

## THE MESSIAH IN ISAIAH

**PORTRAIT OF THE SERVANT:** The term “servant” is an exalted term used repeatedly outside of the book of Isaiah to designate a special individual, especially the prophet Moses and the king David. Initially in chapter 41, the servant is the nation Israel, but this rebellious servant who refuses to do God’s will is juxtaposed with another servant, also called Israel, who is **upheld by God** and who is a **covenant for Israel** and a **light to the Gentiles** (41:8-9; 42:1-7, 19). This servant functions as a king in **establishing justice** on the earth, but he is **gentle to the weak** and he **heals the broken** (42:2-7). The possibility that the servant is the entire nation is denied by the servant’s role: **to bring Israel back to God**. His work initially appears to be a **failure** as he is despised by the nation, yet ultimately he is **exalted above all kings** (49:1-7). The servant’s faithfulness to God is emphasized, even though he is **beaten** and **mocked**, and the Lord ultimately **vindicates** him (50:4-9). Ultimately we learn that the servant **suffered** not for his own sin but **for the transgressions of the nation**. The nation rejected this tender shoot, and the Lord put the people’s iniquities upon him. Thus the servant **died** and was **buried**, yet he would see the **light of life** and be given great spoils (52:13-53:12). In his final words in the book, the servant proclaims **good news to the poor** and rejoicing to those who mourn (61:1-11).

**THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE KING AND THE SERVANT:** A number of shared characteristics between the one described as king and the one called a servant suggests that these two are the same individual: both have a **humble origin** (9:6; 49:1; 53:2), are **rulers** (8:8; 9:7; 42:1-4), **righteous** (9:7; 11:4-5; 53:9-11), **gentle** (11:3-4; 42:3; 50:4), are **anointed with the Spirit** (11:2; 42:1; 61:1), arise in the **midst of the exile** (7:14-25; 8:21-9:2; 49:5-6), **restore the remnant** (11:10-16; 49:5), have a **worldwide ministry** (11:10; 42:6; 49:6), and have **hints of divinity** (7:14; 9:6-7; 52:13; 53:5-8, 12).

Isaiah’s portrait of the servant answers critical questions: How will we be restored to God? How will the sin that caused our exile be removed? How will Israel be able to fulfill its purpose to bless all peoples?

**THE MESSAGE OF ISAIAH** is that though the people’s guilt requires exile, the Lord will restore a righteous remnant to a glorious Zion. This message is already communicated in the book’s introduction (1:1-2:5), and much of the rest of the book unfolds these themes.

**THE GLORIOUS FUTURE OF ZION** is presented throughout the book, beginning in the first chapter and continuing until the last. In general, there is a progression of brief treatments (e.g., only two verses in chapter 1) to lengthy treatments (all of chapters 60-62). So while the theme of judgment is strong in the earlier parts of the book, this is gradually reduced and replaced by development of the promised restoration. The restoration of Israel includes many aspects:

- 2: Zion will become the center of the world where the nations come to learn from the Lord.
- 4: The remnant will be purified and protected by the Lord.
- 9: War will cease and a righteous government will be established that will last forever.
- 11: The animal kingdom will be transformed and the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord. The remnant will be brought back from worldwide exile (cf. 14, 43).
- 12: The remnant will recognize that God alone is the source of salvation.
- 19: The nations will worship the Lord along with Israel.
- 24-27: The earth will be destroyed, the enemies will be punished, and the Lord will reign on Mount Zion. A banquet will be prepared, the dead will rise, death will be destroyed, and Israel will fill the world with fruit.
- 32: The Spirit will be poured out, transforming the land and the people.
- 33: The Lord will be the judge, lawgiver, king, savior.
- 35: The deaf will hear, the blind will see, the lame will leap, and the desert will be a waterpark (cf. 29). Only the redeemed will live in Zion.
- 49: The nations will restore Israel to the promised land and serve Israel.

- 52: The Lord will visibly come to Zion and comfort his people.
- 54: Numerous descendants will dispossess nations and experience God's eternal, irremovable love. Zion will be established in righteousness.
- 56: Foreigners will worship God in Zion.
- 60-62: The Lord will restore Zion and cause the nations to bring their wealth to it. Violence and destruction will no longer exist, and God will replace the sun as the city's light. The nation will be characterized by righteousness and the Lord will delight in his people.
- 65: The Lord will create a new heavens and new earth for his people, lifespans will be greatly extended, and enemies will not exist.
- 66: The nations will bring the remnant to Zion, and the Lord will cause Israel's name and descendants to endure forever.

**A GLORIOUS INDIVIDUAL** figures prominently in the passages of Israel's glorious future, and in fact he seems necessary to its fulfillment. In the early part of the book, his chief role is that of a king. In the second half of the book, he is repeatedly called a servant. *In both functions*, he is contrasted with the failure of the nation Israel.

- In the first half of the book, two narratives portray **two Israelite kings** as failing to fully trust the Lord. By contrast, the prophesied king will have the Spirit upon him and will act in perfect righteousness. That he is something more than an ordinary king is hinted at in several of his names (Immanuel, Mighty God).
- In the second half of the book, the **nation of Israel** is depicted as God's servant, but one who utterly fails to serve God because the people are deaf and blind. By contrast, the individual servant that God raises up has the Spirit upon him, perfectly obeys God's will, and is a light to the nations.

**OUR METHOD:** Is it legitimate to connect these descriptions spread across the book and ascribe them all to a single individual? Yes, because the author is careful to connect these passages with shared language and concepts. It also is his style with various themes to develop a subject over many chapters, giving new information in each

section. Finally, this approach is affirmed by the writers of the New Testament, who believe that one person was the fulfillment of all of these passages. Furthermore, the alternatives to this approach are unsatisfying: (1) there are multiple future figures who will do similar extraordinary things; (2) the book is only using idealistic language to express their (unfulfilled) hopes for a righteous king; (3) the book was written by multiple individuals without an attempt to give a unified portrait of a single person.

**PORTRAIT OF THE KING:** The **holy seed** is the **stump** left in the land from which a **shoot** comes which is the glorious **Branch** of the Lord (4:2; 6:13; 11:1). Because of Ahaz's refusal to trust, the nation goes into exile, but because of the Lord's faithfulness, the **line of David** is preserved, though the heir (**Immanuel**) is raised in poverty (not in a palace) (7:1-25). The land first carried off into exile (Galilee) is the first to see **the light** of the Messiah who as the **Prince of Peace** brings an end to war and rules in righteousness on **David's throne** forever (9:1-7). The remnant one day stops trusting the nations and instead trusts the Messiah (**Mighty God**) upon whom the Spirit of the Lord rests (10:20-21; 11:2). He establishes perfect justice in the transformed world which is filled with the knowledge of the Lord (11:3-9; 16:5; 32:1). He stands as a **banner** to which the remnant returns from the four corners of the earth (11:10-16). He will be a **precious cornerstone** in Zion whom the people can trust (28:16). **The king** will come in his beauty to a Zion that will be eternally established (33:17-22).

Isaiah's portrait of the king answers critical questions: Will the house of David survive? Will we return to the land? Will God's promises to Abraham and David be fulfilled?

	<b>Audience</b>	<b>Message</b>	<b>Need for Hope</b>
Chs. 1-39	Ahaz/Hezekiah (700)	Forsake sin/trust the Lord	Davidic Ruler
Chs. 40-66	Exile (540)	God is able to restore you	Suffering Servant