

# Isaiah 42:1

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/isa/isa-42/isaiah-421/>

*This is the first of Isaiah's four "Servant Songs" prophesying about the Messiah to come. It emphasizes that the coming Messiah will not only be a king, but also a servant. The song begins with a declaration that the LORD's Servant will be commissioned by God and will have His Spirit upon Him.*

The beginning of Isaiah chapter 42 is the first of Isaiah's four "Servant Songs." Each of these *Servant Songs* are prophecies about the Messiah who is described as *My Servant*.

The Old Testament predicts both a suffering *servant* Messiah as well as a victorious king Messiah. Jewish tradition calls the suffering *servant* Messiah "Son of Joseph" and the victorious king Messiah "Son of David." Some schools of thought held that there would be two messiahs ("anointed ones"). Jesus fulfills both. In *His* first advent on the earth, Jesus fulfilled the suffering *servant* prophecies. In *His* second advent on the earth, *He will* fulfill the conquering king prophecies.

## **This is the first "Servant Song" of Isaiah.**

The first "*Servant Song*" of Isaiah is found in Isaiah 42:1-4. It prophesies that the Messiah will bring forth justice but will not be quarrelsome. He will be so gentle, "a bruised reed He will not break" (Isaiah 42:3). This *Servant Song* is quoted by Matthew as a demonstration of Jesus being the Messiah by virtue of having fulfilled this prophecy after He walks away from an escalating confrontation with the Pharisees over His healing on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:18-21).

The second "*Servant Song*" of Isaiah is found in Isaiah 49:1-26. It is four messages from the *Servant* and/or the *LORD*. The main part of this *Servant Song* is the first message which is in the voice of *the Servant* as a message to the Gentiles. At one point *the Servant* seems dejected over having apparently failed to accomplish His task to *restore Israel*. *The LORD consoles Him* that *it is too small a thing* for *Him* to only redeem *Israel*, *He will also* redeem *the nations* so that *the LORD's* salvation will reach the ends of the earth.

*The Servant's* dejection and *the LORD's* assurance in this *Servant Song* of Isaiah 49 can be seen as foreshadowing Jesus, during the Messiah's despair in the Garden of Gethsemane hours before *Israel* rejected and crucified *Him* and what was shared between *Him* and His Father as He prayed (Matthew 26:36-39).

The third "*Servant Song*" of Isaiah is found in Isaiah 50:4-11. It prophesies that the Messiah *will* rely upon the LORD for *His* vindication. *He will* set His "face like flint" towards obeying *His* Father's will (Isaiah 50:7). Luke alludes to Isaiah 50:7 when he wrote: "When the days were approaching for *His* ascension, *He* was determined [literally "set His face"] to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51).

The crowd's mocking of Jesus on the cross also seems to be a fulfillment of this *Servant Song*. Compare the chief priest's taunts, "He trusts in God; let God rescue Him now, if He delights in Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God'" (Matthew 27:43) with Isaiah 50:10, "Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God."

Isaiah 52:13-53:15 is the fourth and most famous "Servant Song" of Isaiah. It is commonly known as "the Suffering Servant" passage. It prophesies that the Messiah will astonishingly be worshiped by the Gentiles even as He will be unrecognized, despised, and ultimately killed by Israel. The Messiah will be "pierced through for our transgressions...[and] crushed for our iniquities...[but] by His scourging we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). This *Servant Song* also accurately predicts that the Messiah will die "with wicked men" but be buried in the tomb of "a rich man" (Isaiah 53:9). The LORD's "Servant will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities" (Isaiah 53:11). And because *He will* "render Himself as a guilt offering" (Isaiah 53:10), the LORD "will allot Him a portion with the great" (Isaiah 53:12).

The New Testament quotes this fourth "*Servant Song*" no less than six times: Matthew 8:14-17; Luke 22:35-38; John 12:37-41; Acts 8:26-35; Romans 10:11-21; 1 Peter 2:19-25. The New Testament both cites it as a proof of Jesus being the Messiah (Acts 8:26-35) and alludes to it as an example of what Jesus did for us that we should emulate (Philippians 2:5-10).

### **The First Servant Song of Isaiah**

The first *Servant Song* of Isaiah, in Isaiah 46:1-4 begins:

*Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold;*

*My chosen one in whom My soul delights* (v1)

Isaiah seems to be speaking with the voice and perspective of the LORD. The LORD is the *I* and *My* who is speaking. The LORD begins, by saying *Behold*. This is a way to say: "Pay Attention"; "Notice"; or "Consider."

