

CHRIST IN THE PSALMS AND PROPHETS

November 20, 2022 | *The Servant, Part 1*

SERIES PREVIEW

Last year, Oakwood small groups studied the life of Jesus. One of the things we learned was that Jesus's life was part of a larger story that began long before He was born and will continue until after He comes again. All of human history centers on the man we profess to be the savior of the world. It is not surprising that Christians following Christ's ascension continue to define our lives in terms of Jesus's story. What may be surprising to many is that the generations before Christ's birth looked forward to His coming. This series will examine eight Old Testament passages that anticipate the first coming of Christ. Each lesson will identify the main idea of the passage and give special consideration to how the passage points to the first coming of Christ. May this series prepare your heart to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

How would your life be different if you knew God would give you strength to accomplish every task He called you to?

Read Isaiah 42:1–9 and 49:1–7.

Ask God to help you understand His commission and rest in His strength, just as the servant did.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

The servant's commission and strength come from God.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

If Jesus relied on God's strength, so should we.

❏ MEDITATE

“Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations” (Isaiah 42:1).

GETTING STARTED

+This section will introduce Isaiah’s servant passages.

❏: *Why would Jesus be identified with a servant?*

❏: *How was Jesus a servant for all of humanity?*

The second half of Isaiah contains several passages known as the “Servant Songs” that refer to a servant figure who either speaks or is spoken to by God. In each case, the servant has a significant role in God’s plan. The identity of this servant is contested. Many scholars believe he is the nation of Israel. While this is possible for some of the Servant Songs, the servant cannot be the nation of Israel in Isaiah 49:5–6, part of the second passage studied in this lesson, because this passage distinguishes the servant from Israel.

Furthermore, the servant is frequently connected to royalty. In Isaiah 37:35, King David is referred to as a servant. Several other Old Testament passages use “servant” to refer to a king (1 Samuel 23:10; 1 Kings 3:6; Psalm 78:70; Ezekiel 34:23). The servant in Isaiah received God’s spirit (Isaiah 42:1) as do kings Saul and David (1 Samuel 10:10–12; 16:13). The servant’s ministry of justice (Isaiah 42:1) was typically the role of a king in the ancient world.

Most Christian interpreters throughout church history have understood the Servant Songs to be about Jesus. These prophetic oracles anticipated the coming of a figure distinct from Israel but who at the same time took up Israel’s role.

❏: *If the Messiah was a servant to others, what does that say about us?*

❏: *Although the servant cannot be identified as Israel, why is it important that he*

continue to be identified with Israel?

APPLICATION POINT – We know Jesus as king and as the Son of God, yet He can also be identified as God’s servant. If Christ can identify as a servant, His followers must as well. We are not the Son of God. We are not kings or queens. We are lost sinners redeemed by Christ. Being God’s servants is more than we deserve.

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Each of the four Servant Songs shares themes with the others and the rest of Isaiah, but each also presents a unique element of the servant. This lesson will cover the first two Servant Songs.

1. THE SERVANT’S INTRODUCTION

2. THE SERVANT’S MISSION

GOING DEEPER

+This section is divided between the first two Servant Songs. Each section identifies the main points of the Servant Song and offers personal applications.

1. THE SERVANT’S INTRODUCTION

■ ISAIAH 42:1-9

Q: *Where does the servant draw strength for his ministry from?*

Q: *What does Isaiah mean by saying the servant will not break a bruise reed or blow out a faint candle?*

The first thing we are told of the servant is that he is upheld by God (Isaiah 42:1). God will uphold the servant because He delights in him. Furthermore, God will put His Spirit upon the servant. Only then are we told the servant will bring forth justice. The order is instructive for understanding the servant. Although he will accomplish many great things, he always does so through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit also explains the endurance of the servant. He will not give out or give up until he accomplishes the justice he seeks (Isaiah 42:4). All of this reveals that the servant finds his strength in God.

