witness, but it's a blind witness. You can't bear witness to something if you haven't seen it, but the witness he's called is they themselves are blind and deaf, unresponsive. Israel is called to a task but they have disqualified from it by closing their eyes and stopping their ears.

And Jesus, of course, makes reference to this by quoting Isaiah 6. Isaiah 6 does not mention the servant of Yahweh but it does talk about their ears they've stopped and their eyes they've shut lest they should see and hear and be converted and I should heal them. Isaiah 6 is quoted numerous times in the New Testament in the Gospels and in the book of Acts and it's applied to Israel. So Israel is the blind servant, not a very good witness.

You call a witness to court, what did you see? I don't know, I'm blind. Well, how can you bear witness? I guess I can't. I didn't see anything.

I'm blind. If you're blind and deaf you didn't hear anything or see anything. You can't be a witness.

And so Israel is a failure in the role that God has called them to. In chapter 49, which is the second servant song that we read, we can see there is a transition from Israel being the servant to someone else being the servant who is there to fix Israel, or to call Israel back. Because, of course, we saw in verse 3 of Isaiah 49, he said to me, you are my

servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.

But then, apparently Israel speaking, says, I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing, and in vain. Yet surely my just reward is with the Lord and my work with my God. Now this is either saying that Israel's servanthood has been fruitless and therefore they just have to expect God to come through and do something that they can't do for themselves, or there's a slight temptation to see this servant as maybe Jesus at the end of his life saying, I'm dying, I don't have much to show for.

Jesus at one time had thousands of people following him, but at the time he died he had 11 people loyal to him, hiding. It had been a huge movement that actually threatened the authorities of the time, but then it reduced down to a ragtag group of 11 frightened men, and that's what Jesus left when he died. Of course when he rose again it changed, there were more, but one could say the servant is looking at his works at the end of his life as he's arrested and gone to be crucified, and he says, man, what have I accomplished here? But I'll just trust God for the outcome.

My reward is with God, which would be implying that even at the end of Christ's life, though he had nothing to show for it on the day he was crucified, there was reason for him to hope in God that there would be an outcome of some consequence, and there certainly was, as we know, after the resurrection. But this seems to imply that it is Israel, the servant, who is the failure, and who's labored in vain. But then God speaks, apparently to his servant, who seems to have morphed into an individual rather than the nation.

He says in verse 5, now Yahweh says, who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him. Jacob is Israel, so that Israel is gathered to him. So he speaks of Jacob and Israel as someone other than himself, and he is the servant speaking.

And he says, for I shall be glorious in the eyes of Yahweh, and my God shall be my strength. And indeed, verse 6, he says it is too small a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel. I will also give you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be my salvation to the ends of the earth.

Now this makes perfectly good sense if the servant being addressed is the Messiah. He comes to rescue them, to save them, and also to bring salvation to the ends of the earth. One would have to say that if the Jews believe this is a reference to Israel, that Israel collectively is going to bring salvation to the ends of the earth, they haven't gotten very far.

Because it's been 2000 years since the time of Christ, it's been 2700 years since the time of Isaiah, and Israel is pretty much still a small nation that keeps their laws insofar as some of them do, but they have done essentially nothing to bring salvation to the

Gentiles. They don't even seem to be moving in that direction. It doesn't seem like Israel as a nation has taken even the first steps toward doing anything to enhance the Gentiles' relationship with God.

Now there's a very strong pro-Israel sentiment in the modern church, and to make more of the significance of Israel than the Bible does in the New Testament, we'll point out how influential the Jews have been. What a large percentage of the Nobel Prize laureates and winners have been Jewish. It's an incredibly large percentage.

I mean, when you consider the smallness of the Jewish population worldwide compared to everything else, the fact that whatever it is, like 80% or something like that, it's a very large percentage, it does speak of a contribution that the Jews have made to human society, presumably to enhance in some way. It's often pointed out how many great scientists have been Jewish. Einstein, obviously, comes to mind, and many others.

Of course, a lot of entertainers are Jewish. I'm not sure that that has enhanced the spiritual benefit of the nation or of the Gentiles, but almost every comic, almost every stand-up comedian is a Jew, not every last one, but certainly most of them are. Actors and producers in Hollywood, usually their names are listed.

