

The Life and Times of Isaiah

The Uniqueness of the Servant of the Lord, Isaiah 41-53

My Servant, Song 3, Isaiah 50:4-11

The Four "Servant Songs"

Scholars commonly identify four poetic sections as the "Servant Songs" (or "Songs of the Servant of the Lord"), where the figure is described in detail:

Isaiah 42:1–9 Gentle servant bringing justice to the nations.

Isaiah 49:1–13 Servant called from the womb, mission to restore Israel and be a light to the Gentiles.

Isaiah 50:4–11 Obedient servant who suffers but trusts God.

Isaiah 52:13–53:12 The exalted yet suffering servant who bears sins and makes many righteous.

Background: Israel's faithlessness, Isaiah 50:1-3

Isaiah 50:1 Thus says the Lord, "Where is the certificate of divorce by which I have sent your mother away? Or to whom of My creditors did I sell you? Behold, you were sold for your iniquities, and for your transgressions your mother was sent away.

Isaiah 50:2-3 "Why was there no man when I came? When I called, why was there none to answer? Is My hand so short that it cannot ransom? Or have I no power to deliver? Behold, I dry up the sea with My rebuke, I make the rivers a wilderness; Their fish stink for lack of water and die of thirst. I clothe the heavens with blackness and make sackcloth their covering."

I. The Servant's Divine Equipping and Obedient Response (vv. 4-6)

Isaiah 50:4 The Lord God has given Me the tongue of disciples, that I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple.

The Servant describes himself as receiving "the tongue of those who are taught" (or "a disciple's tongue") from the Lord God (Adonai YHWH), enabling him to sustain the weary with timely words.

Isaiah 50:5-6 The Lord God has opened My ear; And I was not disobedient nor did I turn back. I gave My back to those who strike Me, and My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting.

The Lord God "opens" the Servant's ear (a metaphor for revelation and commissioning, as in Psalm 40:6), and the Servant responds without rebellion or turning back.

The Servant willingly offers his body to abuse: "I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting."

II. The Servant's Confidence in Divine Vindication (vv. 7-9)

Isaiah 50:7-8 For the Lord God helps Me, therefore, I am not disgraced; Therefore, I have set My face like flint, and I know that I will not be ashamed. He who vindicates Me is near; Who will contend with Me? Let us stand up to each other; Who has a case against Me? Let him draw near to Me.

Despite suffering, the Servant sets his face "like flint" (unyielding determination, cf. Ezekiel 3:9), confident that the Lord God will help him and prevent ultimate shame.

Isaiah 50:9 Behold, the Lord God helps Me; Who is he who condemns Me? Behold, they will all wear out like a garment; The moth will eat them.

Rhetorical questions challenge opponents: "Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who is my adversary? Let him come near to me." The language evokes a courtroom scene, where God acts as justifier and condemner of the wicked

III. Exhortation to the Faithful and Warning to the Wicked (vv. 10-11)

Isaiah 50:10 Who is among you that fears the Lord, that obeys the voice of His servant, that walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God.

This is a call to imitate the Servant

Isaiah 50:11 Behold, all you who kindle a fire, who encircle yourselves with firebrands, walk in the light of your fire and among the brands you have set ablaze. This you will have from My hand: You will lie down in torment.

Those who "kindle fire" and "equip yourselves with burning torches" (metaphors for self-made light, i.e., human schemes) will face torment from their own devices.