

**The Servant of Jehovah:**  
The Sufferings of the Messiah and  
The Glory That Should Follow

by  
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CHAPTER IV

*THE UNTENABLENESS OF THE MODERN  
INTERPRETATION*

I shall now proceed to show the untenableness of this modern interpretation; but before doing so it is necessary to point out that, like most of the false teaching of the present day, it contains a germ of truth which lends plausibility to the error.

The germ of truth contained in this explanation is that, as has already been observed above, the term "Servant of Jehovah" is indeed again and again applied to Israel in the second half of the Book of Isaiah. Thus, in the very first instance where the phrase occurs, we read: "*But thou, Israel, art My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham My friend.*"<sup>1</sup> Again: "*Ye are My witnesses, saith Jehovah, and My servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He.*"<sup>2</sup>

"*Yet now hear, O Jacob My servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen,*" etc.<sup>3</sup>

This is Israel's high calling, but, alas! in this, as in the other great relationships to God, to which he was called, namely, that of a son to his father, and of a wife to her husband, Israel has failed and proved himself unfaithful.

Israel's failure to apprehend that for which he was apprehended of God, and his unfaithfulness as Jehovah's *Servant*, is forcibly depicted in many passages in these very chapters of Isaiah. "*Hear, ye deaf,*" God complains in the 42nd chapter; "*and look, ye blind, that ye may see. Who is blind, but My servant? or deaf, as My messenger that I send? Who is blind as he that was called to be perfect (or 'as he that is at peace'), and blind as Jehovah's servant? Seeing many things, but thou observest not; his ears are open, but he heareth not.*"<sup>4</sup>

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1 Isa. xli. 8.

2 Isa. xliii. 10.

3 Isa. xliv. 1.

4 Isa. xlii. 18-20.

But Israel's sins and disobedience cannot frustrate the purpose of God. The ideal to which the nation could not rise is gloriously realized in Him who is both the Head and Heart of Israel. In the words of Von Orelli, "The idea, Servant of Jehovah, which was united from the first in God's purpose with the people of Israel, outgrew this national limit, even as the idea, 'Son of God,' which was likewise at first attributed to the people, also became a separate Person and was definitely assigned to the Messiah--*i.e.* the Lord's Anointed" (as, for instance, in Ps. ii.). It is true that both these designations ("Servant" and "Son") remain as marks of the *character indelebilis* impressed by God's grace on this nation, and in and through their Messiah, and in union with Him, will yet become true of their actual condition and experience; hence, wherever this *grace* speaks, and restored and converted Israel in the future is prophetically contemplated, the nation still wears these names of honour, as, for instance, in the passages from chapters xli., xliii., and xliv., quoted above. "But the more the nation as a whole shows itself incapable of rising to the high calling implied in it, and the less the Lord is willing to renounce the realizing of this high idea, the more plainly the term 'Servant of Jehovah' detaches itself from the national multitude and becomes a personally conceived ideal, which acquires such independence that the nation itself becomes the object of the Servant's redeeming work."<sup>5</sup> In chapter xlix. especially we see this One Individual who is out of the nation, and yet towering high above it, invested with the name and the mission to which the whole people was called in the first instance.

*"Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye peoples, from far; Jehovah hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath He made mention of my name.*

*"And He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of His hand hath He hid me, and He hath made me a polished shaft; in His quiver hath He kept me close;*

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5 The following suggestive note is from Franz Delitzsch on Isaiah: "The idea of the Servant of Jehovah assumed, so to speak, figuratively, the form of a pyramid. The base was Israel as a whole; the central section was that Israel which was not merely Israel according to the flesh, but according to the spirit also; the apex is the person of the Mediator of Salvation springing out of Israel. And the last of the three is regarded (1) as the centre of the circle of the promised kingdom--the second David; (2) the centre of the circle of the people of salvation--the second Israel; (3) the centre of the human race--the second Adam. Throughout the whole of these prophecies, in chapters xl.-lxvi., the knowledge of salvation is still in its second stage, and about to pass into the third. Israel's true nature as a servant of God, which had its roots in the election and calling of Jehovah, and manifested itself in conduct and action in harmony with its calling, is all concentrated in Him the One, as its ripest fruit. The gracious purposes of God toward the whole human race, which were manifested even in the election of Israel, are brought by Him to their full completion.

