

Understanding Christmas

The Promise of Christmas
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Introduction:

740 years is a long time. Think about 740 years ago. If someone lived 740 years ago, that would be 1269. Think for a moment about someone living in 1269 making accurate predictions of what would happen today.

But that is exactly what happened. In 740 BC a man by the name of Isaiah lived and he made prophecies about a man called God's servant that are so accurate, when you apply them to Jesus, it reads like one of the gospels.

The book of Isaiah was written during a dark time in the history of Israel. Israel was headed into a time when her people would be scattered all over the world. In the context of this coming horror, Isaiah writes of 5 great acts of deliverance that God would perform.

- The deliverance of Judah from the Assyrian invasion 36-37
- The deliverance of the nation from the Babylonian Captivity 40

- The future deliverance of Jews from worldwide dispersion 11-12
- The deliverance of lost sinners from judgment 53
- The deliverance of creation from the effects of sin 60, 66:17 ff

Today, we want to look at Isaiah's greatest prophecy. It's the prophecy of the coming Messiah and his work among us. It's called *the song of the servant*. We're in Isaiah 52:13-53:12

I. The ultimate exaltation of "the servant"

This great *servant song* is a hymn to the servant of Jehovah. Who is this servant? In the book of Isaiah, Isaiah is called "my servant" (Isaiah 20:3) Israel is called "My servant" (Isaiah 41:8-10, 49:3-6) And there is another called "my servant"

Isaiah 42:1 (NASB95)

¹ "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold;
My chosen one *in whom* My soul delights. I
have put My Spirit upon Him; He will
bring forth justice to the nations.

God says, my soul delights in my servant and I have put my Spirit upon him. He will bring forth justice to the nations.

In Isaiah 50:10 we get an idea of the identity of this servant.

Isaiah 50:10 (NASB95)

¹⁰ Who is among you that fears the LORD,
That obeys the voice of His servant, That
walks in darkness and has no light? Let
him trust in the name of the LORD and rely
on his God.

Notice that Isaiah puts two things in parallel to fear the Lord (Yahweh) and obey the voice of his servant. Isaiah is identifying this *servant* with Yahweh.

What we are going to see is that the servant of the Lord here is the promised Messiah.

Isaiah begins this prophecy with a short summery.

Isaiah 52:13–15 (NLT)

¹³ See, my servant will prosper; he will be highly exalted.¹⁴ But many were amazed when they saw him. His face was so disfigured he seemed hardly human, and from his appearance, one would scarcely know he was a man.¹⁵ And he will startle many nations. Kings will stand speechless in his presence. For they will see what they had not been told; they will understand what they had not heard about.

Isaiah says the servant will be *high and lifted up*. The last time Isaiah used this term, *high and lifted up* was when he saw Yahweh sitting on his throne in 6:1.

Isaiah 6:1 (NASB95)

¹In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple.

Isaiah begins this great song by stating that Messiah is going to occupy the place of God!

In 14-15, we see that Messiah is going to amaze people in two ways.

In verse 14, when people saw him they were amazed. His face was so disfigured, he could hardly be recognized as human. When you look at the suffering and death of Jesus, you can begin to realize what Isaiah was referring to. Think of Jesus after he had been beaten around the face and had the crown of thorns placed on him. His face would have been bruised, battered and caked with blood.

By the way, you may be wondering why Isaiah writes as if this is past tense. This is actually called the prophetic past. The prophet is writing from the standpoint of the future looking back at the future event as if it was already past.

But in v 15. He, the messiah will startle many nations in a different way. This verse is looking forward to the second coming of Jesus when he comes as king. Isaiah says Kings will be speechless in his presence.

They will see what they have not been told, they will understand what they have not heard about.

Can you imagine this day? I'm so intrigued by the science fiction series that come out like Independence Day and V that show what the amazed reactions we would have if gigantic space ships entered our atmosphere and parked over our major cities.

Guess what folks, a day is coming when Messiah will return and Kings will be speechless.

Philippians 2 says that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Messiah is Lord!!!!

So in three verses, Isaiah summarizes both the suffering and the exaltation of Messiah.

Now, Isaiah details the painful process.

II. The sadness: People just won't believe

The lamentation of the difference of God's estimation of Messiah and the estimation of people

¹ Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? ² For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no *stately* form or

majesty That we should look upon Him,
Nor appearance that we should be
attracted to Him. ³ He was despised and
forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and
acquainted with grief; And like one from
whom men hide their face He was
despised, and we did not esteem Him.

This is a painful prophecy. Jehovah is asking *who has believed our message*, to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed.

The answer to who has believed our message: the message of Yahweh and his servant? Not very many people.

To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?
The baring of the arm speaks of the great strength that God exerted in saving us.

Notice the stark contrast between Yahweh and his servant. Jesus is described as a root out of parched ground. Jesus was born in a poor time in the history of Israel and his was born in poverty.

