

“The Servant’s sufferings brought such a disfigurement that those who saw said not only, ‘Is this he?’ but ‘Is this human?’” (Motyer 1999: 375).

“The nations will be just as surprised at the greatness of the end as they were at the smallness of the beginning....the surpassing greatness of the Servant causes the kings of the earth to *shut their mouths*, that is, they are rendered speechless. Their own greatness is so small that they have nothing to say in his presence and can only fall at his feet (see 49:7). Thus what they have never heard of before is how one who took such a lowly place could ever sit on the very throne of God in the end” (Oswalt 1998: 380).

“Thus it is best to conclude that the reason for the response of being horrified in 52:14 was the disfigurement of the servant by men, but the reason for the dramatic positive response of the kings in 15 appears to be this mysterious sprinkling of many nations (15a) which will result in a new understanding of the Servant (15b). When the Servant fulfills 53:1-12, the kings and nations will see, hear, and understand new things that they had never known before (49:7; Ps 72:11)” (Smith 2009: 440).

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Consider the contrast between verses 13 and 14, and compare this to Philippians 2:6-11. How should you follow his example?

How can the Messiah be victorious (e.g., Ps 2, 110) but also suffering (e.g., Ps 16, 22, 69)?

How can we help fulfill verse 15b today? (For a hint, see Rom 15:21.)

SOURCES CITED

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ISAIAH 52:13-15: THE PARADOX OF THE SERVANT

STRUCTURE OF ISAIAH 49-55

Servant song (#2)	49:1-13
Salvation for Zion	49:14-50:3
Servant song (#3)	50:4-11
Salvation for Zion	51:1-52:12
Servant song (#4)	52:13-53:12
Salvation for Zion	54:1-17
Conclusion	55:1-13 (adapted from Smith 2009: 337)

OUTLINE OF THE FOURTH SERVANT SONG (52:13-53:12)

- A The **paradox** of the servant (52:13-15)
 - B The **rejection** of the servant (53:1-3)
 - C The **sacrifice** of the servant (53:4-6)
 - B The **death** of the servant (53:7-9)
- A The **resurrection** of the servant (53:10-12)

THE SERVANT IN THE FIRST THREE SERVANT SONGS

(Isa 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-9)

Character: Spirit-filled, God delights in him, tender, compassionate, strengthened by God, obedient to God, innocent, persevering

Mission: to establish justice on the earth, to be a covenant for Israel and a light for the nations, to restore the remnant

Result: apparent failure, despised by the nation, physically abused, receives submission of kings, restores land to Israel, vindicated

NOTES

“There is virtually complete agreement among scholars that the chapter break between 52:15 and 53:1 is misplaced....Medieval Jews also separated 52:13–15 from what followed as a result of the same kind of reasoning: 52:13–15 described the Messiah, but 53:1–12 could not....This may explain why the chapter break was inserted where it was” (Oswalt 1998: 376n69).

“The most important connection is that the earlier songs indicate that the Servant would have trouble with his ministry to Israel (49:4), would be abhorred and despised (49:7), and would even be beaten and mocked (50:6–7). Nevertheless, this Servant will not be discouraged or give up (42:4) but will bring forth justice and salvation to Israel and the nations by being a light and a covenant to them (42:4,6; 49:5–6,8). In the end God will vindicate and exalt the Servant (49:7; 50:8). The examination of these earlier poems led to the conclusion that this Servant was a messianic royal figure who would establish justice for all the nations but suffer opposition and physical abuse before his eventual vindication and exaltation. The present poem explains these issues in more detail and adds new information” (Smith 2009: 431–32).

“From the great homecoming we turn to the solitary figure whose agony was the price of it. We are at the heart of the book, the centre of its whole pattern of sin and righteousness, grace and judgment” (Kidner, NBC).

“The central thought of the poem is focused on two great contrasts: the contrast between the Servant’s exaltation and his humiliation and suffering, and the contrast between what people thought about the Servant and what was really the case” (Oswalt 1998: 376).

“This first stanza [52:13–15] is in a sense a summary of the entire Song” (Webb 1996: 210).

“Forgiveness has been announced, but the basis on which it rests has not been clarified. Now at last it is: *my righteous servant will justify many . . . he will bear their iniquities* (53:11). At the very outset

of the Song the Servant is pictured as a priest, ‘sprinkling’ the unclean (52:15), and in the heart of the Song he is spoken of as a *guilt offering* (53:10). The Servant is both priest and sacrifice, and it is through his priestly work that the people of God are themselves made fit for priestly service. There are treasures beyond price here, but we must not rush; every part of the Song is rich and worth savouring” (Webb 1996: 209).

“Isaiah starts with an enigma: how can such an exaltation (13) arise out of such suffering (14); how can such suffering (14) lead to universal benefit and acknowledgment (15)? The Lord’s testimony to his Servant (13) blends into the statement of suffering and benefit (14–15). Balancing this opening there is the concluding section (53:10–12) which solves the enigma: the Servant’s suffering was a bearing of sin” (Motyer 1999: 374).

“The one that people regarded as unclean (they were *appalled at him*, 14) will turn out to be the one who cleanses others. It is a paradox so astounding that it will dry up every accusation and cause every mouth to be stopped (15). The wisdom of God displayed in the Servant will utterly confound human wisdom” (Webb 1996: 210).

This “is usually translated “be wise” or “prosper,” but neither of those translations gathers up the full sense of the context here: to act with such wisdom that one’s efforts will be successful” (Oswalt 1998: 378). See Jer 23:5 where the Branch has such wisdom.

“‘High and lifted up’ (*rwm* and *ns*) are used in combination four times in this book (and no place else in the OT). In the other three places (6:1; 33:10; 57:15) they describe God. Whom do they describe here? The same point may be made concerning *exalted*. The section 2:6–22 speaks forcefully against every exaltation of the human; v. 17 says that God will humble the exaltation of man, so that only God will be lifted up. Is it here, then, being said that the nation of Israel will be exalted to the place of God? Is it a prophet of Israel? In each case the answer must be no. This is the Messiah or no one” (Oswalt 1998: 378–79).