*"And He said unto me, Thou art My servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.*

*"But I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and for vanity: yet surely my judgment is with Jehovah, and my recompence with my God.*

*"And now, saith Jehovah that formed me from the womb to be His servant, to bring Jacob again to Him, and that Israel be gathered unto Him: (for I am honourable in the eyes of Jehovah, and my God is become my strength:)*

*"Yea, He saith, It is too light a thing that thou shouldest be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will give thee for a light to the Gentiles, and that thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth."<sup>6</sup>*

That it is not of the nation of Israel that this prophecy speaks is clear, and manifest to every unbiased mind, since the One who is here thus dramatically introduced as proclaiming His own call and enduement for His office, and whom Jehovah addresses, is the One who is sent as *the Redeemer of Israel*, namely, "to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel," *i.e.* not only to the land, but to *their God*.

Here God says to him, "Thou art My servant, O Israel" (or, "Thou art Israel"). He is invested with the name of Israel because He, "as Israel's inmost centre, as Israel's highest head," realizes the idea and carries out the mission to which the nation which had originally been *called* to the task of carrying out God's saving purpose in relation to the world does not respond.

Here, too, as in chapter xlii. 1-9, where the ideal personal Servant of Jehovah is contrasted with the nation whose failure and unfaithfulness is depicted in verses 18-25 of the same chapter, His mission extends, not only to Israel, whom He is to raise up and restore, and to whom He is to be, not only the mediator, but the very embodiment of "the covenant" which shall be everlastingly established between them and their God, but is to be the light also of the Gentiles, and God's salvation unto the very ends of the earth.

And as in chapters xlii. and xlix., so also in Isa. liii. itself, "where the figure of the Servant of Jehovah unfolds its entire fullness of meaning," He is clearly and definitely distinguished from the nation. Thus, for instance, we read in the 8th verse, "*For the transgressions of my people was He stricken.*" The speaker is either Jehovah or the prophet, but in either case עַמִּי, *ami*, "my people,"

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6 Isa. xlix. 1-6.

can apply only to Israel, and if the servant is stricken for Israel he cannot be Israel. But, apart from the fact that in chapters xlii. 1-9, xlix. 1-7, l. 4-11, liii. (which begins lii. 13), and lxi., this ideal Servant stands out clearly distinguished from the nation, there are other conclusive reasons why the 53rd chapter in particular cannot be applied to Israel, for (1) the subject of the prophecy is an absolutely innocent sufferer who suffers for the guilt of others--one who has Himself "done no violence, nor can deceit be found in His mouth," but is "stricken," "smitten," and "afflicted of God" for others. (2) He is a *voluntary* sufferer--one who willingly "pours out His own soul unto death" (ver. 12). (3) He is an *unresisting* sufferer--one who is "led as a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, He openeth not His mouth"; and (4) His sufferings end *in death*.

Now, none of these points is found in the Jewish nation. Israel has been suffering, and is suffering as no other nation has suffered. Truly "under the whole heaven," to use the words of Daniel, "hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem" and upon her people during the many centuries of their dispersion. I have elsewhere given a condensed summary of the terrible story of Israel's sufferings since the destruction of the second Temple,<sup>7</sup> and of the guilt incurred by the nations by their cruel conduct towards them, but Israel is not an innocent sufferer. Israel's sorrows and sufferings are the direct consequence of his sins.

