

The Four Servant Songs in Isaiah

Isaiah 42:1-9

Isaiah 49:1-12

Isaiah 50:4-11

and Isaiah 52:7-53:12

Isaiah 42:1-9

1 Behold My servant, whom I uphold; My chosen, in whom My soul delights: I have put

My spirit upon him; he shall make the right to go forth to the nations.

2 He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street.

3 A bruised reed shall he not break, and the dimly burning wick shall he not quench: he shall make the right to go forth according to the truth.

4 He shall not fail nor be crushed, till he has set the right in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his Torah.

5 Thus says El YHWH, He that created the heavens and stretched them forth, He that spread forth the earth and that which comes out of it, He that gives breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein:

6 I YHWH have called you in righteousness, and have taken hold of your hand, and kept you, and set you for a covenant of the people, for a light of the nations.

7 To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.

8 I am YHWH, that is My Name: and My glory will I not give to another, neither My praise to graven images.

9 Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them.

(Is. 42:1-9 HRV)

Is. 42:1 says:

*Behold my servant, whom I uphold;
my elect in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him;
he shall bring forth judgement to the Gentiles.*

This is a close parallel to another passage in Isaiah:

*And the Spirit of YHWH shall rest upon him...
with righteousness shall he judge...
(Is. 11:2, 4)*

Now EVERYONE agrees that Is. 11:1f speaks of the Messiah and it is clear that Is. 42:1 speaks of the same individual. (Also Is. 61:1 is parallel.)

Isaiah 49:1-12

1 Listen, O isles, unto me: and hearken, you peoples, from far. YHWH has called me from the womb, from the innermost parts of my mother, has He made mention of my name.

2 And He has made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of His hand has He hid me, and He has made me a polished shaft. In His quiver has He concealed me,

3 And He said unto me: You are My servant, Yisra'el, in whom I will be glorified.

4 But I said, I have labored in vain. I have spent my strength for nought and vanity: yet surely my right is with YHWH, and my recompense with my Elohim.

5 And now, says YHWH, that formed me from the womb to be His servant; to bring Ya'akov back to Him, and that Yisra'el be gathered unto Him: for I am honorable in the eyes of YHWH, and my Elohim is become my strength.

6 Yes, He says: **It is too light a thing, that you should be My servant** to raise up the tribes of Ya'akov, and to restore the offspring of Yisra'el. I will also give you for a light of the nations, that My salvation may be unto the end of the earth.

7 Thus says YHWH, the Redeemer of Yisra'el, his Set-apart One, to him who is despised of men, to him who is abhorred of the nation, to a servant of rulers: kings shall see and arise; princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, because of YHWH that is faithful, even HaKadesh of Yisra'el, who has chosen you.

8 Thus says YHWH: In an acceptable time have I answered you, and in a day of salvation have I helped you, and I will preserve you, and give you for a covenant of the people: to raise up the land; to cause to inherit the desolate heritages;

9 Saying to the prisoners, Go forth. To them that are in darkness, Show yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and in all high hills shall be their pasture.

10 They shall not hunger nor thirst, neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for He that has compassion on them will lead them, even by the springs of water will He guide them.

11 And I will make all My mountains—a way—and My highways shall be raised on high.

12 Behold, these shall come from far, and behold, these from the north and from the west, and these from the land of Sinim.

(Is. 49:1-12 HRV)

It is the claim of the anti missionaries that 49:3 closes the case and clearly identifies the Servant as Israel. However in context that identification must be allegorical. In Is. 49:1-12 the servant is clearly NOT literally Israel because in verses 5 & 6 the servant brings Jacob (Israel) back to YHWH; raises up the tribes of Israel and restore the preserved of Israel. Clearly then the next two verses reveal

that the servant is NOT Israel. So why does Is. 49:3 make that identification? Because there is an allegorical relationship between Messiah and Israel. Both for example are the Son of Elohim. Both had miraculous births. Both were taken into Egypt to save them in their youth. Both were called out of Egypt. Rome tried to kill both of them. etc.

