***The Servant Songs of Isaiah - CA-026***

In Genesis 12:1-3, we see the beginning of the ministry of the Jewish people on God's behalf to the world: "The Lord said to Abraham, 'Go forth from your country and from your relatives and from your father's house to the land which I will show you. I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great. So you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you, I will curse. In you, all the families of the earth will be blessed.'"

**God's Blessings through the Jewish People**

God's blessing to the world through the Jewish people (the descendants of Abraham) consists of four areas: The first one is that the Jews were to write God's revelation to man. Secondly, they were to preserve God's written revelation to human beings. Thirdly, they were to be the communicators of monotheism. This is not only the belief that there was only one God, but that the God of the Bible, a God of absolute righteousness and holiness, desires that sinful human beings be reconciled to Him. Fourthly, the Jewish nation was to be used as the vehicle to bring the Messiah, the Savior of all mankind, into the world.

The Jewish Scriptures, the Hebrew Scriptures (what we call the Old Testament) are filled with references to the coming Savior, and we have looked at some of them. In fact, a very outstanding scholar of Bible prophecy, J. Barton Payne, says that there are 574 explicit references to the coming Messiah in the Hebrew Scriptures. When we read the gospels, we see that the technique that Jesus used was to start with the Scriptures, and to prove that He was the Messiah foretold in the Hebrew Scriptures. Let's just look at some examples.

In John 5:39, Jesus encouraged people to study the Scriptures. Jesus said, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life. It is these that testify about Me, and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may receive life." So Jesus said, "You Jewish people are students of the Scripture. That's good. Keep studying the Scriptures and you'll find out who I am."

In Luke 16:31, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus quoted father Abraham as saying, "But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets (the Old Testament Scriptures), they will not be persuaded, even if someone rises from the dead.'" So Jesus said, "You've got to get your information about spiritual truth from the Scriptures, because this is what really matters. That's where we find spiritual truth."

In Luke 24:25, after the resurrection: "He said to His disciples, 'Oh, foolish men, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken. Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?'" Then, beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in the Old Testament Hebrew Scriptures. He probably went through all 574 predictions about the coming Messiah.

Verse 44: "Now He said to them, 'These are My words, which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the Scripture." So He went through all of the Old Testament predictions about the coming Messiah with the apostles. Then He showed them that these supplied to Him.

We find that this technique was what was used by His earliest followers, beginning on the day of Pentecost. In Acts 2:22, when Peter preached the first sermon in the church age, he preached that sermon to the men of Israel. Notice how it begins: "You mean of Israel." And then he goes to Psalm 16. He always begins with the Jewish Scriptures.

Then Acts 13:14: "The apostle Paul and his companions, going on from Perga, arrived at the city in Antioch, and on the Sabbath day, they went into the synagogue and sat down. After the reading of the Law and the prophets, the synagogue officials sent to them saying, 'Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it.'" I can imagine that the apostle Paul was probably dressed in his Pharisee robe, and they thought, "Boy, this is a visiting dignitary and theologian. Man, this guy is a Pharisee. He really knows his stuff. So, our visiting brother, do you have anything you would like to say?" Paul stood up and said, "Men of Israel, you who fear God." Then he went through the Old Testament Scriptures to prove that the Lord Jesus Christ was the coming Messiah predicted in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Then, of course, Acts 17:11 (a scripture very dear to the hearts of us here at Berean Memorial church): "These (the people at Berea) were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily (the Old Testament Hebrew Scriptures) to see whether these things were so." Verse 12: "Therefore, many of them believed."

In the book of Acts, the apostle Paul says that the things that are written in the Old Testament are there for our edification. They're there for a reason.

1 Corinthians 15:3: "For I delivered to you, as of first importance, what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Old Testament Hebrew Scriptures."

**The Servant Songs of Isaiah**

So now we're going to look at one rather long passage that reveals Jesus to be the Hebrew Messiah. That is what we call "the servants songs of Isaiah." These are found in Isaiah 42-53. We're not going to read all of these. We're just going to glide along and pick out some highlights. These are actually four poems or songs about the coming Messiah. We're going to pick out some passages here that very explicitly could refer to no one except Jesus of Nazareth.

In Isaiah 42:1-4, we read, "Behold, My servant whom I uphold, My chosen one in whom my soul delights. I have put my Spirit upon Him. He will bring forth justice (or righteousness) to the nations. He will not cry out, or raise His voice, nor make His voice heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break, and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish. He will faithfully bring forth justice." His primary mission was that of righteousness – the imputed righteousness to all those who believe on Him. He was elected or chosen by God the Father. He was anointed for a mission that was guaranteed to be successful.

In verse 6, again, He was said to be the representative of righteousness, and that He would have an international ministry: "I am the Lord. I have called You in righteousness. (This is God the Father speaking to the Messiah.) I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You. I will appoint You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations." This is the way the Jewish people referred to the gentiles – the other nations of the world, or just the nations.