Modern Rabbis, in spite of the definite statement in the chapter itself, that it was "for the transgressions of My people" (Israel) that the righteous servant was stricken, put verses 1-9 into the mouth of the Gentile nations, and make *them* say that "he (*i.e.* Israel) suffered the sickness and sufferings which we Gentiles deserved"; but this is only part of the self-deception which characterizes the modern teachers and leaders of the Synagogue, and which has led them to perverse views of their own Scriptures and facts of history. It is this same spirit of pharisaic self-satisfaction which regards the dispersion among the nations as a blessing, and denies the necessity of atonement and of a mediator between God and man.

But whether we will heed or not, the solemn fact remains that Israel's dispersion among the nations, and their many sufferings during the long period of their wanderings from the presence of God, are the direct consequences of their apostasy and sin.

At the very beginning of their history Moses foretold what the consequences would be if they departed from their God. "*If ye will not for all this hearken unto Me, but walk contrary unto Me, then I will walk contrary unto you in fury: and I also will chastise you*

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<sup>7</sup> See *The Shepherd of Israel and His Scattered Flock*.

*seven times for your sins. . . . And I will make your cities a waste and your sanctuaries a desolation. . . . And you will I scatter among the nations, and I will draw out the sword after you. . . . And you shall perish among the nations, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up. And they that are left of you (far from atoning by their sufferings for the sins of the Gentile nations) shall pine away in their iniquity in your enemies' lands. And also in the iniquities of their fathers shall they pine away with them." And this is to last until "they shall confess their iniquities, and the iniquity of their fathers in their trespass which they trespassed against Me, and also that because they walked contrary unto Me. . . . If then their uncircumcised heart be humbled and they accept of the punishment of their iniquity, then will I remember My covenant with Jacob; and also My covenant with Isaac, and also My covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land."<sup>8</sup>*

And what Moses announced in advance in Lev. xxvi. and Deut. xxviii., etc., is repeated and confirmed by all the prophets. We need only contemplate the picture of Israel as a nation given in this Book of Isaiah itself to be convinced that it cannot be of it that the prophet speaks in chapter liii. Far from being itself absolutely innocent (as the Servant of Jehovah in Isa. liii. is described as being) and suffering for the guilt of others, the prophet speaks of them as *"a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers,"*<sup>9</sup> whose iniquities have separated between them and their God, and whose sins have caused His face to be hid from them that He will not hear.<sup>10</sup>

In the 42nd chapter Israel's suffering condition among the nations is described in graphic style and language. *"But this is a people robbed and plundered; they are all of them snared in holes, and they are hid in prison houses: they are for a prey, and none delivereth; for a spoil, and none saith, Restore."* But the prophet proceeds immediately to declare that Israel's sorrows and sufferings are not the result of mere chance, but are due to the direct acts of God in judgment on account of Israel's sins. *"Who is there among you that will give ear to this, that will hearken and hear for the time to come? Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? Did not Jehovah? He against whom we have sinned, and in whose ways they would not walk, neither were they obedient unto His law."<sup>11</sup>*

To evade the force of this truth, that the nation could not be the innocent sufferer set forth in the personal portraiture of the Servant of Jehovah in chapters xlii., xlix., l., liii., and lxi., some Jewish and rationalistic writers have interpreted this great prophecy of the godly remnant in the nation. But, though relatively

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8 Lev. xxvi. 14-45.

9 Isa. i. 2-9.

10 Isa. lix. 2-15.

11 Isa. xlii. 23-25.

the pious in the nation may be spoken of as righteous when compared with the godless majority, they are not absolutely righteous, and, far from being able to render a vicarious satisfaction for others, they cannot even stand themselves before God on the ground of their own righteousness.