In verse 7 most translations state that a “nation” abhors the servant. However some Rabbinic translations (JPS and Soncino) state that the “nations” abhor the servant. This makes a big difference. If the word is singular “nation” then by context the “nation” would be Israel. Thus proving once again that the servant is not Israel because Israel cannot abhor Israel. However if the reading is “nations” then this fits with the Rabbinic interpretation that the servant is Israel and that in Is. 53 Israel is being oppressed by the nations. So one must ask: who is being honored? This is pivotal. Is the word “nation(s)” in Is. 49:7 plural or singular? The word is in the Hebrew SINGULAR thus proving once again that the servant is NOT Israel. The Rabbis have actually CHANGED the text of Is. 49:7 so as to make it fit with their theory.

Isaiah 50:4-11

4 The Adonai YHWH has given me the tongue of them that are taught, that I should know how to sustain with words, him that is weary. He wakens morning by morning. He wakens my ear to hear, as they that are taught.

5 The Adonai YHWH has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away backward.

6 I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.

7 For the Adonai YHWH will help me, therefore have I not been confounded.

Therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.

8 He is near that justifies me: who will contend with me? Let us stand up together: who is my adversary? Let him come near to me.

9 Behold, the Adonai YHWH will help me: who is he that shall condemn me?

Behold, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up.

10 Who is among you that fears YHWH, **that obeys the voice of His servant**, though he walks in darkness, and has no light? Let him trust in the Name of YHWH, and stay upon his Elohim.

11 Behold, all you that kindle a fire; that gird yourselves with firebrands. Begone in the flame of your fire, and among the brands that you have kindled. This shall you have of My hand: you shall lie down in sorrow.

(Is. 50:4-11)

Isaiah 52:7-53:12

7 How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messengers of good tidings—that announces peace, the harbinger of good tidings; that announces salvation; that says unto Tziyon, Your Elohim reigns!

8 Hark! Your watchmen! They lift up the voice. Together do they sing, for they shall see eye to eye, YHWH returning to Tziyon.

9 Break forth into joy; sing together, you waste places of Yerushalayim: for YHWH has comforted His people; He has redeemed Yerushalayim.

10 YHWH has made bare, His Set-Apart arm in the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our Elohim.

11 Depart you! Depart you! Go you out from thence. Touch no unclean thing; go you out of the midst of her. Be you clean, you that bear the vessels of YHWH.

12 For you shall not go out in haste, neither shall you go by flight: for YHWH will go before you, and the Elohim of Yisra'el will be your rearward.

13 **Behold, My servant** shall prosper: he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high.

14 According as many were appalled at him,¹³⁵ so marred was his visage unlike that of a man: and his form, unlike that of the sons of men.

15 So shall he sprinkle many nations: kings shall shut their mouths because of him, for that which had not been told them, shall they see, and that which they had not heard, shall they perceive.

1 Who would have believed our report? And to whom has the arm of YHWH been revealed?

2 For he shot up right forth as a sapling, and as a root out of a dry ground. He had no form nor comeliness, that we should look upon him, nor beauty that we should delight in him.

3 He was despised, and forsaken of men—a man of pains, and acquainted with disease, and as one from whom men hide their face: He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.

4 Surely our diseases He did bear, and our pains He carried: whereas we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of Elohim, and afflicted.

5 But He was pierced because of our transgressions; He was crushed because of our iniquities: the chastisement of our welfare was upon Him, and with His stripes, we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned every one to his own way, and YHWH has made to light on Him, the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed, though He humbled Himself, and opened not His mouth. As a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before her shearers is dumb: yes, He opened not His mouth.

8 By oppression and judgment He was taken away, and with His generation who did reason? For He was cut off out of the land of the living, for the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due.

9 And He made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich, His tomb: although He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth.

