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## Messiah in Isaiah

### Study Six

### *The “Afflicted Servant” of the LORD – (Isaiah 50:4-11)*

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<b>A Suggested Outline &amp; Synopsis of the Book of Isaiah</b>
Prophecies of <b>CONDEMNATION</b> Chs 1-35
<b>HISTORICAL INTERLUDE</b> re: Hezekiah’s Deliverance from Assyria (36-37), Sickness (38) & Sin (39)
Prophecies of <b>COMFORT, CONSOLATION &amp; RESTORATION</b> Chs. 40-66

**Introduction** - There are four “Servant Songs” in the Book of Isaiah. The One True God, “the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob”, the LORD God of Israel, declared in the strongest terms that readers (and hearers) must: **“Behold My Servant”!** (Isaiah 52:13). The One referred to in this injunction is the **“Suffering Servant of the LORD” – Messiah Jesus!**

This present series of studies seeks to heed God’s words and focus entirely on “Him”, “[Messiah Jesus who] was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Rom. 4:25).

The images on this and the following page are presented with the writer’s prayer that those reading this article (as well as the previous two articles and the final one to conclude the series in the next issue) might gain a clearer understanding of these “Servant Songs” as they are found their several contexts in the Holy Bible and then applied, personally.

The four “Servant Songs” are found in the second section of Isaiah’s prophecy. He has delivered his God-given messages of **“condemnation”** in the first section (chs. 1-35, followed by a brief “historical interlude” re King Hezekiah – see chart). The concluding section outlined **“comfort, consolation and restoration”**

for Israel (chs. 40-66). Unlike one of his contemporary eighth century B.C. “prophetic” colleagues, Amos from Tekoa, who testified of himself “I was no prophet, nor a son of a prophet, but ... a sheep-breeder and a tender of sycamore fruit” (Amos 7:14), Isaiah was from the “upper echalons” of Judah’s society. He had access to royalty – enough so that he gave advice concerning the foreign affairs of the nation. This “son of Amoz” (Is. 1:1-2) was directed by the Holy Spirit to write concerning the “Suffering Servant of the LORD” – a messianic portrayal of Messiah Jesus.

Isaiah’s “First Servant Song” revealed a “pictorial” prophecy of the Messiah as **“The Humble Servant”** (Is. 42:1-7). This was followed by a “conversational” depiction of **“The Rejected Servant”** (Is. 49:1-7). The third of his “Four Messianic Songs” recorded an “autobiographical” presentation of the prophesied Messiah as **“The Afflicted Servant”**. The “Fourth Song” proceeds to give an “editorial” record of **“The Suffering/Slain Servant”** (Is. 52:13-53:12).

The “Four Servant Songs” may be illustrated in these suggested images: The text of Isaiah 50:4-11 prophetically revealed **“The Afflicted Servant”** of the LORD:

<sup>4</sup>“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.

<sup>5</sup>The Lord GOD has opened My ear;  
And I was not rebellious,  
Nor did I turn away.

<sup>6</sup>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.

<sup>7</sup>“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.

<sup>8</sup>*He is near who justifies Me;*  
Who will contend with Me?  
Let us stand together.  
Who *is* My adversary?  
Let him come near Me.

<sup>9</sup>Surely the Lord GOD will help Me;  
Who *is* he *who* will condemn Me?  
Indeed they will all grow old like  
a garment;  
The moth will eat them up.

<sup>10</sup>“Who among you fears the LORD?  
Who obeys the voice of His Servant?  
Who walks in darkness  
And has no light?  
Let him trust in the name of the LORD  
And rely upon his God.

<sup>11</sup>Look, all you who kindle a fire,  
Who encircle *yourselves* with sparks:  
Walk in the light of your fire and in the  
sparks you have kindled—  
This you shall have from My hand:  
You shall lie down in torment.

The immediate context of these “autobiographical” words of the “Afflicted Servant” mentioned in the first three verses of Isaiah 50 stated the cause of Israel’s coming woes in exile. God’s people would be in Babylon because of their

sinful disobedience against the One True God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The consequences of the breaching of their covenant responsibilities with Him would make them conclude that God had abandoned His people. In fact, the contrary was true! He was keeping his covenant promises, actually (cf. Dt. 28:15-68 and especially verses 64-68). Their exile would not be a matter of “divorce” but for “discipline” (vss. 1-3)!

Yes, Israel knew that she was Yahweh’s “servant” (cf. 41:8-10; 44:1-2; 49:3), but she had failed to be as verses 4-9 will go on to describe. This messianic “Servant” would show all the hallmarks of willing discipline and uncompromising obedience!