In Isaiah 49:2, the Messiah was promised to have been a gifted teacher: "He has made My mouth like a sharp sword. In the shadow of His hands He has concealed Me, and He has made Me a select arrow. He has hidden Me in His quiver." In other words, His mouth was a sharp sword. When he spoke something, it could cut right down to the very soul, and He made Him a select arrow. His words always made their target.

In Isaiah 49:4, He would receive opposition: "I said I have toiled in vain. I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity. Yet surely the justice due to Me is with the Lord, and My reward with my God." He had opposition. There were times when the Lord Jesus Christ was probably discouraged and thought, "I have toiled in vain," but He remembered that He was on a mission from God the Father.

Then here is one that really makes us sit up and take notice. Isaiah 53:9: "His grave was assigned with wicked men. Yet he was with a rich man in his death, because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth." We know that Jesus was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea who was a rich man. But isn't this interesting? "His grave was assigned with wicked men." These were men who were sinners. But notice, "He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth." The implication is that He was sinless – without sin.

Isaiah 52:14: "Just as many were astonished at you, so His appearance was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men." We can read in the gospels about the beating that the Lord Jesus Christ took that changed His appearance as marred more than anyone else.

Isaiah 53:1-2: "Who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground. He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him." He had humble origins, and He was rejected. Verse 3: "He was despised and forsaken of man, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and like one from whom men hide their face. He was despised, and we (the Jewish people) did not esteem Him."

Listen to this verse. Verse 5-6: "But He was pierced through for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging, we are healed. All of us, like sheep, have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way, and the Lord has called the iniquity of us all to fall on Him." We call this the vicarious suffering of Jesus. It was predicted by Isaiah that although the Messiah would be sinless, He would suffer for sins. He would suffer on behalf of other people's sins.

Also, He would be put to death. Isaiah 53:7: "He was oppressed and He was afflicted. Yet He did not open His mouth, like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before shearers. So He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgment, He was taken away, and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living." He was taken away. Sometimes we even use a similar term for someone being killed. We say, "They were taken out". Then in verse 8, "He was cut off out of the land of the living." Very clearly, He was put to death: "For the transgression of My people to whom the stroke was due."

Then it was predicted that the Messiah would come back to life. Isaiah 52:15: "Thus He will sprinkle many nations. Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him, for what had not been told them they will see, and what they had not heard they will understand." Then we just read that after His work is done, kings will become His followers, and will honor Him. Then Isaiah 53:11-12: "As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied. By His knowledge, the righteous one, My servant, will justify the many, and He will bear their iniquities." So here we see someone who has been killed and has been brought back to life and has done the work of justifying many people. Now, how could you see anyone in this prophecy except Jesus of Nazareth?

Throughout history, the Jewish people (the Jewish rabbis) have interpreted this to be the Messiah. However, in the last 100 years or so, Jewish theologians have said, "No, this can't be the Messiah because it fits Jesus too much, and we don't recognize Jesus as being the Messiah." So they've had to make up something else.

I actually read a testimony of a Jewish man who has become a believer. One of the things that encouraged him to become a believer was that he went to his rabbi and he said, "Look, rabbi, I've met some people who tell me that the servant songs of Isaiah refer to Jesus. Who do they refer to?" Now, the Jews have traditionally said, for the last 100 years or so, that this could either be applied to Isaiah the prophet or to the nation of Israel. We'll look at that in just a moment, but this young man's rabbi answered him: "You know, I don't know. It sure sounds to me like it's referring to Jesus. But since we Jews reject Jesus, we know that can't be Jesus. So I really don't know who it's referring to: the Messiah; the nation of Israel; or, Isaiah the prophet." So as a result, this young man believed that it had to be Jesus, and the Jewish people just would not recognize this.

First of all, it cannot stand for Israel. You could call up a Jewish rabbi tomorrow and ask him, "Just who is Isaiah talking about – the suffering servant?" He would probably say, "Oh, it's the nation of Israel. Just look at how we have suffered all through history under Nebuchadnezzar, and Adolph Hitler, and all of these people who have wanted to do away with the Jews. Our nation has really suffered." But we just saw that the suffering servant is sinless. And nowhere does the Bible indicate that Israel is a sinless nation. In fact, in the Law in Leviticus 16, God instituted the Day of Atonement once a year where the Jewish people were to spend the day fasting and confessing their sins. And in the context of Isaiah's prophecy, there are many many indictments of the Jewish people for their sins of idolatry and unfaithfulness to the Lord. So, just on that basis, we can say it cannot be the Jewish people or the nation of Israel. Also, there is no indication that the Jewish nation has ever been put to death. Many people have tried to do so, but we have many Jews alive today in the world. So the Jewish nation still exists, so it cannot be the Jewish nation.

