

# Isaiah 50-55

## Part 2

### QUESTIONS

1. We saw last time that there were various sources in ancient Jewish thought anticipating something like a suffering messiah, but that it was likely not the dominant view. Jesus repeatedly predicted his own suffering and death (Mk 8:31; 9:12; Lk 17:25; 22:15; 24:26, 46), e.g.:

He said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (Lk 24:25-27)

Jesus specifically named himself as fulfilling Isa 53:12 when he said in Lk 22:37, “It is written: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors’; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment.”

The disciples anticipated a very different messiah<sup>1</sup> (Mk 9:9; Lk 24:25-26), as demonstrated by passages like Mt 16:21-22:

From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, ‘God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.’

In Lk 24:25-27 above, Jesus shows that he reads the Scriptures as predicting a suffering messiah. After the resurrection, this becomes central to Christian self-understanding, so that Peter can address the crowd at the Temple, saying

Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer.

(See also Acts 17:3, 26:23; Heb 9:26; 13:12.) The passages alluded to include the Servant Songs of Isaiah; Ps 22; Zech 13:7 (“Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones”); Dan 9:26 (“After the sixty-two ‘sevens,’ the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing”); and perhaps others.

- Discuss 1 Pet 1:10-13 in light of our study of Isaiah.<sup>2</sup>
  - What conclusion does Peter draw in v. 13-16?
2. In 1 Pet 1:22-2:1, Peter uses Isaiah’s prophecy to motivate again holy living. Read Isa 40:1-11. Who is Isaiah encouraging, and why? What did they have in common with the readers of 1 Peter? What does the permanence of God’s word have to do with the plight of the early church—i.e., how is Peter’s quotation of Isaiah relevant?

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<sup>1</sup> Though Simeon seems to have anticipated a suffering messiah: see Lk 2:25-35 (the Song of Simeon), which quotes Isa 49:6, the second Servant Song.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Pet 1-2 makes good use of Isaiah: 1 Pet 1:24 quotes Isa 40:6b-8, 1 Pet 2:22 quotes Isa 53:9, 1 Pet 2:24 quotes Isa 53:12b, and 1 Pet 2:25 quotes Isa 53:5-6.

Finally, discuss the following:

The contrast between what is transitory and what is permanent embodied in the quotation would be highly appropriate for a beleaguered community of Christians facing what gave every appearance of being the permanent, even eternal, power and glory of the Roman Empire. In such a situation, the announcement that the glitter, pomp, and power of the Roman culture was as grass when compared to God's eternal word spoken in Jesus Christ, available through the gospel preached to and accepted by the Christians of Asia Minor, would give them courage to hold fast to the latter while rejecting the former.<sup>3</sup>

3. The Servant Songs are written from several points of view, including God's, the Servant's, and that of the Servant's contemporaries. In many places they provide insight into the Servant's thoughts and motivation—both in the “autobiographical” passages (Isa 50:4-11; 49:1-6) and elsewhere (53:3; 42:4).

While it is impossible to know for certain, how accurately might these passages reflect Jesus' thoughts and feelings?

4. Paul quotes Isa 52:11-12 in 2 Cor 6:14-18. Of this, Carson writes,

When the Israelites left Egypt they were told to bring with them whatever they could get from the Egyptians—valuable jewelry and clothing. Here, however, the people are warned not to touch anything. but to come out ‘from there’ and be pure. This suggests that the ultimate goal is not geographical Jerusalem, but the new Jerusalem, and what must be left behind is more than Babylon, but all that Babylon represents. That reflection enables us to understand how and why Paul uses this passage in 2 Cor 6:14-18, and how we should use it today.<sup>4</sup>

How do you understand Paul's use of Isaiah? As Carson asks, how should we use it today?

5. In their deliverance from bondage in Egypt we gain insight into what it means to be a *servant* of Yahweh, since both Moses and Israel are referred to as God's servants (Ex 14:31; Lev 25:55). Eugene Peterson points out that “When Moses negotiated the release of the Israelite slaves, he used the word ‘serve’ over and over again. God instructed Moses, ‘Say to Pharaoh, “Let my people go, that they may serve me”’ (Ex 7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3).”<sup>5</sup> In Isaiah, Israel is the servant, as is David (37:35). Peterson continues,

‘Servant’ surprises us because it is so incongruent with the way itself, the way of salvation, a ‘highway for our God’ (Isa 40:3)... Is this the way the all-powerful God who ‘sits above the circle of the earth’ expects to be recognized? We must have expected better: freedom fighters, perhaps, battle-hardened warriors, politically savvy statesmen skilled in negotiating terms... Servant is a position without distinction, the lowest rung on the work ladder...

Jesus regarded service as the hallmark of discipleship (Mt 20:24-28; Jn 12:23-26; 13:12-17; 15:18-25) and central to Jesus teaching, as shown by the multitude of parables about servants. Jesus also taught that “the greatest among you will be your servant” (Mt 23:8-12); in contrast to

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Carson and Beale, *Commentary on the NT use of the OT*, p. 1022.

<sup>4</sup> D. A. Carson, *For the Love of God*, vol. 2. See entries for June 17-23.

<sup>5</sup> *The Jesus Way* (Eerdmans, 2007), pp. 149-189, esp. 170-174.

the leadership shown by the Gentiles, who “lord it over them”(Mt 20:24-28). In what ways do the Servant of Isaiah and Jesus as described in the Gospels fit your image of a servant?

6. Again, Peterson writes:

This is the gospel way to deal with what is wrong with the world, deal with this multifaceted sin-cancer that is mutilating and disabling us. Variations on what is wrong are multiform: unbelief, missing the mark, evil, rebellion, transgression, willfulness, indifference, violence, arrogance, and on and on and on. But whether the wrong is intentional or inadvertent, the servant neither avoids it in revulsion nor attacks it by force of words or arms. Instead, the servant embraces, accepts, suffers in the sense of submitting to the conditions and accepting the consequences. The servant personally takes the wrongdoer and the wrong to the altar of sacrifice and makes an offering of him or her or it. The servant says to his brothers and sisters, ‘Only God can save you. You don’t think you can go to him? I’ll go for you.’ Or at least, ‘Let me go with you.’

Discuss this quote, and the ways God’s power is made perfect in our suffering.

7. Many of God’s promises are partially fulfilled now, waiting for the fullness of time to come to completion. To what degree is the beautiful promise of Isa 54:17 true now?