The source of the servant's strength is crucial for understanding Isaiah 42:2–3. The ancient Near East was familiar with invading conquerors who used their power to smash and rebuild their enemies. Their heralds would announce the king's intentions to the besieged city to create terror among its citizens (2 Kings 18:28–35). The servant, however, will not need to lift His voice to be heard in the street. He will not need to exploit weak enemies (Isaiah 42:3). He will accomplish what he sets out to do because of the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

❓: *Why is it crucial for us to rely on God's strength instead of our own? Can you describe a time when you failed to fully rely on God's strength?*

❓: *How does relying upon the Holy Spirit's power keep us from compromising essential matters of our faith?*

APPLICATION POINT – Jesus, who has been given all power and authority, calls us to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18–20). The implication is that we will do so in the power He has been given. Like it does for the servant, working in God's strength makes all the difference for us. When we try to work in our own strength instead of the Holy Spirit's, we will make compromises. We will have to, because there is no way we can adequately accomplish a spiritual task like disciple-making apart from God's power. When we make compromises to complete spiritual tasks, we compromise the task itself. Like the servant, we must remember to always work in God's power.

❓: *What is the point of identifying God as the creator in Isaiah 42:5?*

❓: *What are the servant's tasks?*

After describing the source of the servant's strength, Isaiah describes the servant's commission, beginning with identifying God as the creator of the heavens and earth and the giver of life to all people on the earth. This may seem like a pointless excursion at first, but it is important to understand that the one commissioning the servant is also the one who created the realm in which he will carry out his task. God has the authority over what He has made. The servant is carrying out the owner's wishes and does it in God's strength and authority. To reject the servant is to reject the creator God.

The servant's task is to be a covenant for the people. We typically think of a covenant as being made between two parties, but in this case, the servant himself will actually be the covenant. The servant's people will include the nations (Isaiah 42:6). The Old Covenant was made with the people of Israel, but the servant's covenant will include all nations. The servant's task will be to open blind eyes and free those imprisoned by darkness (Isaiah 42:7), similar to the words of the speaker in Isaiah 61:1–2 and to Luke's quotation of this passage (Luke 4:18–19). The servant's task, ultimately, is to reveal the glory of God (Isaiah 42:8). God will not tolerate the idolatry that consumed Israel and the other nations.

Q: *God commissioned the servant to be a covenant for the nations. As a follower of Christ, what is your role in fulfilling the servant's commission?*

Q: *In what ways could you be removing God's glory from what He has called you to do?*

APPLICATION POINT – God will not give His glory to another. Certainly, no one can take it from Him. It is easy to become self-centered. We want to feel important and know that what we do matters. We want to be admired by others. But finding our worth in our jobs or in the admiration of others robs God of the glory meant for Him alone. The servant is our example. Jesus did not seek His own glory (John 8:50). When Jesus received glory, it was to glorify the Father (John 17:1–5). Instead of seeking worth in our jobs or in the admiration of others, we should find our worth in being made in God's image (Genesis 1:27). When our worth is based on what God has made us to be, the glory we receive glorifies God.

2. THE SERVANT'S MISSION

■ ISAIAH 49:1–7

Q: *What themes does Isaiah 49:1-7 share with Isaiah 42:1-9?*

Q: *Why did the servant emphasize his calling from his mother's womb? How does the New Testament affirm these words?*

Isaiah 49:1-7 further describes the mission of the servant. Where God is the speaker in Isaiah 42:1-9, the servant himself is the speaker in Isaiah 49:1-7. Throughout these verses, the servant keeps his mission centered on God. It is the Lord who chose Him for this mission while he was still in his mother's womb (Isaiah 49:1, 5). God shaped the servant (Isaiah 49:2) and expanded his ministry (Isaiah 49:6). As in Isaiah 42:1, God is the servant's strength (Isaiah 49:5).

Q: *Why did the servant describe himself as a sword and an arrow?*

Q: *The servant appears discouraged in Isaiah 49:4. How did he fight this discouragement?*

APPLICATION POINT – God formed the servant into a sharp sword and polished arrow (Isaiah 49:2). These are instruments of war and suggest that the servant's ministry will be undertaken in a hostile context. The servant will defend his people when they are under attack. Jesus alluded to this when He distinguished the good shepherd from the hired hand (John 10:1-18). Jesus is committed to the perseverance of His flock. It is also appropriate to remember that Hebrews describes God's Word as a double-edged sword that pierces us to the soul (Hebrews 4:12). Jesus defends His flock from outside attacks, but He also disciplines us for the purpose of transforming us into who He desires us to be.

