

**Read: Isaiah 49.1-7.**

While the Servant is described as “Israel” in v. 3, he is also called “him who was despised and abhorred by the nation... the servant of rulers” (v. 7). Seemingly, the Servant is frustrated in his mission (v. 4a), yet he was born to bring the Lord’s people back to himself (v. 5).

His mission goes beyond the nation Israel – “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth” (v. 6).

In the final count, the one who has been despised and abhorred by the nation and a servant of rulers will be exalted – “Kings will see you and rise up, princes will see and bow down, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you” (v. 7b).

**Reflect:**

- In what ways is the Servant like the “leader” we pictured at the beginning of this study? and in what ways is he different?
- Already we begin to see a uniqueness in the Servant that can only be fulfilled in Jesus. Reflect on Luke 22.24-27 – the leadership style of Jesus and what he expects of us his followers. Then consider the washing of the disciples’ feet in John 13.1-17.



Studies from the book of Isaiah  
by Peter J Blackburn

**6. The Servant of the Lord**

**Reading: Isaiah 41.8-10;42.1-9;44.1-5;49.1-7**

There’s a bright light and an unusual craft descends silently and lands in an open grassy area nearby. A ramp is lowered and a strange creature emerges. Three bright shining eyes. Strange pointed ears. Olive-green skin with a touch of bright pink fur. With a strange waddling gait the creature comes closer. Is it hostile or friendly? At the very least it must have some form of intelligence. To judge by the strange craft in which it has arrived, it may have a very high form of intelligence. Will it communicate or attack? Is it wiser to wait and see or to make a quick escape? Just then, the creature lifts its four-fingered hand. It is about to speak. “Take me to your leader!”

Have you ever had that experience? I have met two people who claimed to have seen a UFO – an Unidentified Flying Object. Science fiction aside, they have experienced something. But what has it all been about?

There’s a sign that says, “Once I was indecisive, but now I’m not so sure!” And with UFOs, is officialdom “not so sure” or just plain sceptical – assuming people have an over-active imagination, or worse?

Certainly it has become good fodder for science-fiction books and television series and these have enhanced the expectation of such experiences. And then, there have been other books suggesting, not extra-terrestrial causes, but highly secret experiments with new technologies being conducted by American or Russian agencies!

**Reflect:**

- “Take me to your leader.” What are the characteristics we expect when we talk about a “leader”? Is a true leader an up-front person who is always “doing it all”, or what?

In this study we are following Isaiah’s theme about the “Servant of the Lord”. Just who is this “Servant”? the whole nation of Israel? the God-fearing faithful remnant? the promised Messiah?

**Study 7 – By His Wounds.** Reading: Isaiah 52.13-53.12

## Israel my Servant

### Read: Isaiah 41.8-10.

In this passage, the Servant seems to be specifically the nation Israel – “But you, O Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend, I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, ‘You are my servant’; I have chosen you and have not rejected you” (vv. 8-9).

A couple of chapters later we hear the Lord declare, “You are my witnesses, and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me” (43.10).

While the whole nation had been chosen to be the Servant of the Lord, they had often failed to fulfil this calling. They incurred judgment for their unfaithfulness. Many times it was just a godly remnant who continued faithful to the Lord. And yet, though they might be exiled because of their sin and unbelief, they were still not rejected by the Lord who would take them “from the ends of the earth” and call them “from its farthest corners”

### Read Isaiah 44.1-5.

In v. 21 the reference is clearly to Israel. Some see vv. 1b-4 as a reference to the Messiah. Perhaps it is better to see the overall reference here to the faithful in Israel. They were certainly the ones open to the promised refreshing in v. 3 – including the out-pouring of the Spirit and of the Lord’s blessing. Their descendents will be multiplied and will want to be known as the Lord’s people (v.5).

#### Reflect:

- Is there any sense in which modern Judaism (and the modern state of Israel) could be considered “the Servant of the Lord”? What would this mean for their life and political decisions?
- In Galatians 6.16 Paul writes, “Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.” Many believe this is a reference to the church as the new Israel. What does it mean for the Church to accept the call to be “the Servant of the Lord”?

## The Messiah is the Servant

### Read: Isaiah 42.1-9.

In this passage, the reference seems much more to refer to an individual.

R.T. France writes, “The language about the Servant is often strongly individual, describing the birth, suffering, death and eventual triumph of what is apparently a person rather than a group. Various historical identifications have been proposed, such as Moses, Jeremiah, Cyrus, Zerubbabel or the prophet himself. But the traditional interpretation, Jewish and Christian, is that the Servant is an ideal individual figure of the future, God’s agent in redeeming his people, i.e. the Messiah. In later Palestinian Judaism this was the dominant interpretation (Hellenistic Judaism was apparently more favourable to a collective interpretation), so that the Targum of Jonathan on Is. 53, while clearly embarrassed by the idea of Messianic suffering to the extent of drastically reconstructing the text to eliminate this implication, still explicitly identifies the Servant as the Messiah...” (*New Bible Dictionary*).

“The Servant is an ideal individual figure of the future, God’s agent in redeeming his people, i.e. the Messiah.” The Hebrew word *mashiach* (messiah) means the “anointed one” – one who has been consecrated as prophet, priest or king with anointing oil poured on the head. There were many “messiahs” – people “anointed” by human hands to special tasks. But **the** Messiah is the one consecrated by God himself and anointed with the Spirit of God.

The Lord has “put my Spirit on” the Servant so that he will “bring justice to the nations” (v. 1). He will be marked by gentleness, faithfulness and justice (vv. 2-4).

“I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness” (vv. 6-7) – words that will be expanded further in chapter 61.

“I... will make you to be a covenant for the people” is a striking expression (a better translation than “through you I will make a covenant with all peoples” in *Good News Bible*). Not only will the Servant perfectly fulfil all the covenant requirements that the people had broken, but he will himself be the very focus of the relationship between God and his people.