

THE FOURTH SERVANT SONG

Isaiah 52v13-53v12

The first Servant Song proclaims the Servant's work (Isa 42v1-7). The fourth announces His death (Isa 52v13-53v12). Two other Servant Songs link these themes. In the second, the Servant is like a sword sharpened by God to extend the kingdom beyond the Jews to the Gentiles (Isa 49v1-13). In the third, the Servant sets His face like a flint against ill-treatment by His enemies (Isa 50v4-9). The Songs move in crescendo to a climax. Like a great symphony the themes rise and fall in variations until they reach the final dramatic chorus of the Servant's death.

Introduction to the Song

1. What is the extent of the song?

It certainly does not begin at 53v1. The chapter division is very unhelpful. It begins at 52v13 because it starts in the same way as the first Servant Song in 42v1.

2. Who is the speaker in the Song?

This final Song like the first is biographical. Here is God the father speaking about His Servant (52v13). Here we are given the most complete portrayal and understanding of the Cross in the Bible.

3. What is the theme of this Song?

It sets forth the Lord Jesus Christ as the suffering Servant, but in addition it also reveals His glory. The Song begins and ends with the Servant's exaltation (52v13, 53v12). It is a triumphant Song portraying the whole saving career of Jesus from the cradle to the crown.

4. How is the Song constructed?

There are several ways of looking at it. We could view it as revealing the threefold office of Christ: Prophet (52v15), Priest (53v1-9) and King (53v11-12). Another possibility is to divide the Song around the three states of Christ: Pre-existence (52v13), humiliation (52v14-53v10) and exaltation (53v11-12). In the Hebrew Bible it is divided into five stanzas of three verses each, beginning and ending with the Servant's exaltation; set within this is a detailed description of the Servant's rejection (stanzas two and four). At the very centre of the Song is a stanza which focuses specifically upon the atoning work of Christ. Note also that the five stanzas of the poem, can be arranged respectively with nine, ten, eleven, twelve and thirteen lines, matching the mood of mounting excitement in the poem itself.

5. N.T understanding of the Song?

This is the most frequently quoted passage in the N.T. There are no less than eight different verses referred to by the Apostles and gospel writers. John 12v38, Matthew 8v17, 1 Peter 2v22-25, Acts 8v30-35. Jesus also quoted one verse (53v12) and applied it to himself (Luke 22v37). There are also many allusions to the Song. According to Stott, "Every verse of this chapter except v2 is applied to Jesus in the N.T, some verses several times".