

Isaiah 50:4-6

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Isaiah begins his third Servant Song prophesying about the Messiah. It is in the voice of the Servant, who reveals that He is a disciple and follower of the LORD God. It is from the LORD that the Servant learns of GOD's will and the Servant listens to Him so that He will faithfully obey. The Servant does not turn back from doing the LORD's will, even when He is whipped, spit upon, and has His beard plucked by His enemies.

The remainder of Isaiah 50 is the third 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 portion of scripture begins the third "Servant Song" of Isaiah. We will briefly summarize the other three Servant Songs before turning back to comment upon the third Servant Song (Isaiah 50:4-11).

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 composed of 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 (Isaiah 49:1-6). 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 all the nations, so that *the LORD's* salvation will reach the end of the earth.

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

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, astonishingly, the Messiah will 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 fourth 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. Jesus fulfilled every prediction within it. 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 Third Servant Song (Isaiah 50:4-11)

The introductory verses of this chapter (Isaiah 50:1-3) serve as a sort of preface or prologue to this third Servant Song (Isaiah 50:4-11). In them the LORD speaks to a sinful generation of Israel who is following in the same adulterous and idolatrous ways of her “mother” (previous generations of Israelites). Even though they are desperately lost in the depths of their sins, *the LORD* assures them by a pair of rhetorical questions with the expected answer “No”: “Is My hand so short that it cannot ransom? Or have I no power to deliver?” (Isaiah 50:2b), which is to say that He can still ransom and deliver them. But if they do not accept His deliverance, then they will suffer both the present consequences of their sin and will be harshly judged by God in the future.

This third Servant Song (Isaiah 50:4-11) sings of *the LORD*’s deliverance through His Servant, the Messiah. The Servant Song begins in the voice and with the perspective of the Servant.

The Servant says: *The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of disciples* (v 4).

The title: *The Lord GOD* in Hebrew is יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ “Adonai Yehovah.” The word translated as *GOD* is יהוה (H3069—pronounced “Yehovah:). The word translated *Lord* is אֲדֹנָי (H136—pronounced “Adonai”). The translators choose to capitalize the word, *GOD*, because in Hebrew it is a form of the name “Yahweh,” which *God* used to describe Himself to Moses (Exodus 3:14). Typically, when this word is used in the Old Testament it is translated as “LORD” in all capital letters. “Yahweh” is translated as LORD in the first verse of this chapter (Isaiah 50:1).

However, “Yahweh” is translated as *GOD* in all caps here because the word, “Adonai” is also used. The word “Adonai” in Hebrew is a title meaning “Master” or “Lord.” It is used as God’s title. The translators wanted to avoid the awkward phrase “the Lord LORD” and opted to render it “*the Lord GOD.*”

As far as the verse itself is concerned, the most interesting term in this remark is *disciples*. A disciple is a student, an apprentice, a follower. To be *given the tongue of disciples* means to be

like a disciple who repeats the words he has heard from His instructor, teacher, or rabbi. *Disciples* do not speak on their own behalf. They speak on behalf of their master.

Here the Servant is saying that He is like a disciple who repeats His master's words. *The LORD God* made Him to be a follower (servant) and not the leader (master). Being a follower or disciple can be *weary* at times, because your will is subjected to the will of another. But Jesus learned to walk in obedience, even as we are exhorted to learn (Philippians 2:8).

Jesus, the Messiah, was a leader and teacher of men. But before *the LORD GOD*, His Father, Jesus was a disciple who followed and served His will (Matthew 26:39). Like those who are *disciples*, Jesus only spoke what His Father gave Him *a tongue* to speak and say (John 5:19, 5:30, 6:38),

“So Jesus answered them and said, ‘My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me.’”
(John 7:16)

That I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word (v 4).

The reason the Messiah was a disciple of *the LORD, God*, was so *that* the Messiah could relate with and *may know how to sustain* His own *disciples with a word* when they are *weary*.

Because Jesus the Messiah, was a disciple of His Father, He is relatable to us as His followers,

“For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.”
(Hebrews 4:15)

In Jesus, the Messiah, we have been given a perfect example to follow. Just as He acted only according to His Father's will and only did and said the things God instructed Him to do and say, so are we to only do and say the things Jesus and His Spirit lead us to do and say,

“Do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say. For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.”
(Matthew 10:19b-20)

“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”
(John 15:5)

Next, the Servant says in Isaiah:

*He awakens Me morning by morning,
He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple* (v 4).

