

The Faithful Servant (Isaiah 50:1–11)

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Introduction

1. Identification of the servant of Isaiah is difficult (Acts 8:34).
 - a. Often the servant is identified with collective Israel (Isaiah 41:8).
 - b. The problem is that there are many references to the servant that are not compatible with collective Israel.
 - 1) Some references speak as an individual, not a collective (Isaiah 45:8, 9).
 - 2) Some references speak of acts of the servant that cannot refer to the collective (53:4, 5).
 - c. Thus, we must conclude that there are two servants: the collective servant that is unfaithful to the Lord, but the individual servant is faithful.

This individual represents both the collective *remnant* of Israel and her Covenant Lord. The obedience and suffering of the Servant brings salvation to both the remnant of Israel and the Gentile nations, who were previously excluded from the covenants of Israel (Ephesians 2:11–17).

2. There are four servant songs in this second half of Isaiah
 - a. The *call* of the servant (Isa. 42:1–4): to “*bring forth justice to the nations*”
 - b. The *commission* of the servant (49:1–6): “*that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth*”
 - c. The *care* of the servant (50:4–9): “*I have set my face like a flint*”
 - d. The *career* of the servant (52:13–53:12): “*he shall see his offspring*” because of His suffering.
3. These servant songs are not tied directly to the messianic passages (e.g., Isaiah 9, 11), which lead to considerable confusion until Christ came and proved to be the suffering Servant prophesied in Isaiah.
4. Chapter 50 continues the argument posed by the unfaithful servant.
 - a. Israel faced divine discipline for forsaking her Covenant Lord and following idols.
 - b. Instead of repenting and crying out for mercy, Israel blamed the Lord for forsaking her.
 - c. The Lord’s response was to prove His unfailing faithfulness: “*I clothe the heavens with blackness and make sackcloth their covering*” (50:3).

I. The Confrontation (vv. 1–3)

1. The accusation: “*the LORD has forsaken me*” (49:14).
2. The accusation refuted: “present your proof” (v. 1)
 - a. Divorce in Israel could occur if the wife merely displeased her husband, thus the Lord required the divorcing husband to give the wife a certificate of divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1;

Matthew 19:7). The Lord asks His accusers, “*Where is your mother’s certificate of divorce?*”

- b. Fathers could sell their children into servitude to satisfy debt to creditors (Psalm 44:12). The Lord responds by asking them to produce the creditors to whom He owed anything. Israel could produce no evidence of His betrayal of them. The problem was with Israel, not Yahweh.
3. The real issue is not with an unfaithful Husband or Father, but with an unfaithful wife and rebellious children (vv. 2, 3).
 - a. There is no want of divine power or will to exercise that power, as evidenced by His demonstrations in Egypt.
 - b. Verse 3 is a cloaked reference to divine judgment (*darkness*) and call to repentance (*sackcloth*). Both are His sovereign design to bring in His true servant who will succeed in His saving purpose.

II. The Comparison (vv. 4–9)

In this third servant song, the Christ reveals the means the Yahweh will use to bring salvation to the ends of the earth. These verses are held up in contrast to the natural seed with their deaf ears and stubborn wills, rebelling against the Lord.

1. The Lord qualified His servant to preach the Word (v. 4).
2. The Lord enabled His servant to hear and heed His instructions (v. 5).
3. The Lord prepared His servant to bear reproach and humiliation (v. 6).
4. The Lord helped His servant to bear the shame of His humiliation (vv. 7, 8a).
5. The servant’s confidence in the Lord’s help and the temporary condition of the rebellion (vv. 8b, 9). Note the reference to Psalm 102:25–28. Creation by its nature is temporary. The Lord clothes the creation like a garment that wears out.

III. The Challenge (vv. 10, 11)

The rebellious nation is the focus here. When the Lord clothes the heavens with darkness—spiritual darkness, people must walk in that darkness without light (v. 10). There are two responses:

1. There are those who walk in the fear of the Lord and obey the Christ, will trust in the name—the reputation of the Lord and His covenant promises. Let them rely on Him and trust Him without questioning, fearing, or doubting His purpose (v. 10).

The language here is a bit difficult. The one who fears the Lord may refer to the servant. It may refer to one who is trusting the Lord like the Servant, when he walks in darkness.

2. On the other hand, there are those who seek to kindle their own light—who trust in themselves and walk by their own reasoning. These will be brought down in torment (v. 11).

In which of these two camps to you belong? Do you trust the Lord and obey Him when you walk in darkness? Or, do you seek to overcome darkness by your own means, trusting in your own reasoning and ability?