



THE SERVANT OF THE LORD (1)

As with a phrase such as “Son of God”, which could mean Israel (Hos.11v1); the King (Ps.2); the Messiah (Isa.11) and Jesus (Mk.1), so too the phrase “Servant of the Lord” has different applications, depending on the setting and context. But these different meanings are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Israel was called to be a servant of God, but so often failed to live up to its high calling. Consequently an individual (e.g. the Messiah and ultimately Jesus) might also legitimately be called *the* “Servant of the Lord,” as representing true Israel. Thus verses referring to the “Servant of the Lord” might at the same time refer both to Israel and to the ideal Israel / Israelite (cf Jn.1v47). Sometimes the Servant was both Israel and an Individual in the same few verses of prophecy e.g. Isa.49v1-3 and Isa.49v5-6.

For what Israel was called to be in theory, the individual Servant actually was.

The Hebrew idea of a “servant” meant someone who was at the disposal of another. it could mean a slave, or the servant of a king; it could be a humble self-description; and it also referred to a person in the presence of God (Ex.4v10; Ps.119v17; 143v12).

1. The “Servant” stands in a particular relationship to the Lord.
2. The “Servant” receives specific blessings and takes on obligations.
3. There are mutual responsibilities between the “Servant” and the Lord.

In Isaiah there are five passages which particularly concern someone called “the Servant of God.”
Isa.42v1-4; 49v1-6; 50v4-9; 52v13-53v12; 61v1-3(1-11). [*see separate sheet*]

The “Servant of the Lord” can variously mean:

1. The Nation of Israel.
2. The Prophets (including Isaiah himself).
3. Moses and David.
4. The Messiah.
5. Jesus.
6. (The Church - we who are “slaves” to Christ, are in some sense also “servants of God.”)

1: The Nation of Israel

Lev.25v42,55; Deut.32v36,43; 1 Kngs 8v23,32,36 / 2 Chron.6v14, 23, 27; Ps.135v14; Ps.136v22; Jer.30v10; 46v27-28; Joel 2v28-32.

Sometimes Israel is referred to as “Jacob,” their wayward ancestor, whose name was changed to Israel (Gen.32v28). A reminder of their spiritual heritage; a challenge to their current spiritual state; a call to change, even as Jacob had been transformed by his encounter with God; a reminder of God’s faithfulness to His covenant promises. – they *can* change!

And in the Book of Isaiah in chapters 41v8-9; 43v1,10; 44v1-2; 45v4; 48v20; 49v3.

2: Prophets

They too were servants of God, either generically (Amos 3v7; Jer.7v25; 25v4; 29v19 etc; Dan.9v6), or specific individuals:- Elijah (2 Kngs 9v36); Jonah (2 Kngs 14v25); Isaiah (Isa.20v3).

3: Moses and David

These two men are the giants of Jewish faith, men who were sovereignly called by God to play a pivotal role in the life of the nation and in the purposes of God. One would take a slave people out of Egypt and into their Promised Land. The other would be the model of kingship and the ancestor of the Messiah.

Both men stood in a special relationship to God, as “servants of the Lord.”

Intimacy (Moses: Ps.103v7; Ex.33v11; Num.12v6-8; David:1 Sam.13v14).

Fulfilling a crucial task (Moses: Ps.105v26ff; David: 2 Sam.7v8-12,16; Isa.11v1ff).

Moses: Ex.4v10; 14v31; Num.12v6-8; Deut.34v5; Rev.15v3.

David: 2 Sam.7v5,8; 1 Kngs 8v24; 1 Chron.17v4,7; 2 Chron.6v14; Ps.78v70.

However it is Psalm 89v1-37 that is the key text, containing as it does references not just to David as God's "servant" but to the promise of an everlasting dynasty – the promise of the Messiah (Ps.89v3-4,20, 29, 35-37).

4: The Messiah

As well as Ps.89 e.g. vss3-4,19-20,35-36, see 2 Sam.7v11-16; 1 Chron.17v23-26; Isa.11v1 with Isa.53v2.

In relation to the Servant Songs in Isaiah, an understanding developed that the person about whom the prophet was speaking was a future individual – the Messiah. The Servant is clearly Israel but just as clearly more than Israel (Isa.49v1-3 and Isa.49v5-6). His experiences and his ministry go far beyond a people or even a prophet (Isa.53v4-6, 10-12). "The personification becomes a person." By the time of Jesus the rabbis are identifying the Servant with the Messiah - "*Behold my Servant, the Messiah...*" (Isa. 52v13).

5: Jesus (Acts 8v32-35).

Both explicitly and in the whole understanding of His ministry and mission, Jesus identifies Himself as the Servant of the Lord. (cf Lk.22v24-27).

