

The Steadfast, Obedient Servant

One of the basic issues being worked out in the book of Isaiah is what would happen if God's people did not exemplify His desire for righteousness, godliness, and justice. How could God's commitment continue in those circumstances? Israel's inability to keep its covenant obligations brought the question to full force. Since Israel had broken the covenant, how could God continue in relationship with them? The apparent conflict arises between God's justice and His faithfulness. He must either destroy them because of their sin, or if He wished to remain in covenant with them, He must ignore their sin because of His commitment to them. How would this tension be resolved?

It is helpful to remember that God's justice and His faithfulness are bound up in His own divine holy nature. (While God is just, powerful, faithful, loving, merciful, and expresses wrath and grace, these are always understood in Scripture as holy justice, holy power, holy faithfulness, holy love, and holy wrath.) Throughout Isaiah's book, he tells us that the holy fires of destruction will be the means of salvation, and unless judgment comes, there will be no way God's promises can be kept (cf. Isaiah 1:21-28, 4:2-6).

Isaiah expands our understanding further by painting *in advance* a portrait of the One who would bear the judgment for all mankind (1 Timothy 2:6). God Himself would enter our world as "Immanuel," the Servant. In the person of the Servant, we are given the explanation of how God can express holiness, justice, faithfulness, and love—all at the same time! It is this extraordinary Servant of God that Isaiah describes for us in the poignant Servant Songs.

1. When did you first come in contact with the power of the gospel?

Invitation to Pray: Ask God to help you live your life this week in a way that will remind God of the obedience, sacrifice, and devotion of the Lord Jesus.

The first section of chapter 50 (vv. 1-3) is more of a conclusion to what has come before than an introduction to what follows. **Read 50:1-3** and compare **49:14**. The people of Israel in exile were likening themselves to a divorced wife. The Lord interrupts this kind of thinking with several rhetorical questions. (Behind these questions lies the dreaded possibility that the Lord's covenant with his people may have suffered a final breach. According to Deuteronomy 24:1-4 a divorce could set in motion a series of events making the reconstitution of the first marriage impossible. The absence of a *certificate*, however, would indicate that this process had not even been started.)

2. What is the Lord emphasizing in this series of questions (vv.1-2a)? (See also Hosea 2:2-8.)

3. Of what does the Lord remind His people in vv. 2b-3? What examples does He give?

The Servant, whom we already met in chapters 42 and 49 appears again in verses 4-9. That the Servant is speaking becomes apparent in verses 10-11.

Hear the beauty of His words as the Spirit reveals His preparation for battle so many centuries before the conflict.

4. Prayerfully **read verses 4-9**. Note that four times in this passage God is addressed as the Sovereign LORD, *Yahweh*—the saving God in all His absolute power (4, 5, 7, 9).
 - a. The Servant begins by pointing out what an unusual gift had been given Him for the fulfillment of His duties. What is the distinguishing mark of this Servant of God (4a)? Compare several translations.
 - b. What does this gift enable Him to do?
 - c. How do the Servant's words come to Him (vv. 4b, 5a)? What is the Servant modeling for us as well?
 - d. The connection between the ability to “listen” and the ability to offer a “seasoned word” is not spelled out, but becomes obvious. How might a “hearing ear” be a prerequisite for an “instructed tongue”?

In this Song the Lord Himself takes the place of a disciple. As a true man, He had to receive continually the message of life. As a result he remained a “learner” all his days.

5. On a scale of 1-10, how well do you listen to the quiet workings of the Holy Spirit as He seeks to disciple and instruct you?
6. In verses 5-6 the Servant again alludes to the fine care with which He was taught to listen. With what attitudes and actions does the Servant respond? (See also Mark 15:15, 19-20; Luke 22:63-65.)

From this passage, it becomes plain that the Servant's obedience would lead to physical and emotional suffering. This section presents a truly remarkable catalogue of events, written seven hundred years or more before they happened. The Lord suffered all these things at the hands of sinful men on the actual morning of the crucifixion.

7. How does the Servant remain faithful in the midst of all the humiliation and pain (vv. 7-9)? (Compare Luke 9:51 and John 4:4.)

There are two kinds of courage—the courage of the moment, which requires no previous thought, and a “planned” courage, which sees the difficulty ahead and steadfastly marches towards it. The Servant had the later kind of courage; He could see the cross in the horizon, but still set His face like a flint.

This kind of resolve should characterize our lives as well. When God gives us a course of action, we must move steadily toward our destination, no matter what potential hazards await us there.

8. Is there a situation in your life to which you can apply this truth? Explain.

To dig deeper: Examine the following scriptures to see how the LORD will vindicate His Servant (v. 8). (1 Corinthians 6:14; John 16:8, 9; and Psalm 2:6-9.)

In verses 4-7 the very essence of **true obedience** is distilled for us. There is first an ear attuned to hear God speak, and alongside that, there is a spirit that is not rebellious. There is also an absorbing desire to do the will of God whatever the cost.

9. In which of these areas do you feel you need to grow the most? How is God nudging you?

Of necessity, this will involve a daily application of the cross; it will mean having “the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God, who raises the dead” (2 Corinthians 1:9).

10. a. What attitudes or actions do you need to submit to the way of the cross? Talk to God about this.

- b. In what areas of your life are you allowing the application of the cross?

Note: True obedience is initiated and continued by the Holy Spirit who alone can live a Christ-honored life through the believer.

11. Verses 10-11 remind us of two possible outcomes that result from men's attitude towards the Servant of the LORD. What truths are pictured here for Israel and for us?

Dependence on God

Dependence on Self

In the section that follows, Isaiah is reflecting on the third Servant Song. Here the emphasis is on the expectations of those who will listen to the Servant as well as encouragement to those followers of righteousness. From this point through 52:12, the Servant theme builds to its climax in 52:13—53:12.

12. **Read chapter 51.** What effect should the heavenly vision (v. 6) have on the exiles as they face their oppressors (vv.7-8)?
13. What words or pictures are used to describe how the exile felt to those people who loved God (vv. 12-16)?
14. What promise is given to them now (vv. 17-23)?
15. When discouraged, how might meditating on the truths of this chapter give you a new perspective?
16. As we wrap up this section, take time to consider all the remarkable features of the Servant-King's manner of living as outlined in the first three Servant Songs: Isaiah 42:1-4, 49:1-6, 50:4-9. Finish by writing your impressions of this beautiful Servant of the LORD.

Continue to meditate on the qualities that you want His Spirit to reveal more fully in your life.