

27.02.2021 TO SERVE AND TO SAVE

“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.” Isaiah 42:1

Isaiah foretells the coming of God’s Servant, who will both serve and save His people when He comes to earth as the Son of Man. We also see in our study, that all who are chosen and called by God have a similar role to Jesus – they are servants too - they serve God’s people, and witness to the nations of the God who brings salvation/deliverance.

Servant Nation: Isaiah 41

Isaiah 41:1-7 describes a courtroom scene. God calls the world to acknowledge Him as the Lord of history... *‘who has performed and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD, am the First; and with the last I am He.’* (41:4)

The response of the nations is to turn to idolatry (41:5-7). At the judgment, the futility of idols is described in Isaiah 41:21-29.

In contrast, God gives a message of comfort and consolation to His servant, Israel... *‘the descendants of Abraham, My friend’* (41:8). The comfort of God described in Isaiah 40 can be relied upon for He is the Ruler of history. In Isaiah 41:8-20, God offers comfort and protection in 3 situations:

1. When faced with enemies, God will vanquish their enemies (41:8-13)
‘Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.’ (41:10)
2. In personal weakness they will be made strong; the worm will become a threshing sledge* (41:14–16)
“Fear not, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel! I will help you,” says the LORD and your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. (41:14)
3. In adverse circumstances, God will not forsake them; He will provide miraculously for them (41:17–20).
“The poor and needy seek water, but there is none, their tongues fail for thirst. I, the LORD, will hear them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them.” (41:17)

*threshing sledge - a heavy wooden plank, 2 or 3 feet by 5 or 6 feet, with sharp spikes on the bottom, when oxen pulled it over a grain field the grain was separated from stalks and weeds.

Isaiah 41:8, 9 describes Jacob/Israel’s status as God’s servant. Old Testament slavery/servanthood must never be thought of on the model of the West Indian slavery of the Christian era. Mosaic legislation extended protection to the slave and – such was the institution – had to make provision for the slave who loved his master and would not leave slavery (Ex. 21:2ff.). Such a ‘slave’, as a matter of social status, may have been at the bottom of life’s heap, but in another sense he was as powerful as his master, for should he ever have been molested, it was the master the molester had to reckon with... To be such a servant is a matter of divine choice and arises out of divine faithfulness. The divine pledge to Abraham contained a family principle involving an equal commitment to Abraham’s descendants/‘seed’, sealed in circumcision (Gen. 17:7). Abraham My friend is (literally) ‘who loved me’. *Motyer: the Prophecy of Isaiah.*

“Behold My Servant”

The Servant is Jesus – see Matthew 12:16-21. Jesus described Himself as a servant (Matthew 20:25-28, Matthew 23:11, Mark 9:35, Mark 10:43-45). Peter calls Jesus ‘Servant’ in his sermon at Pentecost (Acts 3:13, 26) and the praying church calls Him, ‘Your holy servant, Jesus (Acts 4:27, 30). Jesus still serves us, His redeemed and ransomed people, through His ministry as High Priest and Intercessor in the heavenly Sanctuary. Considering the futility of idols described in Isaiah 41, He is the One who brings truth and justice to the Gentiles.

His Character:

Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law. Isaiah 42:1-4

He is Spirit-filled, His ministry encompasses the world (the Gentiles are included). He is quiet and unaggressive in His ministry, for He is meek and lowly in heart. He cares for everyone and neglects no-one: He can mend the broken reed, fan into flame the smouldering flax (used as a wick for lamps).

The Servant is gentle, but He is not weak. He will bring forth justice for truth. He will not fail in His work and He will not be discouraged – all power and authority are His and He will finish the work in truth and righteousness.

Behold my servant, whom I uphold... God upheld His Son throughout His earthly ministry. He will uphold us in our ministry as sons and daughters of God. *Mine elect, in whom my soul delights...* God delighted in His Son; He has chosen us before the foundation of the world and He delights in us.

His Mission:

I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thy hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house. Isaiah 42:6, 7

The Mission of God's servant is similar to the description found in Isaiah 11:1-5 and Isaiah 61:1. God's Servant is the Messiah, Christ Jesus. At Calvary, He destroyed the works of the devil (1 John 3:8) and set mankind free from the prison of sin.