Enter the “Afflicted Servant” of the LORD!

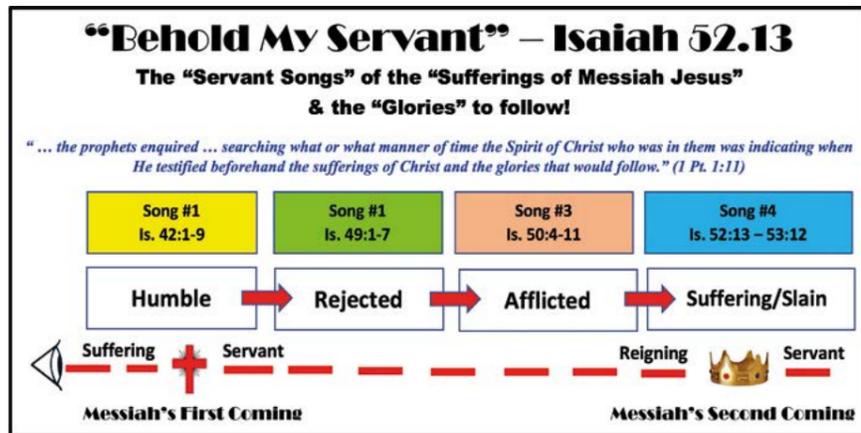
**I. The Servant’s “Education” Manifested His Readiness to Learn! (vss. 4-5)**

Messiah Jesus is God Incarnate, the “Word that became flesh and tabernacled amongst us” (Jn. 1:1,14). He laid aside His eternal glory, humbled Himself and became man (Phil. 2:5-9). As “God-Man”, He was “the last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45-49) and even though He was omniscient, in being born as a human baby, He had to learn to feed, to speak, to write, to interact and “live life” as it unfolded. Significantly, he had to learn “obedience” and that was through “suffering” (Heb 5:8). In fact, He was “made perfect” through “suffering” (Heb. 2:10). In that context of Hebrews 2:5-18, in His humanity, the “Heir of all things” (God’s King-Son), Messiah Jesus, has become fully suited to the needs of His fellow heirs – born again believers!

He made it his habit to listen to his Father’s voice to set the direction for every moment and every day of His life. He never rebelled against those given instructions, nor did He ever “turn away” from expediting them. He always “pleased Him” (Jn. 8:29) and did His will (Heb. 10:7,9). Having listened to the Father, He used His tongue to communicate His “word” in ministry “at the right time”, thereby encouraging the “weary” hearer.

**II. The Servant’s “Determination” Evidenced His Resolve to Suffer! (vss. 6-7)**

Since He always “listened” to His Father, Messiah Jesus always did what he was told. He “lived by the Book”, as the twelve quotations in Matthew’s Gospel citing “that (the Scripture) might be fulfilled”, reveal. What Israel failed to be as God’s “servant”, Messiah Jesus, His “Afflicted Servant”, was!



Indeed, The Lord Jesus did “set (His) face like flint” (vs. 7; cf. Lk. 9:51) to go to Jerusalem, to be mocked, rejected, and ultimately crucified. The prophetic prediction of this was revealed in verse 6. Is it any wonder his disciples were amazed and afraid (Mark 10:32) as he walked so resolutely to the Holy City and to His death. It was no “cake walk”! Recall the events in the Garden of Gethsemane: Loud cries and tears (Heb 5:7); He revealing prayer of the agonising burden of being willing to “do the Father’s will” no matter what the cost. That burden was that of man’s “sin” which He later took “upon the tree” (1 Pt. 2:24) and “was made sin for us” (2 Cor. 5:21). Hallelujah! This faithful “Suffering Servant” resolved to do this because this was what He and His Heavenly Father had ordained from “before time began” (1 Pt. 1:18-20; Tit. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:9; Eph. 1:4-5).

**III. The Servant’s “Vindication” Proved His Prior Reckoning that This Would be So! (vss. 8-9)**

Paradoxically, after the “disgrace” of verse 6, the “Afflicted Servant” testified that He had “not been disgraced”! One can only assume that this could have referred to His soul being “abandoned in Hades” (cf. Ps. 16:9-11; Acts 2:25-31). Messiah Jesus was able to go through the ignominy and desolation of Calvary’s Cross because he knew from “before time began” that He would be vindicated (vs. 8).

To be “vindicated” means that after one has been wrongly accused, it is then shown that the accusation was wrong. So ‘vindication’ of the wrongly-accused must include the unmasking of those who have initiated the wrong accusations. That is the way that the sovereign LORD will “help” Messiah Jesus (vs. 9). He will cause those who accuse Him to “wear out”, just like moth-eaten clothes are only good for the rubbish bin!

