



The Songs of the Suffering Servant

Prayers for the Lenten Season

Many Christians associate the Suffering Servant with Jesus the Messiah. While praying with the four songs, found in the Book of Isaiah, we connect with the Savior's journey, from before his birth until his final sacrifice.

The first song, Isaiah 42, introduces us to God's Servant. The second song, Isaiah 49, describes how the Servant was chosen to be the voice of the Lord on Earth in his own words. The third song, Isaiah 50, describes the abuse endured by the Servant at the hands of those trying to subvert his mission. The fourth song, Isaiah 52, discusses the saving grace that the Servant's sacrifice bestows upon us all.

Isaiah, Chapter 42

THE SERVANT OF THE LORD

Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased.
Upon him I have put my spirit; he shall bring forth justice to the nations.
He will not cry out, nor shout, nor make his voice heard in the street.
A bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench.
He will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow dim or be bruised
until he establishes justice on the earth; the coastlands will wait for his teaching.
Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out,
who spread out the earth and its produce, Who gives breath to its people
and spirit to those who walk on it: I, the LORD, have called you for justice,
I have grasped you by the hand; I formed you, and set you
as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations,
To open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement,
and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness.
I am the LORD, LORD is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols.
See, the earlier things have come to pass, new ones I now declare;
Before they spring forth I announce them to you.



THE LORD'S PURPOSE FOR ISRAEL

Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise from the ends of the earth:
Let the sea and what fills it resound, the coastlands, and those who dwell in them.
Let the wilderness and its cities cry out, the villages where Kedar dwells;
Let the inhabitants of Sela exult, and shout from the top of the mountains.
Let them give glory to the LORD, and utter his praise in the coastlands.
The LORD goes forth like a warrior, like a man of war he stirs up his fury;
He shouts out his battle cry, against his enemies he shows his might:
For a long time I have kept silent, I have said nothing, holding myself back;
Now I cry out like a woman in labor, gasping and panting.
I will lay waste mountains and hills, all their undergrowth I will dry up;
I will turn the rivers into marshes, and the marshes I will dry up.
I will lead the blind on a way they do not know; by paths they do not know I will guide them.
I will turn darkness into light before them, and make crooked ways straight.
These are my promises: I made them, I will not forsake them.
They shall be turned back in utter shame who trust in idols;
Who say to molten images, "You are our gods."
You deaf ones, listen, you blind ones, look and see!
Who is blind but my servant, or deaf like the messenger I send?
Who is blind like the one I restore, blind like the servant of the LORD?
You see many things but do not observe; ears open, but do not hear.
It was the LORD's will for the sake of his justice to make his teaching great and glorious.
This is a people plundered and despoiled, all of them trapped in holes, hidden away in prisons.
They are taken as plunder, with no one to rescue them, as spoil, with no one to say, "Give back!"
Who among you will give ear to this, listen and pay attention from now on?
Who was it that gave Jacob to be despoiled, Israel to the plunderers?
Was it not the LORD, against whom we have sinned?
In his ways they refused to walk, his teaching they would not heed.
So he poured out wrath upon them, his anger, and the fury of battle;
It blazed all around them, yet they did not realize, it burned them, but they did not take it to heart.

Isaiah, Chapter 49



THE SERVANT OF THE LORD

Hear me, coastlands, listen, distant peoples.
Before birth the LORD called me, from my mother's womb he gave me my name.
He made my mouth like a sharp-edged sword, concealed me, shielded by his hand.
He made me a sharpened arrow, in his quiver he hid me.
He said to me, You are my servant, in you, Israel, I show my glory.
Though I thought I had toiled in vain, for nothing and for naught spent my strength,
Yet my right is with the LORD, my recompense is with my God.
For now the LORD has spoken who formed me as his servant from the womb,
That Jacob may be brought back to him and Israel gathered to him;
I am honored in the sight of the LORD, and my God is now my strength!
It is too little, he says, for you to be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob,
and restore the survivors of Israel; I will make you a light to the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.
Thus says the LORD, the redeemer, the Holy One of Israel,
To the one despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers:
When kings see you, they shall stand up, and princes shall bow down
Because of the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen you.

THE LIBERATION AND RESTORATION OF ZION

Thus says the LORD: In a time of favor I answer you,
on the day of salvation I help you; I form you and set you
as a covenant for the people, to restore the land
and allot the devastated heritages, to say to the prisoners: Come out!
To those in darkness: Show yourselves!
Along the roadways they shall find pasture,
on every barren height shall their pastures be.
They shall not hunger or thirst; nor shall scorching wind or sun strike them;
For he who pities them leads them and guides them beside springs of water.
I will turn all my mountains into roadway, and make my highways level.
See, these shall come from afar: some from the north and the west,
others from the land of Syene.
Sing out, heavens, and rejoice, earth, break forth into song, you mountains,
For the LORD comforts his people and shows mercy to his afflicted.
But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me."
Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb?
Even should she forget, I will never forget you.
See, upon the palms of my hands I have engraved you;
your walls are ever before me.
Your children hasten—your levelers, your destroyers go forth from you;

Look about and see, they are all gathering and coming to you.
As I live—oracle of the LORD—you shall don them as jewels,
bedeck yourself like a bride.