10 Yet it pleased YHWH to crush Him. He has put Him to suffering to see if His soul would offer itself, as a guilt offering: that He might see His seed, prolong His days, and that the purpose of YHWH might prosper by His hand.

11 From the travail of His soul, He shall see light, and shall be satisfied in His understanding. My Righteous servant shall justify many, and their iniquities, He bears.

12 Therefore will I divide Him a portion among the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the mighty, because He bared His soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors: yet He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

(Is. 52:7-53:12 HRV)

Key Questions

Who is the speaker?

Who is the servant?

Who is “we”?

Who is “he”?

Who is the Speaker?

Three answers have been proposed:

1. Isaiah
2. YHWH
3. The Gentile Kings of the Earth

We will examine number 1 last.

First: Is the speaker YHWH?

The speaker cannot be YHWH because the speaker has sins (53:6)

Second: Is the speaker The Gentile Kings of the Earth (As Tovia Singer claims) ?

Chiastic Structure in Isaiah 52:10

Is. 52:7

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him
that brings goodnews,
that publishes peace;
that brings goodnews of good,
that *publishes salvation*,
that says to Zion: “Your God reigns!”

Is. 52:10

A. YHWH

B. has *made bare his holy arm*

C. in the eyes of all the nations

C. and all the ends of the earth

B. shall *see the salvation*

A. of our God.

Is. 53:1

Who has believed our report?

And to whom is *the arm of YHWH revealed*?

Clearly the “arm of YHWH” in 53:1 is the “report” of 52:7

Clearly the “arm of YHWH” in 53:1 is “his holy arm” in 52:10

Clearly “see the salvation” of 52:10 is “bare his holy arm” of 52:10

Clearly the “publishes salvation” of 52:7 = “see the salvation” of 52:10

Therefore the “report” of 53:1f is being given by the figure on the mountains who is certainly NOT the Gentile Kings.

The text of 52:15 specifically tells us that the Gentile kings are silent they have nothing to say, they are NOT delivering a report. If it was important that we think that the speaker was the Gentile kings of 2:15 then why would YHWH have the text tell us they are silent. in fact the Targum actually states that the kings “shall be silent because of him”

Is the Servant Israel?

The servant cannot be Israel because:

1. The servant is a voluntary sufferer (Is. 53:7, 12b)
2. The servant is contrasted with the speaker who counts himself with a group (Israel) saying “we” throughout. (Is. 53:6) If “we” is Israel and “we” is being contrasted with “he” then “he” the servant cannot be Israel.
3. The servant is an innocent sufferer (53:6, 9) but Israel has guilt. Israel suffers BECAUSE we have sinned (see Deut. 28-29 and Lev. 26)

So Shall He Sprinkle Many Nations (Is. 52:15)

So shall he sprinkle many nations: kings shall shut their mouths because of him, for that which had not been told them, shall they see, and that which they had not heard, shall they perceive.
(Isaiah 52:15 HRV)

sprinkle Hebrew: יזה the imperfect hiphil form of the verb יזה “to spurt or splatter”. Some translators have rendered this word as “startle” based largely on the Greek LXX reading “wonder”, however even these translators translate the word “sprinkle” in all other passages (such as Lev. 5:9; 8:11; Num. 19:18-19). The Aramaic Peshitta translates this word into Aramaic with מדכא “purify” taken from the Aramaic root מדך “to season or sprinkle”. The Aramaic Targum Jonathan understands the word here to mean יבדר “scatter”.

He Shall See His Seed (Is. 53:10)

53:10 says “he shall see his seed” and anti-missionaries make much of this. They say that zera cannot be used allegorically. In fact the word zera (seed) is used allegorically in Jewish literature to refer to the scattered tribes. In fact the Targum on this passage understands “seed” allegorically and paraphrases it “the Kingdom of their Messiah”. In fact then term seed is used allegorically in the very next chapter (Is. 54:1-3)

He shall See Light (Is. 53:11)

In the Hebrew of the Masoretic Text Isaiah 53:11 has a serious grammatical problem.