Recall the similar point Jesus made during his trial prior to His crucifixion. Read the

account in (Mk. 14:53-65 and especially vs.62). Moreover, Peter tells us that “He committed Himself to Him who judges justly” (1 Pt. 2:22). The resurrection happened and God’s redemptive plans were consummated (cf. Phil. 2:9-11) as He was made both *Lord and Christ* (Acts 2:36). The “Afflicted Servant” came “to serve” and in that role, demonstrated that He was “the greatest” (cf. Mk. 10:45).

**IV. The Servant’s Disciples’ “Consolation”: The Recompense of Trusting God! (vs. 10)**

Verses 10 and 11 gave Isaiah’s application of this messianic passage about the “Afflicted Servant”. In verse 10, the first of two ways of walking were described, viz., “walking in the dark, “trusting” God”. Thus, the disciples of the “Afflicted Servant” were invited to “trust God” even in “dark times”.

In verse 10, He described those who “obey the voice of the Servant” (i.e., His disciples or servants) who were walking in darkness, just as He himself did in vs. 6, and as Israel would do in the exile. The way may be “dark” but “disciples” are called to do that, trusting in the name of the Lord, relying on Him their sovereign LORD, in all things!

This is the big theme of Isaiah’s message to his people – believe in Me (the LORD) or you will never “be established” (Is. 7:9) They are to “look unto (Him) and be saved” (Is. 44:22). So, it is for us: Trust God in everything because He is committed to His people, no matter what their circumstances. His promises will prove true, and by His grace, they will stand!

**V. The Servant’s Enemies’ “Destination”: The Reward of a “Faith-less” Life! (vs. 11)**

The second of Isaiah’s applications concludes this third messianic “Servant

Song”. The “son of Amoz” described the second way of “walking in the dark, “seeing”, but not by faith”. This is the alternative group of people he addressed. They are not spared the “darkness”, either. Notice, however, their “self efforts” to illumine the “darkness”. They make for themselves “flaming torches”, designed to assist “seeing” as they walk about. How did they fare? How did their “best efforts” get on? The “sparks of self-effort” flew, but ...!!!

Note the stark contrasts here in verse 11 and the people described in verse 10. They “serve” the Servant and “walk with Him”. They may not “see” where they

are going, but they continue to trust their Servant Guide. Where do they end up? In whatever place and circumstance He has chosen for them. The people of referred to in verse 11 end up “(lying) down in torment”. Apparently, they can “see” where they’re going (as the sparks fly), but the corollary is that they cannot stop themselves from ending up in a very bad place. “Torment” in this context of “fire and darkness” connotes a place described elsewhere in Scripture as “Hell” (Gehenna, prepared for the devil and his angels – Mt. 25:41; cf. Rev. 21:16). Even Isaiah himself in his prophecy which is acknowledged as “the most evangelistic of all the Prophets”, ends his God inspired

account with the “most horrendous description of ‘Hell’ in all Scripture” in chapter 66, verse 24. It stated:

24“And they shall go forth and look Upon the corpses of the men Who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, And their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.

Dear reader, Jewish or Gentile friend, this present writer respectfully invites you to consider “The ‘Afflicted Servant’” of Isaiah 50:4-11, in faith turn to Him and receive Him into your heart as you personal Saviour and “walk in His light”, trusting Him in everything, wherever He may lead!

**The Timeless Jewish Context of the Book of Esther**



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**Introduction** - Suffering is an important theme of our Bible. We have been looking at the significance of the Suffering Servant in Scripture - the One who suffers for the sin of the world.

The consequences of sin have caused much suffering for the Jewish people. Isaiah 63:9 is a sobering little verse that is worth reflecting on: “In all their affliction He was afflicted.” Wow!

I particularly want to focus on a book of the Bible that focuses on the Jewish suffering, and the key themes that emerge from it.

But from the start, I want to ask you to stop for a moment and consider the significance of this truth: God devoted a whole book of the Bible to the suffering of the Jewish people in dispersion!

This should cause us to sit up and take note - we who believe the entire Bible is inspired and thus the carefully chosen revelation of God. God included a whole book of the Bible to give us understanding of the Jewish people in the diaspora.

Each year in February Esther becomes a focus of mine. At the end of February is the Jewish celebration of Purim, so I spend the month considering the text while I am arranging Purim songs for our Israeli band. By the time

Purim arrives on the 14th of Adar (exactly 1 month before Passover...!), I have let God guide my thoughts for this celebration as I play Jewish songs that every Jewish kid is raised to know and sing.

