



The Suffering Servant: The Messiah of Isaiah 53 and Psalms 22

Robert Clifton Robinson

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There is a great King who came to earth, not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. The Prophet Isaiah was uniquely chosen by God and given the great privilege of writing 131 detailed and specific prophecies of the Messiah. In describing the sacrifice for sin that He would make, Isaiah wrote not exclusively of his beloved nation of Israel, but also the ultimate servant, the One who came to lay down His life for all mankind.

At the end of the Jews third war in 63 B.C. against Mithridates IV, king of Pontus—the Roman government appointed Syria as a province of Rome. Pompey the Great came to Jerusalem and sacked the city and entered the Temple. In 1 B.C., Herod was installed as the king of Judea, followed by the establishment of Israel as a Roman province in 6 A.D.

By the time that Jesus stood before the people of Israel as their long-awaited King, the Jews had been under the tyranny of the Romans for close to 100 years. In spite of their long outcry to God for deliverance and the hope of a Messiah who would overthrow the Roman government—when their King arrives, they will not receive Him. The Jews wanted a conquering king, not a suffering and dying Servant. The Chief Priests and the Pharisees had not read and understood their own scriptures. Had these men studied the words of their prophets they would have known that the Messiah would come first to set the world free from sin and death. Later, at the end of the age, He would return a second time to reign over all the governments of men.

Jesus was not the Messiah the Jews wanted or expected, so they called for His crucifixion.

There have been several books written on the subject of the “Suffering Servant” of Isaiah. Unfortunately, very few accurately address the real issue of this important subject: “Who is this servant?” Chapter 42 of the Book of Isaiah gives us the clearest understanding of what this important text is stating:

?Verses 1-17: the Servant who is the Messiah, the faithful one.

Verses 18–20: the servant (small “s”) who is Israel, who is unfaithful to the Lord.

Isaiah 42:1-17 “Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.

Isaiah 42:18-20 “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?”

By careful observation of the above text, we understand that Isaiah is describing two different servants: the faithful Messiah and the unfaithful nation of Israel.

The mixing together of these verses of scripture from Isaiah 42, as the Servant who is the Messiah and the servant who is Israel, has caused some who interpret these verses to conclude that the entire text is speaking of Israel and not the Messiah. This is of course an error.

The first 17 verses of Isaiah 42 are distinctly descriptive of a person who is identified much later in the New Testament as Jesus Christ.

Verses 18-20 describes My blind servant. This is a correct description for the spiritual condition of Israel during the time that Jesus appeared before the leadership of the Jews and confounded their ability to rightly identify Him as the Messiah.

This failure to recognize two servants in the text of Isaiah 42 has led to a further error in identifying the suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 as the nation of Israel. Many commentators on the text of Isaiah 42 and 53 believe that both are depicting the suffering which the nation of Israel has undergone for the past 2,000 years.

This is the result of an incorrect exegesis and hermeneutical interpretation of the text. Simply reading through each verse, and allowing the context to speak to us without a premise or bias towards any particular interpretation, leaves the reader with a clear conclusion that the two servants are distinct from each other by marked contrasts in the language of the text.

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