The Persian 'Messiah'

Who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," and to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid."' Isaiah 44:28

"Thus says the Lord to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held..." Isaiah 45:1

Isaiah prophecies of a deliverer, King Cyrus, who will arise nearly 150 years after Isaiah's death.

Josephus in his *Antiquities* relates that when Cyrus came across his name mentioned in this place in Isaiah 220 years before he lived, he was seized by a holy desire to fulfil what was written of him.

'He is My shepherd...' Cyrus would be the shepherd who restored the scattered sheep of Israel to their pasture in Jerusalem.

...saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," and to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid." In the days of Cyrus, only the foundation of the Temple was laid.

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up! 2 Chronicles 36:22, 23

Hope in Advance

In modern times, critics of the Bible state that Chapters 40-66 could not have been written by Isaiah. This is because they deny that prophecies of the future are possible. They deny the God who rules Time and History.

And this is to deny all the amazing prophecies in Isaiah that were literally fulfilled in the life of Christ.

At the time of writing, Israel, God's chosen people had rebelled against Him. Nevertheless, God continues to offer them His grace. He offers to protect, deliver and save them. This is true for God's people in all times and all ages. Not only does God offer salvation to Israel; He offers it to the Gentiles too, for He is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). And it is only a vision of the goodness of God that leads man to repentance (Romans 2:4).

"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 the Lord has done it! Shout, you lower parts of the earth; break forth into singing, you mountains, O forest, and every tree in it! For the Lord has redeemed Jacob and glorified Himself in Israel. Isaiah 44:21-23

The Feeling and Suffering Servant: the Great Deliverer

Isaiah 49 to Isaiah 53:12 describes the work of Christ, the Suffering Servant. It is a parallel passage to Isaiah 44:28 – 48:22 which describes the work of Cyrus also as a deliverer of Israel.

Cyrus will deliver the nation from national bondage, but they will still be a rebellious and disobedient people (Isaiah 48:1, 2). They need spiritual deliverance from sin. So God will send His Servant to deliver them from spiritual bondage. His task will not be easy – He will be despised and rejected of men – but He will conquer and release all mankind from its spiritual bondage to sin.

Christ always identifies Himself with His people. He is 'the worm' (Psalm 22:6); He is 'Israel' (Isaiah 49:4).

"Listen, O coastlands, to Me, and take heed, you peoples from afar! The Lord 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 laboured 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.' "

And now the Lord 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 the Lord, 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 the Lord, 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 the Lord who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel; and He has chosen You." 49:1-7

God the Father will uphold Christ in His ministry on earth.

Thus says the Lord: "In an acceptable[g] time I have heard You, and in the 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,' to those who are in darkness, 'Show yourselves.' Isaiah 49:8, 9

Conclusion:

Isaiah is a book about the grace of God. The love and grace of God is the basis of our salvation.

"Look unto Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other." Isaiah 45:22

Additional Note:

Cyrus the deliverer; Christ the Servant Deliverer

The work of Cyrus (44:24 – 48:22)	The work of the Servant (49:1 – 53:12)
The task stated and the agent named (44:24–28)	The task stated and the agent named (49:1–6)
The task confirmed: to Israel and the world (45:1–7)	The task confirmed: to Israel and the world (49:7–12)
The response: prayer (45:8)	The response: praise (49:13)
Israel’s disquiet (45:9–25)	Israel’s despondency (49:14 – 50:11)
– The Lord’s purpose affirmed (45:9–13)	– The Lord’s love affirmed (49:14–16)
– Israel and Gentiles (45:14–22)	– Israel and Gentiles (49:17–26)
– Those who find righteousness and strength in the supreme Lord and those who oppose him (45:23:25)	– The Servant, the exemplar of those who find strength and vindication in the almighty Lord (50:1–11)
The Lord’s care for Israel – from the beginning through to the coming salvation (46:1–13)	The Lord’s care for Israel – from the beginning through to the coming salvation (51:1–16)
Babylon: from the throne to the dust (47:1–15)	Zion: from the dust to the throne (51:17–52:12)
Redemption from Babylon (48:1–22)	Redemption from sin (52:13 – 53:12)

From: Motyer: The Prophecy of Isaiah
