



# Highlights From the Book of Isaiah

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# The Perseverance of the LORD's Servant (50:4-9)

- This text is the *third* of four “Servant Songs” in the book of Isaiah:
  - The *First* Servant Song (42:1-9)
  - The *Second* Servant Song (49:1-13)
  - The *Third* Servant Song (50:4-9)
  - The *Fourth* Servant Song (52:13 – 53:12)
- This (third) “Servant Song” reveals that the servant’s *obedience* to the Lord will result in *suffering* for him.
- The “*servant*” here clearly does *not* refer to the nation of Israel (as this term often did in *Isaiah 40-48*), because *their* suffering was the result of their *rebellion, not* their *obedience*.

# The Perseverance of the LORD's Servant (50:4-9)

- There is an indication in this third song that the “*servant*” is gifted with a *special ability* to declare God’s message in a way that clearly reveals who God is.
- It tells us that his “ears” have been “opened” to hear God’s message (50:5), and his “tongue” has been “instructed” (50:4) on how to declare it.
- But when this message is *proclaimed* by the servant, he will *suffer abuse* at the hands of those who *despise* the message (50:6).
- And the Servant is willing to *bear* that abuse because he knows that God will *vindicate* him in the end (50:7–9).

# The Perseverance of the LORD's Servant (50:4-9)

- No one will be able to successfully accuse the servant of disobeying God or of falsifying his message.
- Nor will those who “beat” him and pull out his “beard” be able to make him stop obeying his Lord.
- In fact, the servant’s accusers will *perish* in the end.
- The servant’s confidence that the Lord will “vindicate” him in the end gives him the courage and determination to be obedient, setting his “face like flint” to do his Master’s will.

# The Perseverance of the LORD's Servant (50:4-9)

- Today's passage can be broken into *four* parts – each of which starts with a reference to the “*Sovereign LORD*”:
  - The LORD's Instruction (50:4)
  - The Servant's Obedience (50:5-6)
  - The LORD's Assistance (50:7-8)
  - The Demise of the Servant's Opponents (50:9)

# The LORD's Instruction (50:4)

50:4 *The Sovereign LORD has given me the capacity to be his spokesman, so that I know how to help the weary. He wakes me up every morning; he makes me alert so I can listen attentively as disciples do.*

**50:4** *The Sovereign LORD has given me the capacity to be his spokesman, so that I know how to help the weary. He wakes me up every morning; he makes me alert so I can listen attentively as disciples do.*

- The one speaking here is the “*servant*” himself.
- **Four** times in this third song “the Lord Yahweh”, or “*Sovereign LORD*” as it’s translated here, occurs at the beginning of a verse, marking the structure of the poem and also indicating the Servant’s **profound respect** for the authority the LORD of whom he speaks.
- The Servant speaks here of an endowment given to him by the LORD: “*the capacity to be his spokesman*”
- Literally in the Hebrew it says he has been given “the tongue of those who are taught.”
- In other words, he is able to speak in such a way that “those who are taught” (i.e. his students or disciples) are able to understand and fully grasp what he is telling them.

**50:4** *The Sovereign LORD has given me the capacity to be his spokesman, so that I know how to help the weary. He wakes me up every morning; he makes me alert so I can listen attentively as disciples do.*

- Similarly, the LORD has trained the Servant so that he is fully equipped for a **practical** prophetic ministry *“to help the weary”*.
- We know from **Isaiah 49:2** that the Servant could speak clearly and directly, with the cutting edge of a sharp sword.
- But now the **other** side of his speaking ability is emphasized:
- We see that he **also** has the **sensitivity** to speak in gentle, consoling tones and to encourage those who have become discouraged and who know that their own efforts are getting them nowhere.
- And so we hear him saying in Matthew 11:27-28 – *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke on you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”*



**50:4** *The Sovereign LORD has given me the capacity to be his spokesman, so that I know how to help the weary. He wakes me up every morning; he makes me alert so I can listen attentively as disciples do.*

- The Servant tells us here that the LORD, as his instructor, “*wakes [him] up*” in order to get his pupil’s attention to listen to what the LORD has to say to him.
- “*every morning*” indicates that not a day goes by that the LORD does not *stimulate* him to renewed attentiveness and effort.
- “*so I can listen attentively as disciples do*” – His knowledge and skill have been honed by the LORD’s instruction, and by keeping the LORD’s message in the forefront of his mind.

# The Servant's Obedience (50:5-6)

*50:5 The Sovereign LORD [makes me obedient]; I have not rebelled, I have not turned back. <sup>6</sup> I offered my back to those who attacked, my jaws to those who tore out my beard; I did not hide my face from insults and spitting.*

50:5 *The Sovereign LORD [makes me obedient]; I have not rebelled, I have not turned back.*

- In this second stanza of the poem the main theme is that of ***obedience***.
- “*The Sovereign LORD [makes me obedient]*”, literally “*has opened my ear*” – reflecting an eagerness like that expressed by the psalmist when he said, “*I want to do what pleases you*” (Ps. 40:8).
- Unlike Israel, whose ear had ***not*** been open (cf. 48:8), the Servant ***responded*** to the LORD’s revelation.
- He also differed from Israel in that inwardly he has “***not rebelled***”, chafing at, and disregarding divine instruction.
- Outwardly, he says “*I have not turned back*”, either in apostasy (cf. Ps. 44:18) or treachery (cf. Jer. 38:22).
- Only ***rarely*** could Israel make such claims, but the Servant maintained such an outlook throughout his ***entire life***.

