

The SERVANT of YHWH / יהוה A Messianic Job Description

Dr. Joe Martin, May 2011

We are in the context, *Sitz im Leben*, of Isaiah, knowing that an ox knows its owner, a donkey knows its master, but Israel does not know YHWH, the LORD, and has even abandoned Him. (1:3,4) This seems like *Déjà vu*, for our times. Does anyone know Yahweh, the LORD God? The call is still to “come let us reason together says Yahweh.” (1:18) In the middle of a call for judgment we know of “Immanuel” (7:14), then a child will be born (9:6), for a kingdom of righteousness (9:7), from a shoot/branch of Jesse (11:1), but hell/Sheol is excited over us so that it can quiet our evil (14:9). Woe to the earth (24:1); woe to rebellious children (30:1); and woe to the one who quarrels with His maker (45:9). In 722 b.c. disaster came, the Northern Kingdom fell, ten of twelve tribes gone! But, “comfort you, comfort you my people” says your God (40:1) for the “glory of the LORD/YHWH will be revealed.”(40:5) These “Deutero-Isaiah”¹ passages bring hope. “But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; *and* they shall walk, and not faint.” (40:31 KJV) Within that context, a new hope is clarified, “Behold My Servant!” (42:1) הֵן עַבְדִּי The *Ebed YHWH!*

In the middle of Matthew, 12:18-20, the author takes the time to explain the activities of Jesus, especially healing, with a quote from Isaiah 42:1ff., with what has become known as one of several “Suffering Servant Songs.”² (Isa. 42, 49, 50 & 52/53, possibly 61³) Matthew quotes the beginning of chapter 42:

“BEHOLD MY SERVANT WHOM I HAVE CHOSEN,
MY BELOVED IN WHOM MY SOUL IS WELL-PLEASED.
I WILL PUT MY SPIRIT UPON HIM
AND HE SHALL PROCLAIM JUSTICE TO THE GENTILES.
HE WILL NOT QUARREL, NOR CRY OUT
NOR WILL ANYONE HEAR HIS VOICE IN THE STREETS.
A BATTERED REED HE WILL NOT BREAK OFF
AND A SMOLDERING WICK HE WILL NOT PUT OUT,
UNTIL HE LEADS JUSTICE TO VICTORY. (Mt. 12:18-20 NASB)

Then Peter in the book of Acts, with a formerly lame man clinging to him in the temple, explains the healing with “The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered and disowned... .” (v, 13) Quoting Dt. 18:18 in verse 22, Peter says we should have listened to him (Jesus), “For you first God raised up His Servant

¹ Many have noted the “Second Isaiah.” I feel it is maybe just a change from doom and gloom to God giving relief. I have appreciated the several discussions... Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, Westminster Press, 1969, etc.

² First identified (total of 4) by Bernhard Duhm, in a 1892 commentary on Isaiah. However, note biblical identification first, maybe not of all four, but of the Servant.

³ Barry Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*, InterVarsity Press, 1996

and sent Him to bless you by turning everyone of you from your wicked ways.” (3:26) Later, in chapter four, Peter and John defend themselves before the Sanhedrin, quoting Psalm 2,

“ ‘Why do the Gentiles rage... against the LORD and against His Christ,’ For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed...and now Lord take note of their threats...while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.” (Acts 4:25-30)

“Behold My Servant!” I believe the passages in Isaiah, as well as the other promises and prophecies about the Messiah make up what could be termed, “Jesus’ Job Description,” or a “Messianic Job Description.” Great promises like Gen. 3:15, “the seed of the woman;” Gen. 12:3, the whole world blessed through Abraham’s descendant; Gen. 49:10, “the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet;” Dt. 18:18, “I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him (cp. Jn. 12:49 NIV); II Sam. 7:16, “Your throne shall be established forever;” Micah 5:2, “From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler;” Zech. 12:10, “...they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son...a firstborn,” etc.

I would like to focus for a moment on the Isaiah passages. One may find as many as 100 points of this “job description” here. Too often the first question asked in these passages is “Who is it?” Maybe, we should hesitate a little until we see “What has to be done?” Chapter 42:1-4, begins, “Behold My Servant, whom I uphold.” Scholars have suggested that this is similar to God’s announcement to Samuel looking for the first King of Israel, Saul. “When Samuel saw Saul, the LORD said to him, “Behold, the man⁴ of whom I spoke to you! This one shall rule over My people.” (1 Sam. 9:17) If God says it, it is a “royal designation.” God is to be pleased with this servant individual (Mt. 3:17, etc. voice at baptism, Mt. 17:5, voice at the transfiguration). The Spirit is to be the key leading in his life (Mt. 3:16 et. al.) He will bring forth justice, be gentle, and be a “country preacher” vs. a mostly city preacher? Faithfully bringing forth justice seems similar to the Messiah’s duties of Daniel 9:24, “to make reconciliation...bring in everlasting righteousness.” If one considers what YHWH promises in verses 6,7, there are additional things, “I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners...and those who dwell in darkness... .” Most of these will occur again in some areas of the other servant passages.

