

## The “Servant Songs” in Isaiah John Hepp, Jr.

*Some of the main prophecies in Isaiah 40–53 concern “The Servant of the LORD.” Of these the most important are the four special “songs” in 42:1–9; 49:1–13; 50:4–11; and 52:13 to 53:12. There is an enigma about this Servant: sometimes He is identified as the nation of Israel; other times, as separate from Israel. This enigma is solved by realizing that one Israelite fulfills the mission of the nation. One Person is the real Israel and the real Servant. That Person is Jesus the Messiah, as Matthew 12:14–21 shows by applying the first Servant song to Him. Accordingly, Jesus was called God’s “Servant” in apostolic preaching: Acts 3:13, 26; 4:27 use the same Greek word as in the Servant Songs.*

### **Song I. Isaiah 42:1–9**

Speaker: the LORD, the Creator

Summary: He presents His beloved Servant, whom He has chosen and anointed and through whom He will establish justice on the earth.

NOTE: In vv. 1–4 the LORD talks about the Servant; in vv. 5–9, to Him. “Justice” (Heb. *mishpot*), mentioned in vv. 1, 3, 4, refers to divine order. Verses 2 and 3 describe the Servant’s confidence in the LORD and patience with men.

### **Song II. Isaiah 49:1–13**

Speakers: the LORD’s Servant, reporting to the nations, then the LORD

Summary: Though chosen and prepared by the Lord, the Servant is at first despised. Yet, He will bring light to the nations, will restore Israel, and will be honored.

NOTE: In vv. 1–3 the Servant tells the nations that the LORD called Him before birth and secretly prepared Him as Servant to glorify God. In v. 4 He affirms that He trusts the LORD though He has been unsuccessful. In vv. 5–6 He reports that by the LORD’s strength He will restore Israel and bring light to all the nations. In vv. 7–12 the LORD promises that world rulers will recognize this Servant despised by Israel but chosen by God (v. 7), also that He will use Him to bring the prisoners home from everywhere. V. 13 says that all nations should exult in this the LORD’s comfort of His people.

### **Song III. Isaiah 50:4–11**

Speaker: the LORD’s Servant

Summary: By being obedient even when it cost rejection, the Servant has learned to comfort the weary.

NOTE: In vv. 4–6 the Servant reports that the LORD has taught Him how to support the weary. He has followed the LORD’s daily instructions though it cost suffering. In vv. 7–9 He reports that He relies on the LORD’s strength and trusts

His vindication and triumph. In vv. 10–11 those who fear the LORD and obey His Servant are told to trust the LORD, whereas idolaters will perish.

#### **Song IV. Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12**

Speakers: the LORD, then repentant Israel

Summary: The LORD will degrade His Servant, then greatly exalt Him. Repentant Israel will witness that His obedient suffering, which made them disbelieve, was for their sins. It was the LORD's planned way to restore them.

NOTE: This song consists of five stanzas, each having three verses.

The LORD speaks:

1. He announces that His Servant will be as exalted as He was degraded (52:13–15).

Then repentant Israel gives the following witness:

2. They, like most, didn't believe that the LORD worked through the Servant, because He was unattractive and suffered (53:1–3).
3. Yet, His suffering was for their sins, to restore the sinners (53:4–6).
4. He suffered willingly and unjustly (53:7-9).
5. Since it was the LORD's plan for Him to suffer, He will reward Him with many spiritual descendants, long life, and rulership (53:10–12).