It is indeed the godly remnant in the nation which is described in the second part of Isaiah as of "a contrite and humble spirit," who are themselves waiting for the salvation of God, which will be wholly of *grace*. It is *they*--"the righteous ones"--who confess for themselves and the entire nation that "we are *all* become as one that is unclean, and *all our righteousnesses are as a polluted garment; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.*"<sup>12</sup>

It is perfectly true, therefore, that Isaiah speaks of the "*entire* nation as needing enlightening, redeeming, and reconciling to God," and the godly remnant of it, far from being represented in these chapters as rendering satisfaction for others by their sufferings, "appears on the contrary a fainting flock which the Servant of Jehovah is to release, and refresh, and for whose justification He is to suffer and die."<sup>13</sup>

And as Israel is not an innocent sufferer so neither does he suffer *voluntarily*. "The Jews did not go voluntarily into captivity," as Hengstenberg well observes, "but were dragged into it by force," and so all through the centuries they did not voluntarily suffer the many oppressions and wrongs which they had to endure, but were forced to submit to them by the Gentile nations whom God used as His scourge.

Still less can it be asserted that Israel was an *unresisting* sufferer. "Here is one described," writes another Hebrew Christian brother, "who bears all sorts of affliction and oppression, without making the slightest resistance, without even opening his mouth to utter reproach--one who has the meekness and gentleness of a lamb, the inoffensiveness of a sheep. Surely this does not apply to the Jews. A very hasty glance at their history is sufficient to convince us of that. As long as ever they had the power, they did resist bitterly and bloodily. We freely acknowledge that their provocations were great. We have no wish to defend the wickedness of Christian nations. We grant that their treatment of the Jews is a blot and a stain. But that is not the question. The question is, Did the Jews bear all the oppression heaped upon them like lambs? Did they suffer evil without resisting it? History answers in the negative. The history of the Jewish captivity for the first seven centuries is a history of a series of insurrections, fierce and violent, against the nations. How desperate was the resistance to the Roman power which

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<sup>12</sup> Isa. lxiv. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Von Orelli.

brought on the destruction of the temple by Titus! But when that was destroyed, the spirit of resistance still remained. A.D. 115, the Jews of Cyrene rebelled and slew 220,000 Libyans; and it was not until after several bloody battles that they submitted. A.D. 132, Bar Cochba appeared in the character of the Messiah at the head of an army, ready to shake off the Roman yoke. R. Akiba, one of those looked upon by the Rabbis as most righteous, supported his resistance to the Roman authority; a bloody war was the consequence, and it was only by force that this insurrection was put down. A.D. 415, the Jews of Alexandria revolted. A.D. 522, the Jews of Persia revolted under the conduct of R. Mid, or Miz, at their head, and declared war against the King of Persia. A.D. 535, the Jews in Cæsarea rebelled. A.D. 602, the Jews at Antioch. A.D. 624, the Jews in Arabia took up arms against Mahomet. A.D. 613, they joined the armies of Chosroes, when he made himself master of Jerusalem, and put thousands to death."<sup>14</sup>

Neither have the sufferings of the Jewish nation ended *in death*, as is the lot of the Servant of Jehovah in Isa. liii. No; Israel, in spite of all the centuries of persecutions and oppressions, still lives and can say as of yore, "Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, yet *they have not prevailed against me.*" "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of Jehovah."

I must bring this introductory section to a close, but I may add to all that has been said that it is clear and manifest to all unprejudiced minds that the chapter cannot be applied to a collective body personified, but must refer to an individual person. To quote from another writer, "Not one analogous instance can be quoted in favour of a personification carried on through a whole section, with the slightest intimation that it is not a single individual who is spoken of. In verse 3 the subject is called *ישׂא* (*ish*, 'a man'); in

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<sup>14</sup> *Doctrine and Interpretation of the Fifty-Third Chapter of Isaiah*, by Dr. Alexander M'Cauley.