The Hebrew of the Masoretic Text reads literally:

*From the travail of his soul he shall see _____
shall be satisfied in his understanding.
My Righteous servant shall justify many
and their iniquities he bears.*

There is very clearly a missing word in the Hebrew resulting in two verbs in a row “shall see” and “shall be satisfied”. What shall he see? Now the missing word “light” DOES appear in the Septuagint and has also now turned up in two Hebrew copies of Isaiah found at Qumran.

The passage SHOULD read (as it does in the HRV):

*From the travail of his soul he shall see light
and shall be satisfied in his understanding.
My Righteous servant shall justify many
and their iniquities he bears.
(Is. 53:11 HRV translation)*

The Servant is the Messiah

In fact the Targum Jonathan to Isaiah plainly proclaims the servant of the Suffering Servant Song in Isaiah to be the Messiah:

*Behold, **My Servant the Messiah** shall prosper;
he shall be exalted and great and very powerful.
(Targum Jonathan on Is. 52:13)*

*It is the will of the Lord to purify and to acquit
as innocent the remnant of His people, to cleanse
their souls of sin, so that they may see the Kingdom
of their **Messiah**, have many sons and daughters,
enjoy long life, and observe the Torah of the Lord,
prospering according to his will.
(Targum Jonathan on Is. 53:10)*

The Babylonian Talmud also applies this section of Isaiah as speaking of the Messiah:

*The Rabanan say that that Messiah's name is the Suffering
Scholar of Rabbi's House (or the Leper Scholar) for it is
written, "Surely he has born our grief and carried our sorrows,
yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted."
(Is. 53:4)
(b.San. 98a)*

*The Messiah- what is his name?Š The House of Rabbi Judah the
Holy One says: The Sick OneŠ "Surely he has born our sicknesses"
(Is. 53:4)
(b.San. 98b)*

*Rabbi Joshua came upon the prophet Elijah as he was standing
at the entrance of Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai's cave. He asked him:
"When is the Messiah coming?" The other replied: "Go and ask
him yourself." "Where shall I find him?" "Before the gates
of Rome." "By what sign shall I know him?" "He is sitting
among the poor people and covered with wounds."(see Is. 53:5)
(b.San. 98a)*

The same application is made in the Midrash Rabbah:

Rabbi Jose the Galilean says: Great is peace-for at the hour the King Messiah reveals himself unto Israel, he will begin in no other way than with "peace" as it is written: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger of goodnews, that announces peace." (Is. 52:7) (Perek HaShalom in some Talmud editions and Numbers Rabbah XI, 16-20)

Rambam says:

Regarding the mission by which Messiah will present himself Isaiah states, "He grew like a tender plant and as a root out of dry land At him will kings shut their mouths, for what had not been told unto them shall they see, and what they never heard shall they understand." (Is. 52:15-53:2)

Perhaps most interesting is the application of Isaiah 53 to the Messiah in the Zohar:

In the Garden of Eden there is a hall that is called the "hall of the afflicted." Now it is into this hall that the Messiah goes and summons all the afflictions and pains and sufferings of Israel to come upon him. And so they all come upon him. And had he not eased the children of Israel of their sorrow, and taken their burden upon himself, there would be none who could endure the suffering of Israel in penalty of neglecting the Torah. Thus it is written: "Surely our diseases he did bear and our pains he carried." (Is. 53:5) As long as the children of Israel dwelt in the Holy Land, they averted all afflictions and sufferings from the world by the service of the sanctuary and by sacrifice. But now it is the Messiah who is averting them from the habitants of the world. (Zohar 2:212a)

Yeshua in the “Torah Code” of Isaiah 53

Yeshua is actually identified with his name actually encoded in the prophecy of Isaiah 53. If we start with the sixth to the last ם in Isaiah 53:10 and count every 20th letter going from left to right, we spell ישוע שמי “Yeshua is my name”.