These Christian tracts that tell us all the wonderful things the Jews have done for us lists Barbara Streisand and Woody Allen for human society. Well, they've made us laugh and we've enjoyed their music, but that's not exactly the same thing as raising up the Gentiles and bringing them to God. Israel has done almost nothing in that respect.

Now, someone says, well, but the Ten Commandments and Judaism have sort of informed the whole Western civilization's values. It's Christianity that brought those values to the West. In other words, if someone wants to say that God predicted that Israel collectively is going to bless the Gentiles, the only way that it could even be said that they've in any sense done that is by producing Jesus genetically and biologically.

Of course, they tried to kill him. They did kill him, too, so it's not like they sent him to us. Let's bring the Messiah to the world and send him out to the Gentiles.

No, they were all against that, but if you apply these passages to Jesus, it makes perfectly good sense, I mean, historically. Now, we can't interpret Scripture strictly by history because things might happen in the future that have not happened yet. One could argue, hey, you haven't seen anything yet.

When the rapture takes place and Israel turns to God, he'll convert more people than the church converted in 2,000 years. Hal Lindsey says that, and I suppose as long as you're putting it off to the future, you can say anything you want, especially if you say, it'll happen after we're all gone, so I'll never be able to be shown wrong because you won't be here when it happens anyway. It's kind of a safe prediction.

Israel's going to convert the whole world, or most of it, after we're gone, and it's a safe thing to make such predictions, but all I can say is that we don't have to make predictions to apply this to Christ. It's already happened. Christ has been preached throughout the world.

Gentiles have been blessed. Gentiles from every people, nation, and tongue through the servant of Yahweh, the Messiah, have been converted. They've been saved.

Many have been delivered from bondages. Families have been healed through following Christ. Lives have been saved.

Societies have been enhanced. Hospitals and orphanages have been founded and so forth because of Christians. I mean, the nations have certainly been blessed because of Christ and because of Christianity.

Christ is the servant that is most credible candidate to be the fulfillment of these prophecies that the remnant of Israel was brought back to God through him, as well as Gentiles. It would appear that while in the early part of chapter 49, it's very clearly stated that Israel is the servant as is stated in so many of these other verses we saw, but now we see a transition from Israel being the servant to Israel being the failure and the Messiah being sent to help Israel and the Gentiles. Basically, the Messiah comes to be the witness, to be the new Israel, to take over the role that Israel had been called to do because Israel has failed.

Okay, so that's what we see happening here. Now, the servant, once he has been personified as the Messiah as opposed to the nation of Israel, is seen as having a career of suffering. That is true in many of the passages.

The commentator, Rowley, says, I think helpfully, that when you begin to find the passages that speak of the servant as the Messiah instead of as the nation, he says that which began as a personification becomes a person. That is, when the servant was Israel, it was an anthropomorphism. A nation is spoken of as an individual man.

It's a personification of the nation, but now the servant is no longer personified but a person. It's not a nation spoken of as if it's a person. Now the servant is, in fact, a person, and that is a person who suffers.

In chapter 50, verses 4 and 5, we saw that this servant is not like Israel in that this servant is not rebellious. Israel was rebellious, but this servant says in chapter 50, in verse 4, the Lord God has given me the tongue of the learned that I should know how to speak the word of the season to him who is weary. He awakens me morning by morning.

He awakens my ear to hear as the learned. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious. I did not turn away.

This is almost, you know, blatantly in contrast to Israel. Israel hardly did anything but turn away and rebel, but this servant does not. Unlike Israel, this servant is not rebellious.

Likewise, in chapter 53, we saw in verse 7, he was oppressed, he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter as a sheep. Before his shearers he did not open his mouth.

He just humbly bowed to the mistreatment He was not rebellious. He didn't draw back. He just silently endured.

That's how the Messiah, the servant, is described here. And it was not from the Gentiles that he suffered. The Jews who consider the servant to be Israel throughout Isaiah generally say, well, Israel's suffering is to be redemptive for the world because the servant is Israel and the suffering servant is the suffering of Israel in their history.

However, this servant is rejected by Israel. The reason this servant suffers is not because it is Israel suffering at the hands of the Gentiles. It is the servant suffering at the hands of Israel.

And so, in chapter 49, in verse 7, it said, Thus says Yahweh, the Redeemer of Israel, their Holy One, to Him whom man despises, to Him whom the nation abhors. The nation, what nation? There's no specific nation named. It doesn't say nations.