In addition to echoing the sentiments described above, these lines also indicate how the Messiah's life comes from *the LORD*. That He is renewed daily by His relationship and

interactions with *the LORD God*. The Messiah lives out the truth given from Moses, “that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 8:3). Jesus learned this lesson, and even quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 when tempted by Satan to turn rocks into bread (Matthew 4:4).

The expression: *He awakens Me morning by morning*, likely indicates that the Messiah sought *God’s* perspective at the beginning of each day. The expression: *He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple*, reveals how the Servant listens to and understands *the LORD God’s* will for His life.

And Jesus, the Messiah, regularly sought time to be alone with *the LORD God* His Father:

- “But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.”

(Luke 5:16)

- When it came time for Him to select His own *disciples*, Jesus, “went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God” (Luke 6:12).
- Perhaps because it was His habit to pray to *God*, during His most desperate hour just prior to being arrested, Jesus went to *God* to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:37-38).

The primary ways we can *listen to the LORD as His disciple* and understand His will for our lives are through reading and applying His word through scripture (Psalm 119:11, James 1:22), through prayer with *God* (1 Chronicles 16:11, Psalm 63:6, Philippians 4:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18), and by listening to the inner voice of the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-17).

The Servant confesses:

The Lord GOD has opened My ear (v 5).

The expression *The Lord GOD has opened My ear* means *the Lord GOD* gave Him understanding about the *Lord’s* ways and will. This understanding could be special because He is the *Lord’s* Servant and Messiah. *The Lord* sent the Messiah on a special mission, that the Servant understood (Isaiah 49:2-3). The expression also might mean that this understanding came from the Servant’s devotion to *the Lord* and His habit to constantly and intently seek *GOD*, *to listen* to His will *as a disciple*, which would lead to following His ways. The expression could refer to both.

Jesus the Messiah was aware of the Lord’s will for His life:

- When Jesus’s parents returned to Jerusalem to look for Him, He asked them, “Did you not know that I had to be in My Father’s house?” (Luke 2:49).
- After His baptism, Jesus was impelled by the Spirit who led Him into the wilderness, where He was tempted (Mark 1:12-13).

- Jesus began His public ministry in Galilee “full of the Holy Spirit” (Luke 4:1).
- Jesus sharply rebuked His disciple Peter for trying to tempt Him away from *God’s* will: “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s” (Matthew 16:23).
- Jesus was constantly aware of His mission to sacrifice Himself for the life of the world which *the LORD God* had called Him to. He referred to this moment as “this hour”: “Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour” (John 12:27).
- And in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus understood His Father’s will. He prayed to do not as He desired, but as God intended (Matthew 26:39, Mark 14:36, Luke 22:42).

The Servant sings from a prophetic past tense. This speaks of the future in past tense, indicating the certainty with which the predicted event will come to pass. It says that the Servant not only listened to God’s will for His life and understood His will, He also obeyed it:

*And I was not disobedient
Nor did I turn back* (v 5).

Like faithful *disciples*, the Servant was not disobedient to *the Lord GOD’s* will for His life. He obeyed everything *the Lord GOD* called Him to do. He did not give up, act half-heartedly, or turn back from doing anything *God* asked of Him.

Jesus the Messiah was perfectly obedient to the will of His Father, even when obeying Him led to His suffering, humiliation, and death,

- “Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”
(Philippians 2:8)
- “Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.”
(Hebrews 5:8)
- “I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me. And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him.”
(John 8:28b-29)

And thanks be to *God* and Jesus; the salvation of the entire world was made possible because of Jesus the Messiah’s perfect obedience,

“For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.”
(Romans 5:19)

Moreover, Jesus the Messiah's example of obedience shows us how we too can live an experience that He described as "the abundant life" (John 10:10). When we, as believers in Jesus, follow His teachings, our lives are saved/delivered from futility and toil to lasting purpose and eternal rewards (Matthew 6:33).

For those of us who are now in the New Testament era, when we believe in Jesus, trusting Him as *God* and our Messiah to pay for our sin, we are "born again" (John 3:3) into God's eternal family and are given the Gift of eternal life (John 1:12, 3:14-16). The Apostle Paul often describes this salvation from the penalty of sin as "justification" because through belief in Jesus those who believe are deemed by God to be justified in His presence. This justification was made possible by Christ's sacrificial death on the cross to pay the penalty of our sins (Romans 3:23-25, Colossians 2:13-14, 1 John 2:2). We receive this Gift of salvation from the death penalty of our sins by faith or believing in Jesus (John 3:16, Romans 3:28, 4:5, 5:5).

