

3. Isaiah's doctrine of *Immanuel* is vitally important to Old Testament messianism in that it introduces into it a divine component alongside the human one. As early as the oath in Eden God had revealed that recovery from the curse was to come through a man, and the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants had reiterated and furthered that promise of a human seed. But the Immanuel prophecy brought a whole new dimension to messianic revelation by linking the Davidic descendent with the coming of the Lord. According to the prophet, the presence of the Immanuel child signified the presence of Yahweh Himself. The son prophesied to take David's throne would possess the title of *Mighty God* and *Everlasting Father* ("Father of Eternity").

This divine-human dynamic is all the more profound in that the Immanuel prophecy draws into itself the priestly component of Old Testament messianism. Again, the point of connection is the Davidic Covenant: The promise of Immanuel was to be fulfilled in the Son of David, but that same son would be the Melchizedekian king-priest. In turn, the interweaving of these three strands pulls in the other great Isaianic messianic thread, namely the doctrine of the **Servant of Yahweh**.

While David had earlier prophesied concerning a king-priest – by both direct declaration (Psalm 110) and the typology of his own life as Israel's king (2 Samuel 6), and Zechariah would later explicitly merge the kingly and priestly strands of messianic promise, Isaiah drew them together indirectly by his presentation of the Servant. As noted previously, this individual is presented on the one hand as the theophanic presence of Yahweh, and on the other as the true Israel. In the Servant both parties to the covenant are represented, and this becomes hugely important when His work is considered.

The doctrine of the Servant of Yahweh is evident elsewhere in the Old Testament – particularly in relation to the promised Davidic seed (ref. Ezekiel 34:23-24, 37:24-25; Zechariah 3:8; cf. also Haggai 2:20-23), but Isaiah's treatment stands alone in its magnitude and scope. His prophecy provides essential content for bringing together the various aspects of Old Testament messianism.

- The prophets revealed a Messiah who would be the Son of David and Melchizedekian high priest. This One would also be the tangible manifestation of Yahweh in His coming to establish His kingdom in the earth. Moreover, both the prophets and history itself indicated that this kingdom was to be the product of Yahweh's work of redemption in the great and awesome Day of the Lord (cf. Isaiah 3:1-4:6; Joel 3:9-21; Zephaniah 1:1-18, 3:1-20; Malachi 4:5-6; etc.).
- Together these components of messianic revelation form a general framework, but they leave unanswered the important question of how they all fit together. *How, exactly, does the coming of the Immanuel-Davidide and His execution of Yahweh's judgment and deliverance inaugurate the kingdom and provide for the removal of the curse as first promised in the protoevangelium?* Isaiah answers that question by His revelation of the Servant. In that revelation he conjoins the kingly and priestly messianic strands, but he does much more: He shows how that conjoining is key to reconciling all the components of messianic revelation.

- a. The fact that the Servant represents both parties to Israel's covenant is foundational to properly interacting with Isaiah's presentation of Him. First of all, the Servant is Yahweh's true **Israel**, and the significance of this becomes evident when the biblical idea of "Israel" is unfolded.

- The immediate inclination is to think of Israel as a national, ethnic people, but it is first and foremost a biblical *concept*. Israel found its first expression in a single individual, and only later in the corporate body descended from him. As a concept, "Israel" principally embodies the ideas of *seed of Abraham, son of God, servant of Yahweh, disciple and witness*. The latter three, especially, come to the forefront in Isaiah's prophecy.

The nation of Israel was God's son in that it had been "begotten" by redemptive "birth" in keeping with the Lord's covenant with Abraham. Yahweh had promised to be the God of Abraham and his descendents, and He upheld that promise by delivering Israel from exile and bondage and bringing them to be with Him in His sanctuary-land.

