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The Message of Law and Gospel in the Old Testament

By ALFRED VON ROHR SAUER

(Concluded)

III

THE SERVANT OF THE LORD AS THE MEDIATOR OF DIVINE GRACE

In considering God's grace we are constrained to look also in the Old Testament for Him who was to come from God as man's Savior and Redeemer. We shall not concern ourselves with the references that speak of the promised Messiah in general. Rather we shall take up primarily those passages which show how the demands of God were fulfilled in Him and how the judgments of God were executed upon Him who was to come. This leads us pre-eminently into a discussion of the "Servant poems" (Is. 42: 1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13—53:12).

Since the time when Duhm identified the Servant of these poems with a historical individual (1892), scholars have differed in their opinions as to who the Servant might be.⁶ During a ten-year span (1921—1931) Mowinckel began by identifying the Servant with Deutero-Isaiah, but finally he conceded that this was merely a possibility.⁷ Sellin shifted from an identification with Zerubbabel to one with Jehoiachin, Moses, and finally Second Isaiah.⁸ Rowley advances the point of view that the concept of the Servant is a fluid term, which may shift in meaning from a group to an individual.⁹ Those who still regard the Servant poems as prophecies of the coming Savior include Johann Fischer and Edward J. Young,¹⁰ whose point of view the writer shares.

Delitzsch used a pyramid to explain the concept of the Servant of the Lord. At its lowest base the pyramid represented all Israel; at its middle level the pyramid represented Israel after the Spirit, that is, the faithful; the pinnacle of the pyramid represented the Israelite par excellence, that is, the promised Savior.¹¹ After examining the various identifications that have been attempted for the

Servant, Fischer comes back to the Messianic interpretation and argues that the remarkable parallelism of thought between the Servant poems and the New Testament accounts of our Lord's life and work is no mere coincidence.¹²

Looking at some of these striking similarities, we note that in the first and second poems the Lord says of the Servant: "Behold My Servant in whom My heart delights" (Is. 42:1); "Thou art My Servant in whom I will be glorified" (Is. 49:3). These are the obvious Old Testament counterparts of the words spoken by the Father at Christ's Baptism and at His transfiguration: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased" (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). There is also a noticeable similarity between the description of the Servant's pastoral activity in the first three poems and that of our Lord in the Gospels. As the Bearer of Truth in the first poem the Servant does not break the bruised reed nor put out the smoking flax; rather He gives the downcast sinner every consideration (Is. 42:3). As the Glorifier of the Lord in the second poem the Servant says that He has a mouth like a sharp sword with which to carry out His pastoral work (Is. 49:2). The third poem describes the learned Sufferer as having a well-trained tongue so that He may speak a word of comfort in season to the weary (Is. 50:4). In Isaiah 61 (which Proksch includes as a fifth poem)¹³ the Servant says that the Lord has anointed Him to preach the glad tidings to the poor and to proclaim the year of the Lord's grace (vv. 1 and 2).

The most significant parallel is that of the suffering and glorification of the Servant which is described in the third and fourth poems. The third poem has the familiar allusions to the Servant's back being smitten, His cheeks being struck, and His countenance being exposed to shame and spitting (Is. 50:6). The fourth poem (Isaiah 53) is to be noted especially for the two extraordinary verses (4 and 5) which Pieper¹⁴ reproduced in the following German stanzas:

Fürwahr, auf sich genommen hat er unsre Leiden,
Und unsre Schmerzen — sie hat er getragen;

Wir aber achteten vom Schicksal ihn ereilt,
Von Gott geschlagen und gebeugt.

Doch er—durchbohrt ist er um unsrer Frevel willen,
Zermalmt um unsrer Sündenschulden willen;

Die Strafe lag auf ihm, auf dasz wir Frieden hätten,
Und wir sind heil durch seine Wunden worden.

Thus the Servant was subjected to intense suffering for his fellow men. But His transcendent glorification is also reflected in the words of Is. 53:9: "They appointed His grave among the wicked, but He was with a rich man in His death, because He had done no violence and no deceit was found in His mouth."¹⁵

Attention is also called to the fact that Old Testament references to a coming of God in the future, both as Judge and as Deliverer, may justly be construed as Messianic references, e. g., "Behold, your God! Behold, the Lord God will come!" (Is. 40:9, 10.) That is to say, God will come in and through His Messianic representative. Such statements must be understood in the light of the significant reference in Is. 43:25, which gives the basis for God's forgiveness. There the Lord says: "I will blot out your transgressions for My own sake and will not remember your sins. For My own sake, even for My own sake, will I do it" (cf. Is. 48:11). The conclusion appears to be justified that God forgives only because of the redemptive action which He intends to perform through Him who will represent Him on earth.

That is finally also the thought that is behind the famous "Lord, our Righteousness" passage in Jeremiah. God will convey His righteousness to man through the righteous Branch whom He will raise up from the house of David. It is significant that in Jer. 23:6 the Branch Himself is called the Lord, our Righteousness, while in Jer. 33:16 Jerusalem-Zion is given the same title: Lord, our Righteousness. Thus He who became our Righteousness also made it possible for the spiritual Jerusalem, that is, the church of the new covenant, to be called the Lord, our Righteousness. Clothed in His righteous robe, what better name can be found for the church as the body of Christ?

