

The Coming Messiah as the Perfect Obedient Servant

Isaiah 50

Isaiah 50:1-3 - *“Thus says the Lord: “Where is the certificate of your mother’s divorce, whom I have put away? Or which of My creditors is it to whom I have sold you? For your iniquities you have sold yourselves, and for your transgressions your mother has been put away?”*

² Why, when I came, was there no man? Why, when I called, was there none to answer? Is My hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver? Indeed with My rebuke I dry up the sea; I make the rivers a wilderness. Their fish stink because there is no water, and die of thirst. ³ I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering.”

Background Notes

Isaiah prophesied and wrote this book of Scripture around 700 BC. His ministry and writing extended over a number of years, and the Assyrian Empire was in power during that entire time period. In fact, the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel and its capital, Samaria, fell to the Assyrian Empire took place in 722 BC, during the years that Isaiah was actively ministering in Jerusalem and the southern kingdom of Judah.

In Isaiah’s broad sweep of history, he not only predicted the fall of the Assyrian Empire, but the rise and fall of the Babylonian Empire as well. Remember the specific prophesy of Cyrus the Persian, who was specifically named in chapters 44-45? Cyrus was the means God would use to bring His people back from their Babylonian captivity.

In chapter 50, Isaiah prophetically looked forward to that time when Israel would be held captive in Babylon. At that time the people would try to claim that God had forsaken them and forgotten them. The Lord responded that He had not forsaken them. They were suffering the consequences of their disobedience to Him. The nation was a disobedient servant.

Against this background of the disobedient servant, an individual would come who would be a true and obedient Servant of the Lord. This Servant would be the Lord Himself! The prediction of this Perfect Servant formed the third “Servant Song” in the second half of the book of Isaiah.

Doctrinal Points

1. Israel, the disobedient servant of the Lord, deserved a certificate of divorce.

In verses 1-3 the Lord prophetically addressed the Jewish captives in Babylon. They were considered to be the children of their mother Israel, who was the wife of the Lord. The “certificate of divorce” was referenced to God’s Law in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. This Law did not commend divorce or condone divorce. However, if divorce did take place, the Law said that the first husband could not remarry the divorced wife after she had been married to a second husband.

So was the point of Isaiah 50:1 that the Lord had divorced Israel, or that He had not divorced Israel? *“Thus says the Lord: ‘Where is the certificate of your mother’s divorce, whom I have put away?’* The commentators on Isaiah differ on this.

Jeremiah 3:8 seemed to favor the interpretation that the Lord had divorced Israel. There the Lord said, *“Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce.”* But the **context** of Jeremiah 3:8 concerned the fall and scattering of the **northern kingdom** of Israel in 722 BC.

In the **context** of Isaiah 50, however, the Lord was speaking to the captive people of the **southern kingdom** of Judah, whom Isaiah prophetically saw as in captivity in Babylon, and it appears that the Lord said just the opposite to them. In the context here, the Lord seemed to be giving a word of encouragement to the captives of the southern kingdom.

He had **not** divorced them! And even though they deserved a certificate of divorce, the Lord had **not** broken His relationship with them. In other words, the Lord was asking, “Where is the certificate of your mother’s divorce whom I have put away? You can’t show it because I haven’t divorced Judah! ‘Which of My creditors is it to whom I have sold you?’ I haven’t sold you as slaves to pay off creditors - because I don’t have creditors! I don’t owe anything to anyone!”

You are in captivity because of your iniquities and transgressions, the Lord explained. *“...for your transgressions your mother has been put away” (v1).* That’s why I sent you away. But I didn’t send you away with a certificate of divorce! I sent you away because you wouldn’t listen to Me or answer Me when I called you through my prophets. *“Why, when I came, was there no man? Why, when I called, was there none to answer? But I have not divorced you or sold you into slavery, and I do have the power to redeem you.”*

Think of the displays of My power in the past at the time of the Exodus and Conquest, said the Lord. Verses 2-3: *“Is My hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver? Indeed with My rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness. Their fish stink because there is no water, and die of thirst. I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering.”*

So, said the Lord - Be encouraged, captive people of Judah! You deserved a certificate of divorce but I did not give one. And I did not send you away permanently. I have not broken my relationship with you. Your captivity is my discipline, but it is temporary. Israel, the disobedient servant of the Lord, deserved a certificate of divorce.