50:6 *I offered my back to those who attacked, my jaws to those who tore out my beard; I did not hide my face from insults and spitting.*

- More specifically the Servant's obedience is displayed in his ***submissiveness*** to whatever abuse he experienced as he carried out his mission.
- Looking back on his experience, he records that he did not evade the ***consequences*** of his divinely ordained task.
- "*I offered*" and "*I did not hide*" suggest an ***active*** and ***voluntary*** acceptance, rather than a mere ***resignation*** to his fate.
- The servant is in control of the situation as he ***consciously*** and ***willingly*** pays the price demanded of him.
- We see this illustrated in what Jesus says about himself in the Gospel of John concerning his impending death:
  - *I lay down my life, so that I may take it back again. No one takes it away from me, but I lay it down of my own free will. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have the authority to take it back again.* (John 10:17-18)

50:6 *I offered my back to those who attacked, my jaws to those who tore out my beard; I did not hide my face from insults and spitting.*

- *“those who attacked”* in this context is a reference to those who administer public floggings (cf. Deut. 25:2; Jer. 20:2; 37:15).
- And so we see in John 19:1 – *“Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged severely.”*
- *“those who tore out my beard”* was an expression of extreme contempt, designed to humiliate as well as cause pain. For some other OT examples see:
  - *So Hanun seized David's servants and shaved off half of each one's beard. He cut the lower part of their robes off so that their buttocks were exposed, and then sent them away.* (2 Sam 10:4)
  - *I [Nehemiah] called down a curse on [those whose children were intermingling with the pagan people around them], and I struck some of the men and pulled out their hair.* (Neh 13:25)

50:6 *I offered my back to those who attacked, my jaws to those who tore out my beard; I did not hide my face from insults and spitting.*

- Along with the scornful words of “*insults and spitting*” (another mocking gesture; cf. Deut 25:9; Job 30:10) we see the **fulfilment** of these predictions in the Gospel of Matthew:
  - *Then they spat in his face and struck him with their fists. And some slapped him, (Mat 26:67)*
  - *They spat on him and took the staff and struck him repeatedly on the head. (Mat 27:30)*
- Such actions in the culture of the East would usually have required immediate retaliation to restore an individual’s dignity and honor.
- Nevertheless the Servant records that he did not respond in this way.

50:6 *I offered my back to those who attacked, my jaws to those who tore out my beard; I did not hide my face from insults and spitting.*

- While these words are fulfilled in the final suffering of Christ at his crucifixion, it would be improper to *confine* them to that.
- At this point in the book Isaiah has not yet foreseen the death that the Servant would undergo.
- The Servant is providing this summary of his experience at some point close to, but still before, the climax which will be described in chapter 53.
- His attitude was the same throughout his ministry, and culminated in his willing acceptance of all that was involved in the cross.

# The LORD's Assistance (50:7-8)

*50:7 But the Sovereign LORD helps me, so I am not humiliated. For that reason I am steadfastly resolved; I know I will not be put to shame. <sup>8</sup> The one who vindicates me is close by. Who dares to argue with me? Let us confront each other! Who is my accuser? Let him challenge me!*



**50:7** *But the Sovereign LORD helps me, so I am not humiliated. For that reason I am steadfastly resolved; I know I will not be put to shame.*

- There is something *triumphant* about the tone of this portion of our text.
- The suffering involved may be very heavy, but the victory will be all the more glorious.
- The passage soars on the same level as Rom 8:33, a passage that echoes the thought found here:
  - *Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.*
- The certainty of divine help makes all the difference: "*the Sovereign LORD helps me.*"

**50:7** *But the Sovereign LORD helps me, so I am not humiliated. For that reason I am steadfastly resolved; I know I will not be put to shame.*

- If the preceding section laid emphasis on the ***trust in adversity*** that the Servant maintained, this section seems to make a point of the ***steadfastness*** that he displays.
- The most important idea is stated first – *the Sovereign LORD helps me.*”
- In the past the servant has not been disappointed when he fell back upon the Lord.
- That certainty of help has made such an impression on him that he is “*steadfastly resolved*”, literally in the Hebrew he has “*set [his] face as a flint.*”
- And so we read in Luke 9:51: “*When the days drew near for [Jesus] to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.*” (ESV)

50:7 *But the Sovereign LORD helps me, so I am not humiliated. For that reason I am steadfastly resolved; I know I will not be put to shame.*

- The servant will not give his adversaries the satisfaction of seeing him flinch when maltreated.
- He is certain that in the *future* he “*will not be put to shame.*”
- Another example of the kind of mindset exhibited by the servant here can be seen in Ezek 3:7-9 where the LORD says to prophet Ezekiel – “*the whole house of Israel is hard-headed and hard-hearted. I have made your face adamant to match their faces, and your forehead hard to match their foreheads. I have made your forehead harder than flint— like diamond! Do not fear them or be terrified of the looks they give you, for they are a rebellious house.*”
- But in no instance was this word fulfilled more marvelously than in the case of Christ.