The subject the LORD wants us to *Behold* is *My Servant* and *My chosen one*. These are both references to the Messiah God will send to Israel.

The Messiah *will* be a Prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-19); *He will* be a King like David (2 Samuel 7:12-16); and *He will* be a Priest like Melchizedek (Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 5:6, 10); but here, and elsewhere, Isaiah prophesies that the Messiah *will* be a *Servant* who patiently suffers. Jewish tradition calls the suffering *servant* Messiah "Son of Joseph."

Joseph was a deliverer of Israel who suffered greatly in order to come to a position of being able to save them. This is a picture of Jesus, who was rejected by His own people, but whose rejection will be used by God to greatly bless them, as well as all nations (Genesis 50:20).

The reason *Servant* is capitalized is because it refers to the Messiah—who is later revealed to be Jesus, God's Son (Hebrews 5:5). The term *My chosen one* also refers to the Messiah, and

therefore Jesus, God's Son, but it is unclear why the translators chose not to capitalize it the way they did *My Servant*.

By describing the *chosen one* as *My Servant*, the LORD introduces Him in humble terms.

And as we will see, humility and justice are the two themes of this *Servant Song* (Isaiah 42:1b-4).

A *servant* is someone who does not act on his own will but the will of another. A *servant* puts others needs and desires above his own. Servants in the ancient world had limited liberty, if any at all. They were generally viewed as less important, even though they performed many of the tasks necessary for survival, or managed the business affairs which sustained their master and his way of life. Because they were deemed less important than their masters, they were often overlooked and ignored. A *servant's* occupation was humble. And to be a good and faithful *servant* required a great deal of humility.

The LORD declares two things about His *Servant* from the outset.

First, the LORD describes that *My Servant* will be someone *whom I uphold*. This means that God will protect, direct, and supply His *Servant* with all that *He* needs to accomplish the tasks required of *Him*.

We see this prophecy fulfilled in the life of Jesus, the Messiah. God sent angels to minister to Him after the devil left Him in the wilderness (Matthew 4:11). At other times God seemed to protect Jesus from a premature death until the hour came for all to be accomplished (Luke 4:28-30; John 7:30; Luke 22:53). And the LORD directed both Jesus's actions and teachings. After His baptism, the Spirit led *Him* "to go out into the wilderness" (Mark 1:12). Jesus often claimed that *He* did and taught only what *His* Father gave *Him* to speak or do (John 5:19-20; 5:30; 7:16-17; 7:29; 8:42; 10:32; 12:49-50).

Second, the LORD describes *My chosen one* as someone *in whom My soul delights*. This indicates how the *Servant will* greatly please the LORD by faithfully accomplishing the tasks *He* was given to perform.

This prophecy is likewise fulfilled in the life of Jesus the Messiah. Upon *His* Baptism, "a voice out of the heavens said, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased'" (Matthew 3:17). And Jesus faithfully fulfilled the entire task *His* Father sent *Him* to earth to perform (John 17:4; 19:30).

The first *Servant Song* of Isaiah continues: *I have put My Spirit upon Him* (v 1).

This is another way that the LORD will *uphold* His *Servant*. It is also a way that demonstrates that the *Servant* is the Messiah. Messiah means "anointed one." And God's chosen *Servant* is anointed (i.e. "messiah-ed") with and by the *Spirit* of the LORD *upon Him*.

The fulfillment of this prophecy is seen in the life of Jesus Messiah in several ways.

1. Jesus was conceived by the Spirit inside of His mother, Mary,

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God”  
(Luke 1:35).

2. Jesus was anointed by the Spirit in the form of a dove at His baptism,

“And the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove”  
(Luke 3:22a).

3. The miracles and teachings Jesus performed were in the power of the Holy Spirit,

“And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit”  
(Luke 4:14a).

With these examples and others, Luke is making a clear connection to the anointing and presence of God’s *Spirit upon* Jesus the Messiah, and the opening prophecy of Isaiah’s first *Servant* Song.

The remainder of this Servant Song (Isaiah 42:1b-4) describes the Messiah’s character and mission.

### **Biblical Text**

**“Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold;  
My chosen one in whom My soul delights.  
I have put My Spirit upon Him;**