So let’s have a look at the key themes in the Book of Esther’ ... and allow the LORD to impress upon us why He devoted a whole book to Purim that will be celebrated “without fail” and its memory “should not perish.” (Esther 9:28).

**1. Provide the historical background for the feast of Purim**

This is so important! The basis for the Purim celebrations that continues to this day is revealed in God’s Word. Hence, the Jewish requirement over the 2 days of Purim is to hear the entire Book of Esther read through at least twice. So, like Passover, regardless of whether Jews identify as religious or secular, the enduring purpose of the Purim celebration is integrally and inherently biblical. It is a witness to the faithful and enduring Word of God.

This final feast on the Jewish calendar<sup>2</sup> (Passover being the first) is a Biblical witness - faithfully celebrated by the Jewish people worldwide to this day.

That it is preserved in the Christian canon, not solely the Jewish canon, must impress upon us of what God wants to speak into our hearts regarding the Jewish people.

**2. Emphasize the continuing, ongoing, religious significance of the Jewish people**

This is such an important purpose in the modern Christian world where God’s ongoing purposes for Israel are strongly debated (and sadly also denied)!

Consider the challenge of this statement: The book of Esther provides the strongest canonical warrant in the whole Old Testament for the religious significance of the Jewish people in an ethnic sense. This comment by Brevard Childs goes further: “The inclusion of Esther within the Christian canon serves as a check against all attempts to spiritualize the concept of Israel--usually by misinterpreting Paul-- and thus removing the ultimate scandal of biblical particularity.”<sup>3</sup>

The preservation of the Book of Esther in Scripture is a clear witness that speaks directly to the issue of ethnic Israel. It makes no sense to try make this Jewish narrative anything other than the preservation of Israel in the time of their dispersion. And I would argue the fact that it is to be celebrated “without fail” (9:28) every year is a witness to their preservation. There is no mention of specific Jewish practices in the book (no mention of law or even prayer!) yet “Someone” anonymously preserves them (and not just preserves - actively curses those who curse them, cf. Gen 12:3!) and leaves a permanent record before the world: **Purim!**

Even when God is silent (God is not mentioned in the entire book) history is still His! And as a number of theologians have noted regarding the Book of Esther, God’s fingerprints are everywhere in the book, even though He remains anonymous.

Does this not also apply to modern history? While some see that “God’s fingerprints are everywhere,” others argue “coincidence” and that history is purely about individual response to the Gospel. To be sure, personal response to the

Gospel is essential - but could it be that God is also pursuing global salvation through history? Did not World War 1 recognise the land of Israel for His chosen people (Witness: The Balfour Declaration and San Remo Conference)? Did not World War 2 recognise the chosen people for the land (Israel's statehood in 1948)? Did not the greatest victory of all time (1967 Six Day War) reunite Jerusalem as Israel's capital after 2,000 years? Is not the return of Jewish people to their homeland that was particularly heightened in the 1990s particularly prophesied in the Scripture and recognised as such by the world (a unique phenomenon given a unique term, **"Aliyah"**)? Is not the 2020 "Abraham Accords" a unique bringing together of Jew and Arab that has made the world gape in awe - yet prophetically must take place for a future unified world government? God is silent - but it seems to me "His fingerprints are everywhere"! Even when God is silent, History is still His!

God continues His purposes through His chosen people! Any doubts? - time to reread the Book of Esther!

### **3. Encourage the Jews in dispersion of God's providential ability keep his covenant.**

Bible commentators put it in these terms, "God's ability and willingness to preserve them against their enemies". But I think this is understating it a bit!! For me, it's a bit soft on two counts:

First, a natural reading through the text makes many of us wince at Esther's brutality in chapter 9 (note vs. 13-15), where she calls for another day of slaughter against her enemies. This is not God just preserving His people, this is actively cursing enemies. Genesis 12:3 makes sense of this - "those who curse you I will curse." While it is true that in the Book of Esther God showed He could and would preserve His people, the consequences that play out better demonstrate God's providential ability to keep his covenant. Even in silence God is working through history to fulfil the ancient covenant/s with His people.