It cannot be Isaiah the prophet because in Isaiah 6:5, Isaiah confesses that he is a sinner: "Then I said, woe is me, for I'm ruined because I'm a man of unclean lips, and I live among the people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts. So Isaiah the prophet was very aware of his own sinfulness. So we have to eliminate both of these desperate theories that the suffering servant is the nation of Israel or the prophet Isaiah. It has to be the coming Messiah, and it fits the Lord Jesus Christ perfectly: Jesus of Nazareth – Him, and no one else.

We see in the New Testament what happened to skeptics who were, first of all, Jewish. For the first ten years of the Christian church, everyone was Jewish. Nobody ever thought. "Well, do you reckon we should let a gentile in the church?" It had just never come up for the first ten years. Not only that, but many of the people were such strong Jews that they were very anti-Christian. Let's just look at a couple of them.

**Christ's Half-Brother James**

The first one is the brother of the Lord Jesus Christ, the half-brother James, brought up in the same family, but who rejected Jesus' claims to being the Messiah. In John 7, we read, "After these things, Jesus was walking in Galilee, for He was unwilling to walk in Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill Him. Now the feast of the Jews, the feast of booths, was near. Therefore, His brothers said to Him, "Leave here and go into Judea so that Your disciples may see Your works which You are doing, for no one does anything in secret when he himself seeks to be known publicly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world."

So His brothers were saying, "OK, You claim to be the Messiah, so why don't You just come out publicly and let everybody know, and prove it by doing some mighty works?" They were saying, "If you really do do these mighty works," because verse 5 says, "Not even his brothers were believing in Him." Now, something happened between then and shortly after the crucifixion because we find in Acts 1:14 that the believers were all with one mind, and were continually devoting themselves to prayer along with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers." So something had happened. They had changed their mind, and they were now with their mother and the other believers, calling on God in prayer. We can well surmise that it was during this period (sometime between the first Easter Sunday and Pentecost) that the Lord Jesus Christ had appeared to His half-brother, James. 1 Corinthians 15:7: "Then He appeared to James, and then to all the apostles." So it doesn't tell us when that happened, but it was probably between Easter and Pentecost.

Then we find a number of references to James, the half-brother of Jesus, in the New Testament. We know that he changed from a skeptic (an outright unbeliever) to a pillar of the church. One of the references Paul makes to James is in Galatians 1:19: "After Paul became a Christian, I did not see any of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother."

**Paul**

Speaking of Paul, let's just look at him. Acts 9:1: "Saul, still breathing threats and murders against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem." You know what happened to Paul. He saw the risen lord and became a believer. Then in verse 20, we see this hardened, anti-Jesus, ultra-conservative Jew: "Immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the son of God.'"

So we see how skeptic's (unbelievers) who were very vehemently opposed to Christ, once they saw the evidence, they became believers. What happened was that a whole social structure was changed. The Jewish people, those who became Christians, went radically and drastically from keeping the Sabbath to worshiping on the first day of the week in honor of the risen lord. They stopped offering animal sacrifices. Just read the book of Hebrews, and see all the references to animal sacrifices. That is a letter that was written to Hebrews, and it's saying, "We don't do that anymore. We know that they were only symbolic, and our sins have been taken away by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ." The early Christians might not have ever heard of the word "trinity," because it wasn't made a word until about 180 A.D., but they were Trinitarians. These were Jewish people who had been steeped in the religion of monotheism: "Hear, Oh Israel, the Lord thy God is one." They had understood that He was one, in essence, but in three persons: the Messiah, the Savior; the Holy Spirit; and, the Father. These were people who were willingly expelled from the synagogue.

The Jewish society, as you know, was very exclusive. They associated only in their own community. They didn't have anything to do with gentiles, and they depended on one another for their employment and their business. If you were a Jew, and you were expelled from the synagogue, you lost your friends; you lost your family; you lost your means of livelihood; your business; and, everything. Jews, for the first ten years of the church, all over the Middle East, were being expelled from their synagogues, and giving up their beliefs and practices as Jews as fast as they could. And guess what? They were associating with gentiles. That was something that good Jewish people just didn't do. But they were associating with them; eating with them; having fellowship with them; and, even eating what (up until then) they had considered unclean.

So the point that we're making here is that the Savior that we serve, whom we belong to, is living today. We don't follow a memory of a historical figure. We're not following a ghost. We're following a flesh-and-blood human being who is also God – God in human flesh, who is living today; who is in heaven, making intercession for us; who is aware and in communion with each one of us; who indwells each one of us; and, who is returning again to this earth. He isn't finished with the Jewish people yet either. You can read about God's plans for the Jews in Romans 9. The Jewish people are a very special people to God, and His covenants to them, regardless of what amillennialists and postmillennialists say. His covenants with the Jewish people are still valid today.

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[**Back to the Bible Questions index**](http://www.christiandataresources.com/allarticles.htm)