He must suffer and die, "because it is written" (Mt.26v24; Mk. 9v12; 14v21; Lk.18v31-33; 22v37; 24v25-27) and so He teaches His disciples (Mk.8v31; 10v32-34; Jn.12v23-27 etc.) And throughout all four Gospels and Acts the links are clearly made between His life, mission and ministry and the Servant of Isaiah. And of course the accounts of His crucifixion echo Isa. 52 & 53 in so many ways.

The link between Jesus as the Son of God and the Servant of God is further emphasised by the fact that the Greek word *pais* can mean "son" and also "servant" of the French word *garçon*.

<p>Matthew 3v15; <i>baptised to fulfil all righteousness; Son I love</i> 3v17;17v5 <i>You are My Son..loved..well pleased</i> 8v17 <i>He took our infirmities and diseases</i> 12v15-21 <i>quoting Isa.42v1-4</i> 27v 38, 57 <i>crucified between robbers..Joseph's tomb</i></p>	<p>Isaiah 53v11 <i>My righteous servant</i> 42v1 <i>My servant..in whom I delight</i> 53v4 <i>He took our infirmities and sorrows</i> 42v1-4 <i>My servant, chosen..anointed & etc.</i> 53v9 <i>a grave with the wicked..with rich in death</i></p>
<p>Mark 1v11; 9v7 <i>You are My Son..loved..well pleased</i> 10v45 <i>Son of Man gives His life as a ransom for many</i> 14v24 <i>the blood of the covenant, poured out for many</i></p>	<p>Isaiah 42v1 <i>My servant..in whom I delight [Gk = pais]</i> 53v12 <i>life poured out to death..for many</i> 53v12 <i>life poured out to death..for many</i></p>
<p>Luke 1v54 [God] <i>has helped His servant Israel</i> 1v69: <i>salvation in the house of David, God's servant</i> 3v22; 9v35 <i>My Son..loved..well pleased.. chosen</i> 4v17-21 <i>Isaiah 61v1-2- today this Scripture is fulfilled</i> 22v37 <i>numbered with the transgressors</i></p>	<p>Isaiah 49v1-3 <i>you are My servant, Israel..</i> Ps.89v3-4 <i>to David My servant..establish his line</i> Isa.42v1 <i>My servant..in whom I delight..chosen</i> 61v1-2 <i>The Spirit of the Lord is on me...</i> 53v12 <i>numbered with the transgressors</i></p>
<p>John 1v29,36 <i>Lamb of God who takes away the world's sin</i> 12v28: <i>Father, glorify your name</i></p>	<p>Isaiah 53v5-7 <i>led like a lamb to the slaughter</i> 53v1 <i>to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?</i></p>
<p>Acts 3v13 [God's] <i>servant Jesus, disowned..glorified</i> 3v15 <i>you killed..God raised</i> 3v26 <i>God raised up His servant, blessed, turn from sin</i> 4v27-28 <i>conspired against servant..God's plan</i> 8v32-35 <i>quoting Isa.53 – who is this? Answer = Jesus</i></p>	<p>Isaiah 52v13; 53v3,8,12 <i>My servant.. disowned..glorified</i> 53v7-9,11-12 <i>no descendants..see his offspring</i> 53v11-12 <i>righteous servant justify many</i> 42v1; 49v5-6; 53v7-10 <i>My servant..Gentiles.. & etc.</i> 53v7-8 <i>quoted by the Ethiopian official</i></p>

Paul writes of Jesus in terms that are to be understood in the light of the "Servant of the Lord" (e.g. Rom.4v25; 8v3-4, 32-36; 1 Cor.15v3-4; 2 Cor.5v21; Gal.3v13) and of course his great Christological hymn takes up the themes of the Servant of Isaiah (Phil.2v5-11).

6: The Church

Technically the Church is not linked to the Servant Songs of Isaiah but it is not a completely invalid connection. In the same way that Israel was the Servant of the Lord (and is included in the Servant Songs), so too the new people of God are called into this same privileged relationship.

Individuals describe themselves as “servants / slaves of Jesus”

Paul (Rom.1v1 – *Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus*)

Peter (2 Ptr.1v1 – *Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ*)

James (Jas.1v1 – *James, a servant..of the Lord Jesus Christ*)

Jude (Jude 1 – *Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ*)

Servants both of Christ but also of the Church (2 Cor.4v5; Col.1v24-25).

But the Church also is the servant of the Lord, both as part of the true Israel (Gal.6v16) and also as those who have been bought with a price by Jesus and who now belong to Jesus.

Rom.6v18-19 – *slaves to righteousness*

1 Cor.7v23 – *you were bought with a price*

Rev.7v3 – *the servants of the Lord*

Rev.19v5 – *Praise God, all you his servants..*

We are also servants of the Lord as members of the body of Christ, who is *the* “Servant of the Lord”.

“THE SERVANT OF THE LORD”