Nations would mean the Gentiles. The nation, apparently the nation among whom the servant lives and moves and has his existence. The nation of Israel certainly fits this.

It's the nation of Israel that abhorred the servant. In chapter 50, in verse 6, he says, I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who plucked out the beard. I did not hide my face from shame and spitting.

Which, although this verse is never quoted in the New Testament, it sounds almost like it should be because the description of the treatment Jesus received at the hands, especially of the soldiers after Pilate condemned him, seems to fit that to a T. Of course, such things could be personified. The nation of Israel could be seen as a man who's getting beaten. After all, the book of Isaiah begins with the imagery of the nation being like a man who's been beaten and has these wounds and putrefying sores that are not being bound up.

But in this case, it would seem that it's talking about Jesus. At least his experience fits it to a T. And in Isaiah 53, we see in verses 2 and 3, For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant. And in the middle of that verse, it says, He has no former comeliness and when we see him, there's no beauty that we should desire him.

He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. We,

who's we? Isaiah is addressing his own people. This prophecy is uttered in Jerusalem to the Jewish people.

He says, We hid, as it were, our faces from him. He was despised and we did not esteem him. We were the ones who were against him.

We were the ones rejecting him. Not the Gentiles. We Jews.

Now, this suffering of the servant is then said to be an atoning sacrifice or an atoning suffering that he does. Chapter 53, verses 4 and 6, 4, 5 and 6 actually, brings this out. It talks about his suffering but not just as an unfortunate set of circumstances that came upon him but a suffering that actually accomplished something specific for the benefit of others.

As when a lamb in the Old Testament was sacrificed, it lost its life, it suffered, but it was for the benefit of the persons who were being atoned by its losses, by its blood. So also his suffering is not meaningless but redemptive. Surely he has borne our griefs, verse 4 says, and carried our sorrows.

Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. We figured it was God beating him up and in a way it was. God was beating him up for our sake but he was wounded for our transgressions.

He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement for our peace was upon him and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray.

We're the ones who went wrong. We have turned everyone to his own way but the Lord laid on him the iniquities of us. So just like the sacrificial victims in the Old Testament, the lambs would have hands laid upon them by the high priest before they were sacrificed.

The laying on of hands signifying the transfer of sin from the guilty worshiper who brought the lamb to the innocent lamb. The sinless lamb receives the guilt transferred from the sinner to the innocent. That is at least the imagery.

That is the symbolic meaning of the gesture laying the hands on the animal's head and no doubt confessing the sins of the worshiper so that the lamb now becomes the sinner symbolically and then the lamb is killed. That is the imagery that is applied to this servant. We're the ones who went astray.

We were guilty lambs. In the imagery of the Old Testament sacrifices the man was guilty the lamb was innocent. In this case the sheep are the guilty ones.

The man is the innocent one. We were sheep who went astray and turned away from our shepherd but he is innocent but our sins were laid on him like a sacrificial victim. In

chapter 52 and verse 15 we see it's not just for Israel but many nations will benefit.

In chapter 52 15 so shall he sprinkle many nations. So actually his atonement is not only for Israel which is the primary focus in chapter 53 but also by extension later to other nations. So his suffering is atoning.

Then we find that this servant will gather both Israel and the Gentiles to God. This is in some verses we've already read. For example chapter 49 verses 5 and 6 the Lord says in verse 6 it is too small a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel.

I'll give you as a light to the Gentiles that you should be my salvation to the ends of the earth. So not only does he atone for many nations and sprinkle many nations and Israel he draws them. He pays the price for their sins and then he brings them to God restores them in their relationship to God.

So also in 53 verses that we've already read but also verse 8 Isaiah 53 8 says he was taken from prison from judgment who will declare his generation for he was cut off from the land of the living. That's an idiom for being killed. For the transgressions of my people he was stricken.

For Israel's sins my people Isaiah is speaking my people Israel. He died for my people's sins not his own. Now how could this possibly be applied to Israel as the servant.

How could the servant be Israel and Isaiah says Israel died for my people. Israel is my people. Is it saying they died for their own sins? Well that can't be because the servant is described as being sinless and innocent.

So how could the servant He had done no evil it says. It's made very clear in verse 9. He had done no violence. There was no deceit in his mouth.

He was not the guilty party. He was the innocent party. Israel was guilty so he can't be Israel.