But, being the recipients of the Abrahamic Covenant and its promises, Israel was to fulfill the core feature of the covenant that, in Abraham and his seed, all the families of the earth would be blessed. That blessing consisted in the nations coming to know and worship Abraham's God. From the vantage point of the Fall, it meant the undoing of the curse; it meant the reconciliation of Creator-Father and estranged image-son. In its calling as Abraham's seed, the nation of Israel was to fulfill this promise of reconciliation. Israel was Yahweh's *servant* (Isaiah 41:8-9, 44:1-2, 21), set apart as His *disciple* to learn of Him through devoted faithfulness to the covenant by which He revealed Himself (42:18-24). By that life of faithfulness, in turn, the servant-son would bear *witness* to the divine Father to the surrounding nations (Isaiah 43:10-15, 44:6-8).

*These designations show that the concept "Israel" speaks to man as truly **man** – man as he exists in intimate communion with God as Father and communicates His presence and lordship throughout His creation.*

- Israel was son, servant, disciple and witness, but the nation failed to fulfill its identity in every way. Israel could not be Israel, and its failure brought the Abrahamic promise (and the Edenic oath behind it) into jeopardy. If God were to fulfill His oath of restoration and reconciliation, a new Israel was needed, as this is precisely what Isaiah promised (49:1ff).

This new Israel would fulfill Israel's identity and calling, and this meant mediating Yahweh's blessing to all the earth's people – blessing that consists in intimate relational knowledge of the Creator-Father. But in the context of divine-human estrangement, such knowledge necessitates reconciliation, and this is where the Servant-Israel's *priesthood* comes in.

Along with its identity as son, servant, witness and disciple, Israel was also a priestly entity. The covenant that formally identified Israel as the son of God was founded on the concept of priesthood, and Yahweh structured His relationship with Israel such that no Israelite could conceive of that relationship except in terms of priestly mediation. This principle was put in place with Moses and continued on in the Levitical system.

- If it was true that national Israel was a priestly entity, it was equally true of the Servant-Israel. The relationship between Yahweh and Israel had been defined and instituted by covenant, and the covenant had depended on the priesthood: Israel's execution of its sonship depended upon mediation, and sacrifice was at the heart of that mediation. Yahweh and Israel were bound together through sacrifice, but that union was to find its ultimacy in the reconciliation of Yahweh and the world of men. *Israel's life of filial intimacy was to serve the cause of the reconciliation of God and mankind.*

Accordingly, Isaiah presented the Servant-Israel as the point of divine-human reconciliation effected through priestly mediation (Isaiah 53). The true Servant would not only fulfill Israel's identity and role by His own covenant fidelity, He would fulfill the covenant prescription of vicarious righteousness. Just as prescribed sacrifices preserved the covenant union between Yahweh and Israel, so the Servant, by the sacrifice of Himself, would secure the union between Creator-Father and man, the image-son.

- b. The Servant's priestly role as Yahweh's true Israel is profound in itself, but all the more so in the light of the fact that He is also the presence of **Yahweh** as Israel's Redeemer (Isaiah 59:15-20). In the Suffering Servant, the Lord Himself would bear the guilt of His people and satisfy the demands of justice against them.

- From the beginning God indicated that His kingdom was to be a redemptive kingdom; Yahweh, the great King, would establish it through a spectacular work of judgment, deliverance, and restoration. And as had been the case with its Israelite predecessor, *sacrifice* was to provide the redemptive foundation for the final kingdom. Though only indirectly implied, the future second *Exodus* predicted by Isaiah (ref. again 51:9-11) would also stand upon a second *Passover* as the instrument of redemption.
- At the same time, the Servant's unique nature introduced a whole new dimension into the redemptive circumstance. This one would fulfill in Himself the twin roles of priest and sacrifice, but He would do so as Yahweh the Redeemer as well as the new Israel.

Satisfying the obligations of both parties, the Servant effectively embodied the covenant in Himself (42:1-7, 49:8-9). He would be *Israel* on behalf of Israel, but as the Lord *Redeemer* He would accomplish Yahweh's purpose to redeem and recover to Himself all things (cf. Isaiah 49:5-6, 54:1-17; also Ephesians 1:7-10, 2:11-3:12; Colossians 1:19-20).