Q: *Who did the servant address in Isaiah 49:1?*

Q: *Why did God include the nations within the scope of the servant's ministry?*

The nations hold a remarkable place in the Servant Songs. Both Isaiah 42 and 49 refer to the coastlands. Our modern understanding of geography and travel likely causes us to overlook what is meant by “coastlands,” but for ancient peoples, the coasts were the ends of the earth. You could not go any further. If this is implicit in Isaiah 49:1, it is explicit in Isaiah 49:6. It was also understood that the people residing in the coastlands were non-Israelites.

The servant's mission includes both Israel and the nations. God called the servant to gather Israel back to Him. In the second half of Isaiah, the prophet projected himself into exilic times. Thus, this gathering of Israel is a gathering of the people from exile back to the land. In the ancient Near East, the practice of displacing a nation from its homeland was an attempt to eradicate it. Once a people were scattered from their homeland, they were then assimilated into the foreign culture and posed less threat to the conquering empire. Thus, it is quite remarkable for the servant to speak of gathering Israel from exile. Although the nations who exiled Israel intended to eradicate them, God had other plans.

While it is remarkable for the people of Israel to be gathered from exile, it was apparently not remarkable enough for God! He declared it too light a thing for Him to accomplish (Isaiah 49:6). Thus, God will make the servant a light for the nations in order to bring them into the salvation God will make for Israel.

Q: *How is the servant's global mission evident in Jesus's ministry?*

Q: *How are you involved in the servant's global ministry?*

APPLICATION POINT – During His time on earth, Jesus limited His ministry to the people of Israel (Matthew 15:24). By the time He ascended into heaven, however, He pointed His disciples to the nations and told them to spread the message about Him among them (Matthew 28:19–20; Acts 1:8). If the servant was called to minister among the nations, His church is too. World missions is a vital part of the outlook of any healthy church and any healthy church member. Certainly not everyone will go to the ends of the earth, but everyone has a role in

participating in the servant's world-wide ministry.

Q: *Why is the servant despised and abhorred?*

Q: *Why is it significant that kings and princes will prostrate themselves before the servant?*

The servant will work in God's authority and strength, but He will not have immediate success. This will be even more evident in the next lesson. He will be despised even by the people He was sent to gather (Isaiah 49:7). But this is not the final word on the servant. One day, the kings and princes of the earth will bow before him. And this will be accomplished in God's strength because He has chosen the servant.

Q: *How do you see the servant, Jesus Christ, being despised today?*

Q: *Is it possible for Christians to behave in a way that despises the servant?*

APPLICATION POINT – If even the kings and princes of the earth will one day find themselves submitting to the servant, submission should be our goal as well. We are conditioned to value leadership and action, but our ultimate responsibility is not to lead but to follow Christ. We are called not to take charge but to submit to Christ's will. Only in full submission will we ever understand what it means to be a follower of Christ.

NEXT STEPS

God says it is too light a thing for His salvation to go only to Israel. It must encompass all peoples. If we limit what God can do in this world to our vision, we will miss the wonder of what God is prepared to do. Take time to evaluate the ministries you are a part of and your role in them. How are you limiting how God can work through you? How can you take your hands off these ministries and place them in God's hands? Write down your thoughts.

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

God, I need to live and work in your strength today, not my own. Make me your true servant so I can step aside and give you the glory you deserve.

Lord Jesus, you are the servant. You came to earth to fulfill the Father's plans. As you are the servant, make me a servant for you.

Father, forgive me for the times I have placed limits on what you are prepared to do. My vision is not what is important, and it is far too small for you.

Jesus, mold me into the disciple you desire me to be. Pierce me to the heart, even if it hurts. Remove any part of me that refuses to submit to your will.