To learn more about the Gift of Eternal Life, see our article: "What is Eternal Life? How to Gain the Gift of Eternal Life."

But even as we are saved/delivered from the penalty of sin by Christ's death, we are also saved from the power of sin by His life,

"For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."
(Romans 5:10)

We are saved/delivered from the penalty of sin (separation from God) by faith; this is received as a gift. But to be saved/delivered from the daily consequences of sin requires that we walk in God's ways, rather than the paths of sin.

The way we are saved/delivered from the negative consequences or experience of sin in our daily lives is through living our lives in His resurrection power. It is by walking by the power of His life. When we have the faith to follow His example, then we gain the experiential benefit from following His ways. We gain this great benefit when we listen to *the Lord*, seek to understand His perspective for our lives, and follow His will.

Walking in such obedience, in order to gain the positive experience of walking in life, requires that we *not turn back* when we are afraid. To continue as a courageous witness is to follow the example Jesus set during His earthly life. If we do this "we shall be saved [from the power of sin and its consequences] by [the example] of His life" (Romans 5:10).

The next thing the Servant says is prophetic, and pictures the future Suffering Servant Messiah:

*I gave My back to those who strike Me,
And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard;
I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting (v 6).*

The Servant is so obedient to trust and follow *the LORD God*, that He will allow His *back to be struck* by His enemies. He will not only allow this—He **gave** His *back to them*. This suggests that the Messiah will be whipped, since a person is usually struck or scourged on the back by a whip. This line from this third Servant Song is reminiscent of the lines in the fourth Servant Song of Isaiah 53 which say:

“Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.
But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.”
(Isaiah 53:4b-5)

It would take great patience and faith for the Servant to obey *God* and give His *back to those who strike Him*.

Not only this, but the Servant also *gave His cheeks to those who pluck out His beard*. The skin on a person’s *face* is very sensitive. Having one’s facial hair/*beard* yanked and pulled out is extremely painful. It is also extremely insulting and humiliating. This is a clear example of Jesus giving an example of what it looks like to “not resist an evil person...[and] turn the other [cheek]” (Matthew 5:39).

It is apparent that *those who pluck out the Servant’s beard* intended it to be a *humiliation* because they also spit on His *face*. When they did this, the Servant says He *did not cover His face from humiliation and spitting*.

Again, the Servant showed great patience and faith to obey *God* by giving His *face* over to His enemies to let them *pluck out His beard* and spit on His *face*.

Jesus, the Messiah, endured these things as He patiently obeyed *the LORD’s* will. The New Testament tells us that the perspective Jesus chose when viewing the *humiliation* He endured was to give it no weight, as compared to the great reward He trusted would come from His Father:

“...who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”
(Hebrews 12:2b)

Jesus endured the shame, but compared to the “joy” of gaining the reward of reigning with His Father, Jesus gave the shame no value (“despising”). Jesus the Messiah *gave His back to the Romans who scourged Him with a whip* (Matthew 27:26, Mark 15:15, John 19:1).

Jesus, the Messiah also endured slaps and punches to His *face* after His trial at Caiaphas’s house as He awaited His sunrise trial on the Temple grounds (Matthew 26:67, Mark 14:65b). It is not hard to imagine them also plucking *out His beard* when they did this.

Jesus, the Messiah was also spit upon by the Jews (Mark 14:65a) and the Romans (Matthew 26:30, Mark 15:19.)

In the face of such mockery and physical pain, Jesus, *the LORD God's* Servant, *was not disobedient* to His Father's will which was for Him to redeem the world from sin through His suffering,

“So He became their Savior.
In all their affliction He was afflicted.”
(Isaiah 63:8b-9a)

It was in light of Jesus's obedience throughout the *humiliation* of these abuses that the author of Hebrews encourages us to continue:

“fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”
(Hebrews 12:2-3)

Incredibly, Jesus invites each believer to follow in His footsteps, and be a faithful witness who does not give weight to rejection and loss by the world. And Jesus promises to each of His servants who endure as He endured that they will gain the reward of reigning with Him (2 Timothy 2:12, Revelation 3:21).

Biblical Text

**The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of disciples,
That I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word.
He awakens Me morning by morning,
He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple.
⁵ The Lord GOD has opened My ear;
And I was not disobedient
Nor did I turn back.
⁶ I gave My back to those who strike Me,
And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard;
I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting.**