He is someone who is sent to gather Israel and the Gentiles to God. And as a result he will establish a kingdom worldwide. Characterized by justice and liberty.

And so he proclaims liberty as we saw in chapter 61. The spirit of the Lord God is upon me verse 1 because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim liberty to the captives. The Messiah because of his death and resurrection because of the success of his atonement and because he calls and reaches the Jews and the Gentiles can thereby establish a worldwide empire under himself which is characterized by liberty.

That would be of a spiritual sort. Not primarily political liberty though no doubt in the true kingdom of God there will be political as well as spiritual liberty but liberty from

captivity in this case would probably be liberty from demonic bondage and from the captivity to sin. That's the primary liberty that we're to expect from Jesus.

The Jews of course thought it would be a political liberty. That's why they expected the Messiah to drive out the Romans. Isn't he supposed to liberate us? We're under oppression from the Romans.

He's here to liberate us. The Messiah should liberate us because he's to proclaim liberty to the captives and here we are captive to the Roman overlords but the angel said to Joseph, now his name will be called Jesus because he'll save his people from their sins, not from the Romans, not from political oppression but from spiritual oppression, from spiritual bondage. The slavery of sin is what he's going to deliver from.

So the liberty is primarily at the level of being set free from your bondage to sin but of course if a significant number of people, if a large enough mass of people have ceased to live in sin, they're also going to cease to oppress each other. And if rulers happen to be in that class, they'll stop oppressing those who are ruled and eventually, I mean if true spiritual liberty permeates every echelon of society including the ruling and legislative classes, well then of course how could anything but liberty begin to characterize the political situation? Certainly. Oppression, a Christian who is himself following Jesus would never oppress someone else.

If that Christian happens to be in a governmental position, he will use his influence to end oppression because oppression is not loving your neighbor as you love yourself. So liberty begins at a spiritual level but of course in so far as the critical mass of those who have come under the Messiah's rule increases and spreads to include more and more and more and more people are followers of Christ, then more and more areas of society are occupied by those who are followers of Christ. And their spheres of influence then begin to reflect his values which is why Jesus described the kingdom like leaven put into a lump of dough that spreads and causes the whole lump eventually to rise.

Christ's kingdom is introduced in his own day. We are part of it and as more people come to Christ the kingdom expands and those who come to Christ now stand to represent Christ in whatever sphere they live and work in. So that as this happens more and more all the spheres of life begin to be invaded by the leaven of the kingdom and the whole lump of human society rises measurably and it already has.

Certainly we can look over the past 2,000 years and see what has happened in the lands where Christianity has truly been embraced and how conditions of life have improved for the people over the way it was before, before Christ came. There have been many studies done to show how Christianity has transformed the various societies that it invaded like leaven and a lump. So his kingdom, the Messiah's kingdom becomes one whose message proclaims liberty to the captives in the opening of prison to those who are bound.



And as we saw in chapter 42, the first of the so-called servant songs, the specific reference to liberty is or rather to justice in chapter 42, verse 4, he, the Messiah, will not fail or be discouraged till he has accomplished what it is he intends to accomplish. And this goes beyond his suffering and his resurrection. This is what he intends to do to the world.

This is what will be the result of his restoring the remnant of Israel and going out and being a light to the Gentiles. What will eventually happen? He will establish justice in the earth. He will establish justice in the And the coastlands, which as you've seen the expression coastlands frequently in Isaiah, it means the most remote areas from Israel.

The areas furthest out. The King James Version rendered this word the islands. But the idea is that this is not, we're not looking at the near range of Israel.

We're thinking as far out as you can imagine. The far, you know, unreached areas of the world. The coastlands says they shall wait for his law.

Now, that's a very important statement because in some measure the coastlands are still waiting for his law. Though his law, that is his rule, that is his gospel, has reached far and wide and has actually penetrated every nation. Though there are still tribal groups and, you know, certain villages and places in Asia and Africa and so forth that have not yet been penetrated.

But for the past 2,000 years he has been establishing justice. Now, you might say, well, it doesn't seem like a very just world. Well, you haven't seen what the world was like before he came along.

And justice has got to be understood more or less relatively, you know. You can only have so much justice as you have people interested in justice. The more people who turn to Christ genuinely, the more there will be people who promote justice.