The second reason it is a bit soft for me is this. I believe a key theme is "the pleasure/the will" of the king. (There is little difference between these terms in practice!). Everyone notes the parallel between "the king" (Ahasuerus) and "The King" (of the universe, who remains anonymous). Thus, I believe chapter 1 is so important - because it displays for us how "the king" is limitless in accomplishing his pleasure/will (and again there is little difference between these!). This sets the

stage for how "The King" is limitless in accomplishing His good pleasure/will - as revealed in His covenants. So for me, this third purpose is to encourage the Jews in the time of dispersion of God's pleasure and deep desire for His people. It is this that makes sense of the reversal of mourning to joy, and fasting to feasting that are essential aspects of the account. God is not just revealing his ability to preserve, He is showing His unstoppable will, His passion to fulfil all that He desired for His people when He cut a covenant with the forefathers of national Israel back in Genesis 12. God's passion to keep His covenant with Israel is even greater than the display of Ahasuerus in chapter one - though of course much, much purer in nature!

### **Time for some reflection as we conclude....**

It is so important to let these themes shape how we see our world. As followers of Messiah, we are learning to see the world according to His purposes. One of these is our personal acknowledgement and surrender to Him as the Saviour - the Suffering Servant. Another is to follow Him as He works through history to claim what is rightfully His because He suffered and died to purchase our personal salvation and the global salvation of our world. The Suffering Servant is also the King of the coming Kingdom.

Currently we are in a time of suffering - both for Jews and Christians. 80 million more Christians are being persecuted this year than 12 months ago for their faith<sup>4</sup>. That is astonishing and must impact our perspective of our place in history. The second most prominent persecution in the world is the Jewish people. It is should not escape our attention that the enemy knows who to attack to oppose God's purposes - Christians and Jews.

Just before Purim, every year begins for the Jewish people with Holocaust Remembrance Day (Jan 27) and with it the latest research on antisemitism across the world. It is a sobering read. This year there was a report by Colonel Richard Kemp on the systematic removal of Jews from academia in the UK<sup>5</sup>; and in Australia - in the same week of Holocaust Remembrance, 34 neo-nazi youth marched through the Grampians yelling antisemitic slogans.<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 63:9 - "In all their affliction He was afflicted."

So, let Purim speak to you and inform your faith as you follow the purposes of Messiah. Let ethnic Israel speak to you, to inform your faith, also. What does the Book of Esther teach you about the place

of the Jewish people in God's plans - even in their dispersion? Even in God's silence? May the Jewish encouragement of the Book of Esther be your encouragement - God is faithfully passionate and willful in keeping every word of His covenants. All those who put their faith in His plan - including you! - through His Suffering Servant who is the Messiah of Israel, will find the suffering turned to celebration.

We don't know what 2021 holds for us. But we do know what the future holds for us through faith - and it will be more wonderful than the Jewish celebration in Shushan! More wonderful than all the 2021 Purim celebrations around the world combined! More wonderful than we can even conceive! (1 Cor 2:9)

One final thought: Purim reminds us that even in the years of persecution and suffering, we should make sure we set aside times to celebrate - both to look back and look forward to the times of God's great salvation.

May such thoughts lead you into the year ahead.

<sup>1</sup>I have adapted mine from those presented by David Malick in his article on bible.org "An introduction to the Book of Esther" - bible.org [https://bible.org/article/introduction-book-esther#P106\\_13574](https://bible.org/article/introduction-book-esther#P106_13574)

<sup>2</sup>While Purim is not one of the 7 "Appointed Feasts" mentioned in the Torah (cf. Lev. 16 and Dt. 16) it is certainly a Biblical feast - by the nature of it being recorded and carefully explained in the Biblical book of Esther - especially note chapter 9".

<sup>3</sup>Brevard S. Childs, Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture, 607 cited David Malick bible.org article cited previously.

<sup>4</sup><https://www.opendoors.org.au/persecuted-christians/prayer-news/world-watch-list-2021-1-in-8-christians-persecuted/>

<sup>5</sup>Eerily reminiscent of 1930s Europe.... [https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/16977/educational-ethnic-clean-sing?fbclid=IwAR3IDOP0ieucU4frMIDhB\\_83bpvWfYI-WA4HWKE-CxQD8oJPmeAKcLqnfJU](https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/16977/educational-ethnic-clean-sing?fbclid=IwAR3IDOP0ieucU4frMIDhB_83bpvWfYI-WA4HWKE-CxQD8oJPmeAKcLqnfJU)

<sup>6</sup>[https://www.jwire.com.au/the-grampians-or-ba-aria-dvir-responses/?fbclid=IwAR1jkRIUAej50mnWf5OazrZ8qWf7cwkGHDNwFcbi5JifY7\\_J657BvxMUqI](https://www.jwire.com.au/the-grampians-or-ba-aria-dvir-responses/?fbclid=IwAR1jkRIUAej50mnWf5OazrZ8qWf7cwkGHDNwFcbi5JifY7_J657BvxMUqI)

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