In what is considered the Second Suffering Servant Song, Isaiah 49 (especially vv. 5-8) similar things occur. Pause should be given even in the first verse. “Islands” let us know it is NOT just about Israel... never has been, never will be... “for God so loved the world.” “The LORD called Me from the womb...” is a reflection of Luke 1:31, (Gabriel to Mary) “behold you will conceive in your

⁴ Compare John 19:5, Pilate says... “Behold the man.” □ δε, □ □ vθρωπος

womb.” Named from the womb or in the womb is more like Isaac and Jesus rather than the nation of Israel. (However, note verse three.) Continuing in verse two, “He has made My mouth like a sharp sword” has shades of *logos*, and hints back to Dt. 18:18, but also forward to Heb. 4:12, and Rev. 19:15.

Here is an interlude on “who,” with verse three. About a dozen people have been referred to as “my servant”(73 times) in scripture, Abraham, Moses, Caleb, David, Job, Isaiah (20:3), Eliakim, Israel, Jacob, the King of Babylon (Nebuchadnezzar), “the Branch,” etc. A dominant yet not exclusive interpretation from Jewish perspectives is that the “suffering servant” is Israel. The *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, in the article “Servant of the LORD,” suggests two basic categories: collective and individual. “Collective interpretations have included collective Israel, ideal Israel, empirical Israel, pious remnant of Israel, prophets, priests,”⁵ etc. Since Matthew, Peter, etc. in the N.T. relate these to Jesus, Christians obviously see the descriptions mainly applying to him.

The “real song” in verses 5-7 reiterates the “womb” discussion, and further lists Servant duties “to bring Jacob back...so that Israel might be gathered to Him.” The parenthetical “I am honored in the sight of YHWH and My God is My strength” seem a complete match to John 20:17 and “I can of my own self do nothing.”(Jn. 5:30) In verse 6, just dealing with Jacob and Israel is “too small a thing” for this Servant. YHWH will “also make You a light of the nations” (Hebrew *goyim*) or Gentiles. The “greatest” in my opinion is “So that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” This reflects Gen. 12:3, blessing to the earth, as well as the Acts 1:9, and Mt. 24:14. Troubles and trials of the passion are noted in verse 7, “despised One...abhorred by the nation.” However, the Suffering Servant will prevail, “Kings,” who usually sit, will arise. “Princes,” who don’t usually bow, except to kings, will “bow down” to this Servant of YHWH. Yahweh is faithful in choosing him and giving him “for a covenant of the people.” (Mt. 26:28; Mk 14:24, “blood of the covenant”)

The THIRD Suffering Servant Song is Isa. 50:4-9, with an introduction in verses 1-3 and postscript comments in verses 10,11. The introduction lets Israel know she wasn’t ever “divorced” (maybe sent away for a while?). It also posits the question, “Is My hand so short that it cannot ransom?” The obvious answer is that God is still working.

In verses 4-9, the beginning “The LORD GOD” is a common construct occurring in Hebrew 293 times, **Adonai YHWH** אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה . It is a serious affirmation of who is promoting this Servant in our discussion. View the things the **LORD GOD/ Adonai YHWH** does for the Servant:

- 4, Gives Me the tongue of disciples
Awakens Me, morning by morning
Awakens My ear to listen as a disciple
- 5, The LORD God has opened my ear

⁵ *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Jerusalem, Vol. 14, 1974, p. 1187

- 7, For the LORD God helps me (and v, 9)
- 8, Vindicates me

Besides the LORD GOD helping, the Servant is: **not** disobedient (cp. Gethsemane)⁶, did not turn back, but gave his back, his cheeks for beard pulling, did not cover his face, set his face like a flint, etc. We could fill a paragraph of verses corroborating some of these events. I really appreciate Luke 9:51. "When the time was come... he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem." (KJV) The final postscript in verses 10 and 11 are a little scary, if we do not "fear Yahweh" and "obey the voice of His servant," we will "lie down in torment."