50:8 *The one who vindicates me is close by. Who dares to argue with me? Let us confront each other! Who is my accuser? Let him challenge me!*

- Here we are given a further description of the Servant's thinking.
- He endures as the one who is conscious that "*The one who vindicates me is close by.*"
- The only verdict on his mission that really matters is **not** that given by **others**, or even by himself, but that given by **the LORD**.
- Conscious of his own obedience and innocence, the Servant confidently awaits the divine declaration of satisfaction in all that he has achieved.
- "*The one who vindicates me*", or "declares me righteous", is a legal verdict in which the LORD as Judge declares the Servant to be in the right.

**50:8** *The one who vindicates me is close by. Who dares to argue with me? Let us confront each other! Who is my accuser? Let him challenge me!*

- This is an administration of royal justice in which the King not only determines the **outcome** of the trial, but participates in the proceedings.
- In this case it is the LORD who will defend the Servant from allegations made against him (cf. 50:9).
- The Servant's declaration shows that he lives by **faith**, anticipating the imminence of such a verdict because the Judge is near, closely concerned about what is happening and ready to intervene (cf. 51:5).

50:8 *The one who vindicates me is close by. Who dares to argue with me? Let us confront each other! Who is my accuser? Let him challenge me!*

- Two triumphant questions express the Servant's challenge to those who have disparaged him and his mission. "*Who dares to argue with me?*" calls for those who have any dispute with him to **identify** themselves.
- "*Let us confront each other!*" summons them to the tribunal of the Judge so that he may resolve the issues in dispute.
- "*Who is my accuser?*" employs a technical term for an accuser who **claims** to have a valid case against him.
- Again, there is a confident invitation, "*Let him challenge me!*" as they both come together in the presence of the Judge.

# The Demise of the Servant's Opponents (50:9)

50:9 *Look, the Sovereign LORD helps me. Who dares to condemn me? Look, all of them will wear out like clothes; a moth will eat away at them.*

**50:9** *Look, the Sovereign LORD helps me. Who dares to condemn me? Look, all of them will wear out like clothes; a moth will eat away at them.*

- This verse gives the summary and conclusion of what has preceded.
- By means of an introductory “*Look!*” the prophet directs attention once more to the “*Sovereign LORD*”, from whom the servant’s help will come.
- The following question is stronger than the one in verse 8 (“*Who dares to argue with me?*”), when he says, “*Who dares to condemn me?*”
- The verb “*condemn*” is the antithesis of justify, and refers to the pronouncement of a sentence of condemnation.
- No one is able to pronounce such a sentence upon the servant, for the Lord God will help him and vindicate him.



**50:9** *Look, the Sovereign LORD helps me. Who dares to condemn me? Look, all of them will wear out like clothes; a moth will eat away at them.*

- It is said here that the enemies of the servant will “*will wear out like clothes*”.
- Scripture often uses this figure to express gradual decay (e.g. Hos 5:12).
- As old clothes are devoured by the “*moth*”, so the enemies and accusers of the servant will pass away and come to nothing.
- When they stand in court to bring accusations against the servant, they will be put to shame as easily as a moth devours the worn-out clothes.

# Next Time

I plan to look at **Isaiah 52:1-12** where will see “**The LORD’s Coming Salvation**”.

There are at least *three* references to this text in the New Testament.

# Class Discussion Time



# Class Discussion Time

- Does it ***strengthen your faith*** to see how many ***specific*** prophecies about the servant find fulfillment ***700 years later*** in the earthly ministry of Christ?
  - His unique ability to communicate the things of God effectively (50:4)
  - His ability to speak both speak clearly and directly, as well as in consoling tones to those in need of encouragement (49:2 cf. 50:4 cf. Mat 11:27-28)
  - The fact that the suffering he endured was voluntary – he could have ended it at any time, but didn't (50:6)
  - The kinds of specific suffering that he endured:
    - He was flogged (50:6 cf. John 19:1)
    - They tore out his beard (50:6)
    - He was spat upon and insulted (50:6 cf. Mat 26:67, 27:30)
  - His unwavering determination to carry out his mission, i.e. “he set his face like flint” (50:7 cf. Luke 9:51)

# Class Discussion Time

- We saw that as the servant carried out his mission he demonstrated a **voluntary** acceptance, rather than a **mere resignation** to his fate.
- Do you sometimes find yourself having an attitude of “just doing your duty”, rather than following the example given by the servant of fully and enthusiastically **embracing** the mission or task that the Lord has called you to?
- If you were being falsely accused in a public setting and you were to say the kinds of things the servant is described as saying in this passage as you stood to face your accusers:
  - *Who dares to argue with me?*
  - *Let us confront each other!*
  - *Who is my accuser?*
  - *Let him challenge me!*
  - *Who dares to condemn me?*
- Do you think onlookers would consider you to be arrogant? **Would** it be arrogant to say such things? Was the servant arrogant to say such things? Why or why not?