Even though Jesus was completely God, with all the power and sovereignty that comes with it, when he came to this earth, he came as a human, in weakness so that he could truly identify with us!
This is what Paul is talking about in Philippians 2

Philippians 2:6-7 (NASB95)

⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men.

Isaiah goes on to describe Jesus as one who is lacking stately form or majesty. It's interesting. Isaiah is saying that if we had seen Jesus, we wouldn't be physically attracted to him. Wow! You'd think the son of God would create the best body in the world – one what would shame the govenator.

He was despised and forsaken of men. A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, one from whom people hid their face. Isaiah concludes, he was despised and we did not esteem him.

Wow! That reads like a gospel account of the life of Jesus. John records

John 1:11 (NASB95)

¹¹ He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.

All through Jesus' life, people didn't get him. He loved them, but they questioned him, he demonstrated his power and they doubted him, he showed his love and they screamed crucify him.

For Jesus, coming to this earth was not a fun vacation; he lived a hard, sad life where even his closest followers had trouble getting him.

So why did he come?

III. The mission of the servant

4 Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
And our sorrows He carried; Yet we
ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.

5 But He was pierced through for our
transgressions, He was crushed for our
iniquities; The chastening for our well-
being *fell* upon Him, And by His
scourging we are healed.

6 All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way; But
the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all
To fall on Him.

He came to bear our griefs. He came to carry our sorrows – and we, people just like us looked at him on the cross and believed that he was there because God was punishing him!

But the reason he was there was for us.

He was pierced through for our transgressions

He was crushed for our sins.

The chastening for our well being fell upon him and by his scourging we are healed.

Messiah had to come and die because I had gone astray. I sinned against God and in my pride installed myself as god of my own life. But rather than casting me aside, God sent his son Jesus to take the punishment I deserved.

Jesus died in my place – he died in your place.

Isaiah goes on.

IV. The suffering of the servant 7-9

⁷He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a
lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a
sheep that is silent before its shearers, So
He did not open His mouth. ⁸ By
oppression and judgment He was taken
away;

Jesus was willingly and silently led to death. He did not defend himself, he did not cry out when tortured.

He was silent before Caiaphas (Matt. 26:62–63), the chief priests and elders (27:12), Pilate (27:14; John 19:9) and Herod Antipas (Luke 23:9). He did not speak when the soldiers mocked Him and beat Him (1 Peter 2:21–23). This is what impressed the

Ethiopian treasurer as he read this passage in Isaiah (Acts 8:26–40).

And as for His generation, who considered
That He was cut off out of the land of the
living For the transgression of my people,
to whom the stroke was due? ⁹ His grave
was assigned with wicked men, Yet He
was with a rich man in His death, Because
He had done no violence, Nor was there
any deceit in His mouth.

Because Jesus died among criminals, you would have thought that his body would be dumped, but he was buried in the grave of a rich man – why because God knew he was innocent!

Since Jesus Christ was crucified *with* criminals *as* a criminal, it was logical that His dead body would be left unburied, but God had other plans. The burial of Jesus Christ is as much a part of the Gospel as is His death (1 Cor. 15:1–5), for the burial is proof that He actually died. The Roman authorities would not have released the body to Joseph and Nicodemus if the victim were not dead (John 19:38–42; Mark 15:42–47). A wealthy man like Joseph would never carve out a tomb for himself so near to a place of execution, particularly when his home was miles away. He prepared it for Jesus and had the spices and graveclothes ready for the burial. How wonderfully God fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy!

V. The success of the servant 10-12

¹⁰ But the Lord was pleased To crush Him,
putting Him to grief; If He would render
Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His
offspring, He will prolong His days, And
the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper
in His hand. ¹¹ As a result of the anguish of
His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By
His knowledge the Righteous One, My
Servant, will justify the many, As He will
bear their iniquities. ¹² Therefore, I will
allot Him a portion with the great, And He
will divide the booty with the strong;
Because He poured out Himself to death,
And was numbered with the
transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin
of many, And interceded for the
transgressors.

God's perspective on the cross was completely
different from man's perspective.

Why was God pleased to crush Jesus Christ; because
in the process, Jesus was offering himself as an
offering for sin!

Jesus' death was not a political accident, it was part
of the predetermined plan of God to make a way for
us to come back to God!

Acts 2:22-24 (NASB95)

²² "Men of Israel, listen to these words:

Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know – ²³ this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death. ²⁴“But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

1 Peter 1:18-21 (NASB95)

¹⁸ knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, ¹⁹ but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. ²⁰ For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you ²¹ who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

The result of the offering that Jesus made for us is many offspring. We are a part of God’s family because of the sacrifice that Jesus made for our sins!

Jesus was vindicated by the success of his death and also by his resurrection and ascension into heaven.

Through his death, many will be justified as Jesus bears our sins.

Jesus was numbered with transgressors. He was crucified between two thieves. He bore our sins and became our intercessor.

Conclusion

Philippians 2:9-11 (NASB95)

⁹For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Be on the right side of history!