2. Christ, the obedient Servant of the Lord, was faithful unto death.

Isaiah 50:4-9 - *"The Lord God has given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary. He awakens Me morning by morning. He awakens My ear to hear as the learned. ⁵ The Lord God has opened My ear, and I was not rebellious, nor did I turn away.*

⁶ I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting. ⁷ "For the Lord God will help Me. Therefore I will not be disgraced; therefore I have set My face like a flint, and I know that I will not be ashamed.

⁸ He is near who justifies Me. Who will contend with Me? Let us stand together. Who is My adversary? Let him come near Me. ⁹ Surely the Lord God will help Me. Who is he who will condemn Me? Indeed they will all grow old like a garment; the moth will eat them up.

These verses form the third "Servant Song" of Isaiah, which predicted the Messiah - the Perfect Servant of the Lord. Remember, there are four "Servant Songs" in the book of Isaiah. The first is in Isaiah 42, the second in Isaiah 49. The third is here in chapter 50, and we will see the fourth Servant Song in chapters 52-53.

The Perfect Servant's complete willingness to listen and obey the voice of God, and to submit to God's will, was predicted in verses 4-5. He would not only comfort the afflicted, but He would also suffer.

"I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting." Think of how the Lord Jesus was treated. Even after His perfect life and His wonderful miracles of healing and blessing, the nation rejected Him. Step by step the leaders arranged for His death. The scourging and humiliation of verse 6 was literally fulfilled as the Lord went to the cross.

Verse 7 predicted the confident determination of the Perfect Servant to do the will of God: *"For the Lord God will help Me, therefore I will not be disgraced. Therefore I have set My face like a flint, and I know that I will not be ashamed.* Luke 9:51 certainly showed that this prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus Christ: *"Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem."*

Verses 8-9 tell us that the Obedient Servant knew that God would vindicate Him and would defend Him against all adversaries. *"He is near who justifies Me. Who will contend with Me? Let us stand together. Who is My adversary? Let him come near Me. Surely the Lord God will help Me. Who is he who will condemn Me? Indeed they will all grow old like a garment; the moth will eat them up."*

The vindication of our Lord began with His resurrection - and it will continue until eternity. All opposition will fade away as an old moth-eaten garment. The coming Messiah will be ultimately vindicated as the Perfect Servant.

Jesus Christ, the Obedient Servant of the Lord, was faithful unto death.

Practical Application

Let the Lord be your light!

Isaiah 50:10-11 - *“Who among you fears the Lord? Who obeys the voice of His Servant? Who walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely upon his God.*

11 Look, all you who kindle a fire, who encircle yourselves with sparks. Walk in the light of your fire and in the sparks you have kindled— this you shall have from My hand: you shall lie down in torment.”

In the last two verses of the chapter, a great contrast was drawn between those who obey the voice of the Servant of the Lord (v10), and those who do not obey (v11). For those who fear the Lord and obey the Servant of the Lord, there is light in the darkness. This promise referred not only to salvation, but also to living as a believer.

Do you feel like you're in darkness right now? Perhaps you're unsure as to a decision you have to make? Or are you facing an unknown time of darkness ahead because of illness, or loss of employment, or a breakdown of family structure? Take courage! Rely on the Lord, and trust in Him. You will find light in the darkness. *“Who among you fears the Lord? Who obeys the voice of His Servant? Who walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely upon his God.*

For the person who does not fear the Lord and will not obey His Perfect Servant, and who insists on walking in the light of his own self-made fires, there is sorrow in this life, and ultimately torment. *“Look, all you who kindle a fire, who encircle yourselves with sparks. Walk in the light of your fire and in the sparks you have kindled— this you shall have from My hand: you shall lie down in torment.”*

This unpleasant truth is part of the Word of God. The Bible teaches that there is an eternal hell for those who refuse to submit to and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Servant of the Lord.

Let the Lord be your light!