

The Lord's Servant and Light for the World

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Isaiah 42:1-10 (*God speaks of His Servant: with God's Spirit, gentle, persistent, just, for all people*)

¹ Behold my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom my soul is pleased;
I have given my Spirit to be upon him;
he will bring forth justice to the nations.
² He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice,
or make his voice heard in the street;
³ a bruised reed he will not break,
and a faintly burning wick he will not quench.
For truth he will bring forth justice.
⁴ He will not grow faint or be crushed
till he has established justice in the earth;
and for his law the coastlands wait. [Mt 12:18-21]
⁵ Thus says God, Yahweh,
who created the heavens and stretched them out,
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,
who gives breath to the people on it
and spirit to those who walk in it:

⁶ "I am Yahweh; I have called you in righteousness;
I will take you by the hand and keep you;
I will give you as a covenant for the people,
a light for the nations,
⁷ to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.
⁸ I am Yahweh; that is my name;
my glory I give to no other,
nor my praise to carved idols.
⁹ Behold, the first things have come to pass,
and new things I now declare;
before they spring forth I tell you of them."
¹⁰ Sing to Yahweh a new song,
his praise from the end of the earth,
you who go down to the sea, and all that fills it,
the coastlands and their inhabitants.

Isaiah 49:1-6 (*The Servant tells of his Call, but is discouraged. God calls the Servant to wider service.*)

¹ Listen to me, O coastlands,
and give attention, you peoples from afar.
Yahweh called me from the womb,
from the body of my mother he named my name.
² He made my mouth like a sharp sword;
in the shadow of his hand he hid me;
he made me a polished arrow;
in his quiver he hid me away.
³ And he said to me, "You are my servant,
Israel, in whom I will be glorified."
⁴ But I said, "I have labored in vain;
I spent my might for emptiness and vapor;

yet surely my justice is with Yahweh,
and my recompense with my God."
⁵ And now Yahweh speaks, he who formed me
from the womb as a servant for him,
to turn Jacob back to him;
and that Israel might be gathered to him –
for I will be honored in the eyes of Yahweh,
and my God is my strength.
⁶ He says: "It is too small a thing for you only to be
my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to restore the survivors of Israel;
I will also give you as a light for the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Isaiah 50:4-9 (*Servant speaks: God taught him to hear and speak in the face of opposition, helped by God*)

⁴ My Lord Yahweh has given me
the speaking ability of those who are well instructed,
that I may know how to help the faint with a word.
Morning by morning he awakens my ear
to listen as those who are well instructed do.
⁵ My Lord Yahweh has opened my ear,
and I did not disobey; I did not turn my back.
⁶ I gave my back to those who strike,
my cheeks to those who pull out the beard;
I did not hide my face from insult and spitting.

⁷ But my Lord Yahweh is my advocate;
therefore I have not been disgraced;
therefore I have set my face like a flint,
and I know that I shall not be put to shame.
⁸ He who vindicates me is near.
Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together.
Who is my adversary? Let him come near to me.
⁹ Behold, my Lord Yahweh is my advocate;
who will declare me guilty? [Rom 8:33-34]
Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment;
the moth will eat them up.

Isaiah 41:8-10

⁸ But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; ⁹ you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, “You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off; ¹⁰ fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will be your advocate....”

Isaiah 42:18-20

¹⁸ Hear, you deaf, | and look, you blind, that you may see! | ¹⁹ Who is blind but my servant, or deaf as my messenger whom I send? | Who is blind as my dedicated one, | or blind as the servant of Yahweh? | ²⁰ He sees many things, but does not observe them; | his ears are open, but he does not hear....”

Matthew 12:15-24

¹⁵ Jesus, aware of this [the Pharisees’ plans against him], withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all ¹⁶ and ordered them not to make him known. ¹⁷ This was to fill up what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah:

¹⁸ “Behold, my servant whom I have chosen,
my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased.

I will put my Spirit upon him,
and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.

¹⁹ He will not quarrel or cry aloud,

nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets;

²⁰ *a bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not quench,
until he brings justice to victory; ...*

²¹ *and in his name the Gentiles will hope.*” [Isa. 42:1-4 Heb&Gk]

²² Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. ²³ And all the people were amazed, and said, “Can this be the Son of David?” ²⁴ But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.”

Isaiah, Exile, and a New Vision for Israel and the World

We’re focusing on Isa 40-55, but in scripture it is part of a large book spanning centuries. Israel as independent kingdom protected by God. Jeremiah, that’s past, God’s judgment by Babylon. Now a people in exile, looking forward to Cyrus of Persia, God’s chosen agent for this moment.

Who are we? What is happening, coming? Son of David bearing God’s Spirit (Is 11:1-2, 61:1-2).

Son of Man = saints of the Most High receive kingdom but suffer defeat (Dan 7:13-14, 18-22)

Servant of Yahweh in Isa becomes a central focus for revelation, reflection, anticipation of the new.

The Servant is Israel as a whole (Is 41), object of God’s pleasure, receives God’s Spirit. How? No longer a warring nation but healing, caring servant, uncrushed, bringing justice to nations. How?

Vision of God: Creator of earth and all people. Servant is God’s agent for covenant, new creation:

Light to the nations. Healing blindness, prisoners in darkness. This is God’s glory, true God, not idols. New Event brings a New Song from ends of the earth. All peoples are called to the One God.

The Servant Sings to the World: Is 49:1-6; 50:4-9

Israel as servant is a challenge. Israel has been blind and deaf. That brought exile. Israel needs salvation, renewal. Servant sings with new voice: Called from birth, hidden as God’s instrument for his glory. Did not grasp God’s glory. God gives the Servant a double mission: to Israel to turn Israel around and restore the people (?). To the nations to be God’s light to turn Gentiles to the one God, salvation for all people. Servant is both the embodiment of Israel and the renewer of Israel. He is to bring the truth of Israel’s God to the whole of God’s creation.

The servant is instructed by God, aided to listen. He learns not to disobey. But obedience brings pain and insult. He must trust God as his justice. God is the one who lasts, overcomes defeat and guilt. God is the helper/advocate of the Servant, but on a scale that was hard for people to see.

Jesus brings together Son of David, Son of Man (royal, triumphant figures) with the Servant of Yahweh. No warrior king, rather a healer. A New thing breaking in. Can you see, hear? People knew how to demonize or follow a king. But the Servant was / is a challenge to see God’s glory.