But as long as people are rejecting Christ and still have some influence and power, there will be resistance to, you know, a society of complete justice. The point is, though, that compared to the way things were before Jesus came, certainly Western civilization has been impacted more than most. It has been transformed.

It's not perfect. It's far from perfect. But it's not perfect.

But if you had been in pagan Europe before Christianity came there, you would have found things much worse. And, you know, people were sacrificing their children. I mean, the Druids and so forth that were displaced by the Christian message were doing things that would be an abomination in our sight.

But, I mean, people still do things that are abominable, but not as many people are doing not institutionalized in the same sense that it was before Christianity had its

impact. And this is true wherever the gospel goes. It's a slow progress.

It's gradual. It's taken millennia so far. How many millennia it may take yet before it's absolute, who can say? We don't know.

But he's not going to fail or be discouraged. Sometimes if it takes too long, we get discouraged. And we think, well, it seems like things are going backward now.

When I was in my teens, it seemed like everyone was getting saved. There was a revival going on. Everyone I knew was turned to Christ.

It looked like the whole world was about ready to be converted. And now, 30, 40 years later, it's like going the other direction. How discouraging.

Well, we just see a short piece of this history timeline, the little piece we belong to, the little tiny segment of history we actually live through. And it has its ups and its downs. But it's a I like to liken it to when I used to own some stock.

I was actually given some stock by my grandmother before she died. I don't own it anymore. But I used to watch it day by day.

I'd go and look at the whatever, pages of the newspaper, tracked it. And it would go up a couple bucks. I'd say, oh, good.

I'm better off today. And then it went down a few bucks. And I thought, oh, I've really lost a lot today.

It's all on paper. I didn't lose anything because I hadn't sold it. But I'd be encouraged or discouraged day by day. Because I stood back and looked at the whole month.

Oh, it went up. Overall, it went up. It's like watching gold, you know? If you own gold, oh, it went down 20 bucks today.

Oh, up 30 bucks today. Oh, down 15 again. I mean, it's going all over the place.

But you stand back and look at the 10-year thing, and it went from 300 an ounce to 1,600 an ounce, you know? I mean, there's a lot of zigzagging going on, but the overall net direct upward. And that is really how the kingdom's progress is, too. If you look at any little tiny piece of it, the piece you live in, you say, oh, things are going really bad.

Sometimes people have told me on the radio, things are worse in the world than they've ever been in history. So we know Jesus is coming back. I think you don't know very much about history.

Things may be worse than they have been in your history. That is, when you were younger, things might have been better than they are now in this particular location. But

you're not going to pay much attention to what is going on in Africa or China or South Korea or South America or some of the places where the gospel is growing and spreading faster than it's ever spread in history.

You're looking at your little corner, your little provincial moment of time, and you're saying, oh, gold lost \$5 today. The sky is falling. Well, step back a little bit and see there's a bigger picture than that.

And if you compare that from the way it was at first to the way it is now overall, there's been an incredible improvement. And as far as we know, if the Lord tarries another hundred years or 200 years or more, it may be totally unrecognizable by today's standards. It may be that, who knows? There may be whole nations that are Christian by then.

You just don't know. It might take a thousand more years. Who knows? And we don't know that the Lord will tarry that long.

The point is that over time the trend is going to be the trend is going to be the trend is continuing. We get discouraged at times. He won't get discouraged.

He's got all the time in the world and more. He's got as much time as he needs. We don't.

We get in a hurry. We say, you know, when's God going to fix things? Well, maybe not in your time. Maybe not in your kids' or your grandkids' time.

But he's going to do it. He will not fail. He will not be discouraged.

He's not in a hurry. We are. And so that's why we get discouraged.

But there's no reason to. He's going to establish justice in the earth. And the coastlines are waiting for his rule.

Now, we're pretty much out of time. I was hoping to go through the final servant song, chapter 52, 13 through 53, 12, and analyze it at this time. However, we've read many of the verses already in this lecture and seen their basic content.

But we're not going to We will also be going through, Isaiah, chapter by chapter. And there will be certain chapters which will detain us more than others. And this chapter, 53, will certainly detain us more than most.

So we will have occasion to analyze that chapter later on as we're going actually through the book, chapter by chapter. So I don't feel like we're losing out by not taking this analysis that I've given at the bottom of the page. We'll have to, you know, put that off until the end of the time because we're out of time for this lecture this morning.