The FOURTH Suffering Servant Song, and most popular is the one found in Isaiah 52:13-15, and continued in 53:1-12, the entire chapter. In my bible, I have about 45 aspects of things that the Servant was to do, in this song alone. Making a total of near 100? Time and space in this paper will not permit a detailed analysis, but let us take one section or stanza at a time. The stanzas include three verses each. The first is 52:13,14,15. Again it is initiated with "Behold, My Servant." Then He... will prosper, be high and lifted up, be greatly exalted. This sounds exciting until He also... is marred, His form drastically changed. "Sprinkling of nations" is reminiscent of using the hyssop to apply blood on the doorposts at Passover (Ex. 12), or the ark of the covenant at Yom Kippur with the High Priest's finger (Lev. 16), both necessitating blood!

The second stanza, 53:1,2,3, brings further amazement. No one is believing this "new thing" that YHWH is doing with "his arm." In 52:10, YHWH bared His holy arm in the sight of all the nations. "Parched ground," may indicate the hard times under Roman oppression, or even lack of the knowledge of God, during between the testaments. (cp. Hos. 4:6) This Servant was an "ordinary Jew." In our times he would be 5' 9" and weigh about 185 pounds. Then, he would have been shorter and lighter, but still with a muscular build as a carpenter.⁷ As he is "despised and forsaken...a man of sorrows", we "did not esteem him."

The third stanza is the most personal, especially if one puts "me, my, and I" for "our, us and we." ALL my "griefs, sorrows, transgressions, chastening, and sins" or iniquities fell on him. How can I not recognize the grace involved in that. "Do not miss the grace of God... ." (Heb. 12:15) It concludes with, "All we like sheep have gone astray," ... "but the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all." Read it sometime with me, my, and I. They thought he was crazy... even his family (Mk. 3:21)

The fourth stanza has the servant's attitude, "Like a lamb." In the New Testament we have John the Baptist saying, "Behold the Lamb of God who

⁶ "Not my will but thine be done!" Luke 22:42

⁷ *Popular Mechanics*, of all magazines, had a controversial portrayal of Jesus, in the Dec. 7, 2002 edition: <http://www.popularmechanics.com/science/health/forensics/1282186> I still think of Ted Neely in Jesus Christ Superstar... especially with those high notes!

takes away the sin of the world.” (Jn. 1:29,36) A debated translation in many versions is... “he was cut off from the land of the living.” Died! And it was not a *Euthanasia*, good death. In Daniel 9:26, we have the Messiah or Anointed one being “cut off!” However, he is only “cut off” as he brings in “everlasting righteousness.” When Jesus said, “It is finished,” I believe he recognized his duty being completed as a sacrifice for sin. Though he was sinless, innocent (Pilate said three times... I find no fault), he died for us.

The final stanza of the Fourth Song, verses 10-12, is rich with detail as well. Yahweh is pleased! The N.I.V., maybe following more the Septuagint says: “Yet it was the LORD's will... .”⁸ (Isa 53:10) “Crushed,” as in 53:5, for our iniquities, shows the ultimate suffering of this Suffering Servant. “Guilt offering” occurs 39 times, mostly in Leviticus. We are guilty; Jesus was not. As we partake of that offering and accept it, we are his offspring (Gal. 3:29?) Jesus is the Agent (*shaliah* or *shaliach* in Hebrew) via this guilt offering. He has “power of attorney” for us.

A **shaliah** (Hebrew: שליח; pl. שליחים, *sheli'im*) in [Halakha](#) is a Jewish legal [emissary](#) or agent. Accordingly, a *shaliah* performs an act of legal significance for the benefit of the sender, as opposed to him or herself.⁹

Yahweh will cause him to prosper; he will be “satisfied;” and by His knowledge, YHWH’s Servant will justify many. Verse 12, notes “great.” The right hand of God (21x in N.T.) is very great. Because of His death, we are cleansed.

A final note on Isaiah 61, though the term “servant” does not appear, Jesus in Nazareth perceives this to be part of his job as well. It is more of the immediate beginning of his ministry.

The spirit of Lord Yahweh is on me for Yahweh has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the news to the afflicted, to soothe the broken-hearted, ² to proclaim liberty to captives, release to those in prison, to proclaim a year of favour from Yahweh and a day of vengeance for our God, to comfort all who mourn... (Isa 61:1-2 NJB)

What a beautiful passage. Spirit anointing, good news, liberty, and the “favorable year of Yahweh” preached to all of us sinners, it was the best beginning of ministry ever seen. A ministry that began with the good news of the Kingdom from YHWH’s Suffering Servant, is to continue through us. In southern Louisiana, the French Cajuns have a saying, *Laissez les bons temps rouler*. “Let the good times roll.” We have good news for a messed up world.

⁸ *καὶ κριος βολεται καθαρσαι αταν* (Isa 53:10 LXT) Maybe, it was the YHWH’s will to cleanse (*kastharsis*) through his sufferings?

⁹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shaliah>