And yet in spite of these facts a modern Jewish writer (Dr. A. Kohut, in *Discussions on Isaiah lii. 13-liii. 12*) can allow himself to write: "We have suffered much and murmured less; the annals of history teem with the atrocious crimes of cruel Torquemadas, but fail to reproach us with even a breath of remonstrance. . . . We have whispered sweetly of our wrongs, not imprecations of revenge, but hope-fraught hymns of glad release." But it is a fact, as Dr. Lukyn Williams observes in reply, that "meekness is not, and never has been, a characteristic of Jews, and they have not hesitated to call down the vengeance of God upon their enemies in their private or public devotions. So, for example, in the Service for the Festival of the Dedication: 'When Thou shalt have prepared a slaughter of the blaspheming foe, I will complete with song and psalm the dedication of Thy altar,' and, at the end of the same piece, though omitted by Dr. Singer: 'Lay bare Thy holy arm, and bring the time of Thy salvation near. Take vengeance for the blood of Thy servants from the wicked nation'" (*Christian Evidence for Jewish People*, by Canon A. Lukyn Williams, vol. i. p. 168).

verses 10 and 12 a soul is ascribed to Him; grave and death are used so as to imply a subject in the singular. Scripture never leaves anything to be guessed. If we had an allegory before us, distinct hints as to the interpretation would certainly not be wanting. It is, e.g., quite different in those passages where the prophet designates Israel by the name of the Servant of the Lord. In them, all uncertainty is prevented by the addition of the names of 'Jacob' and 'Israel';<sup>15</sup> and in them, moreover, the prophet uses the plural by the side of the singular to intimate that the Servant of the Lord is an ideal person, a collective."<sup>16</sup>

No, this prophecy speaks of an individual, and there is only one person in the history of the world whom it fits. "Let any one steep his mind in the contents of this chapter," observes Professor James Orr, "and then read what is said about Jesus in the Gospels, and as he stands under the shadow of the Cross, say if there is not the most perfect correspondence between the two. In Jesus of Nazareth alone in all history, but in Him perfectly, has this prophecy found fulfilment. The meekness, the pathos of undeserved suffering, the atoning function, the final triumph, will suit no other." That there is a marked resemblance between the picture of the Servant of Jehovah in this chapter and the historic account of Jesus of Nazareth as given in the Gospels is acknowledged by many Jews.

Thus Rabbi Abraham Farissol,<sup>17</sup> who himself proceeds to misinterpret the prophecy of Israel, says: "In this chapter there seem to be considerable resemblances and allusions to the work of the Christian Messiah and to the events which are asserted to have happened to him--so that no other prophecy can be found, the gist and subject of which can be so immediately applied to him." And as a matter of fact this glorious prophecy of the sufferings of the Messiah and the glory which should follow has been used of God more than any Scripture in opening the eyes of Jews to recognize in Jesus Israel's Redeemer-King.<sup>18</sup>

Is this, perhaps, the chief reason why this chapter is omitted from the public readings in the Synagogue? We know, of course, that whereas the whole *Torah* (the Pentateuch) is read through on the Sabbaths in the course of the year, only selections from the prophets are appointed for the *Haphtarahs*, but it is none the less remarkable

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15 Compare Isa. xli. 8, xlv. 1, 2, 21, xlv. 4, xlvi. 20.

16 E.g. xliii. 10-14, xlvi. 20, 21.

17 Rabbi Farissol, early in the sixteenth century, author of *Iggereth Orechoth Olam; Itinera Mundi*.

18 "Blessed, precious chapter, how many of God's ancient covenant people have been led by thee to the foot of Christ's cross!--that cross over which was written, 'Jesus Christ, the King of the Jews!' And oh! what a glorious commentary shall be given of thee when, in the latter days, repentant and believing Israel, looking unto Him whom they have pierced, shall exclaim, 'Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted!'"--Adolph Saphir, D.D., *The Sinner and the Saviour*.

that in these "selections" the portion for one Sabbath should end with the 12th verse of the 52nd chapter, and the one for the following should begin with the 54th chapter, and that the whole of this sublime section about the suffering Servant, through the knowledge of whom the many are made righteous, is passed over.

It certainly gives ground for the statement that the 53rd of Isaiah is "the bad conscience of the Synagogue," which it dare not face because it reminds them too much of Him whom the nation, alas! in its blindness still despises and rejects, and considers "smitten of God and afflicted." But this very feeling and attitude on the part of the Jewish nation is one great proof that Jesus is the Messiah, and that it is to Him that this prophecy refers.