Though you were waste and desolate, a land of ruins,
Now you shall be too narrow for your inhabitants,
while those who swallowed you up will be far away.

The children of whom you were bereft shall yet say in your hearing,
“This place is too narrow for me, make room for me to live in.”

You shall ask yourself: “Who has borne me these, when I was bereft and barren?
Exiled and repudiated, who has reared them?

I was left all alone; where then do these come from?”

Thus says the Lord GOD:

See, I will lift up my hand to the nations, and to the peoples raise my signal;

They shall bring your sons in their arms,
your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders.

Kings shall be your guardians, their princesses your nursemaids;

Face to the ground, they shall bow down before you and lick the dust at your feet.

Then you shall know that I am the LORD, none who hope in me shall be ashamed.

Can plunder be taken from a warrior, or captives rescued from a tyrant?

Thus says the LORD: Yes, captives can be taken from a warrior,
and plunder rescued from a tyrant; Those who oppose you I will oppose,
and your sons I will save. I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh,
and they shall be drunk with their own blood as though with new wine.

All flesh shall know that I, the LORD, am your savior,
your redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

Isaiah, Chapter 50

SALVATION THROUGH THE LORD'S SERVANT



Thus says the LORD:

Where is the bill of divorce with which I dismissed your mother?

Or to which of my creditors have I sold you?

It was for your sins you were sold, for your rebellions your mother was dismissed.

Why was no one there when I came? Why did no one answer when I called?

Is my hand too short to ransom? Have I not the strength to deliver?

See, with my rebuke I dry up the sea, I turn rivers into wilderness;

Their fish rot for lack of water, and die of thirst.

I clothe the heavens in black, and make sackcloth their covering.

The Lord GOD has given me a well-trained tongue,

That I might know how to answer the weary a word that will waken them.

Morning after morning he wakens my ear to hear as disciples do;

The Lord GOD opened my ear; I did not refuse, did not turn away.

I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who tore out my beard;

My face I did not hide from insults and spitting.

The Lord GOD is my help, therefore I am not disgraced;

Therefore I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame.

He who declares my innocence is near. Who will oppose me?

Let us appear together. Who will dispute my right?

Let them confront me. See, the Lord GOD is my help; who will declare me guilty?

See, they will all wear out like a garment, consumed by moths.

Who among you fears the LORD, heeds his servant's voice?

Whoever walk in darkness, without any light,

Yet trust in the name of the LORD and rely upon their God!

All you who kindle flames and set flares alight,

Walk by the light of your own fire and by the flares you have burnt!

This is your fate from my hand: you shall lie down in a place of torment.

Isaiah, Chapter 52



LET ZION REJOICE

Awake, awake! Put on your strength, Zion;
Put on your glorious garments, Jerusalem, holy city.
Never again shall the uncircumcised or the unclean enter you.
Arise, shake off the dust, sit enthroned, Jerusalem;
Loose the bonds from your neck, captive daughter Zion!
For thus says the LORD:
For nothing you were sold, without money you shall be redeemed.
For thus says the Lord GOD:
To Egypt long ago my people went down, to sojourn there;
Assyria, too, oppressed them for nought.
But now, what am I to do here? —oracle of the LORD.
My people have been taken away for nothing; their rulers mock,
oracle of the LORD; constantly, every day, my name is reviled.
Therefore my people shall know my name
on that day, that it is I who speaks: Here I am!
How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the one bringing good news,
Announcing peace, bearing good news, announcing salvation, saying to Zion,
“Your God is King!” Listen! Your sentinels raise a cry, together they shout for joy, For they see
directly, before their eyes, the LORD’s return to Zion.
Break out together in song, O ruins of Jerusalem!
For the LORD has comforted his people, has redeemed Jerusalem.
The LORD has bared his holy arm in the sight of all the nations;
All the ends of the earth can see the salvation of our God.
Depart, depart, go out from there, touch nothing unclean!
Out from there! Purify yourselves, you who carry the vessels of the LORD.
But not in hurried flight will you go out, nor leave in headlong haste,
For the LORD goes before you, and your rear guard is the God of Israel.

SUFFERING AND TRIUMPH OF THE SERVANT OF THE LORD

See, my servant shall prosper, he shall be raised high and greatly exalted.
Even as many were amazed at him—so marred were his features,
beyond that of mortals his appearance, beyond that of human beings—
So shall he startle many nations, kings shall stand speechless;
For those who have not been told shall see,
those who have not heard shall ponder it.