As Christians we are grateful to God that there is no question in our minds as to who the Servant of the Lord is. By the Lord's grace we recognize Him as the historical Jesus, God's own Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Author of our redemption.

We accept Him as our anointed Prophet, Priest, and King; we acknowledge that in each of these three capacities He effected an important part of our salvation. We know and believe that He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, so that the demands of God might be fulfilled for us by Him and that the judgments of God might be executed on Him on our behalf. We know that God also highly exalted Him and raised Him from the dead for our justification.

Therefore we cannot but speak of this divine Servant and Savior to our brethren and fellow men everywhere. The grace and mercy of God which He brought us must constrain us to proclaim the crucified Christ in all the world as the only Savior of men, in whose name alone there is deliverance and freedom from sin.

IV

REPENTANCE AND FAITH AS REQUISITES FOR THE APPROPRIATION OF DIVINE GRACE

In turning to the concept of repentance, we note first of all that the Old Testament speaks of divine chastisement as a preparation for repentance. After the Lord has prepared the Egyptians by smiting them with a healing smiting, they will turn to the Lord (Is. 19:22). At Amos' time the Lord gave His people the clean teeth of a famine, He sent them a scourge of drought, He inflicted blight, mildew, and locusts upon them, He visited them with pestilence and war, He smote them with an earthquake — all of which had the divine purpose of moving the Israelites to turn unto the Lord. And still Amos has to say of each of these chastisements, "Yet have ye not returned unto Me" (Amos 4:6-11). As a result of repeated chastisements that were intended to bring them to repentance, Isaiah compares his people to a human body that has been severely bruised and beaten, a body that is black and blue from scalp to toe, as if it had been through a boxing match. Finally the Lord says to His crushed people: "On which spot shall I still strike you, because you are continuing to be unfaithful?" (Is. 1:5.) In their resolution to turn to the Lord the Israelites recognize that He has torn them only for the salutary purpose of healing them, that He has beaten them only with the good intention of binding up their wounds (Hos. 6:1). Ephraim provoked the Lord by so many acts of apostasy that the

Lord has to search for further means of chastising this recalcitrant people and says to them, "What shall I do to you, Ephraim, what shall I do to you, Judah?" (Hos. 6:4.)

The Old Testament characterizes repentance as a turning away from evil to good. The entire process is of such a nature that it is begun and carried out by God alone. Ephraim is constrained to say to the Lord, "Turn Thou me, and I shall be turned, for Thou art the Lord, my God" (Jer. 31:18). The Lord assures His people that He will not always contend nor forever be wroth with His people provided their spirit bends, that is, succumbs or surrenders in an act of penitence (Is. 57:16). The wicked man is bidden to forsake his way and his thought and to turn unto the Lord that He may have mercy upon him (Is. 55:7). The complete change that is implied in repentance is called for in the classical plea: "Sow to yourselves righteousness, reap mercy, break up your fallow ground" (Hos. 10:12). The complete break with a past life of sin is insisted upon in the prophetic admonition: "Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns" (Jer. 4:3).

The earmarks of repentance as they are set forth in the Old Testament are a broken and a contrite spirit. The Psalmist is confident that the Lord is nigh unto those who are of a broken heart and will help those who have a broken spirit (Ps. 34:18). Jeremiah hears the voice of his people weeping on the high places, a cry which the Prophet interprets as a mark of penitence (Jer. 3:21). The Lord surely dwells on high in His transcendent heavenly sanctuary, but He also deigns to dwell among those who are of a humble and broken spirit, that He may comfort the spirit of the humble and the heart of those who are broken (Is. 57:15). The poet mourns that his sins have taken such a hold on him that he is unable to look up (Ps. 40:12). Another laments that his sins have gone over his head, they are like a heavy burden, they are too heavy to carry (Ps. 38:4). The longest poem in the Psalter closes with the plea that the Lord might look for His servant, because he has gone astray like a lost sheep (Ps. 119:176). The prayer of Isaiah laments that all of the Israelites are like an unclean thing and that all of their righteousness is like filthy rags (Is. 64:6).

Repentance as a turning to the Lord with a broken and a contrite spirit must be genuine, or man can have no part with God. The

Prophet advises his people that if they turn, then it is necessary that they turn to Jehovah; repentance directed toward any other being will not avail (Jer. 4:1). The people are bidden to turn to the Lord with their whole heart. They are urged to tear their hearts and not their garments, to show that their repentance is genuine (Joel 2:12, 13). In several rare references to a spiritual rebirth in the Old Testament it is said that all sorts of people are born in Zion (Ps. 87:4-6). Genuine repentance involves such a new birth on the spiritual plane. When the Lord wanted to give His people a new birth, He found that Israel was like a pre-natal child which refused to come forth out of the mother's womb (Hos. 13:13). Thus the people showed that they wanted nothing of that genuine repentance that is implied in the new birth. Any turning which does not involve the whole man will be futile. Jeremiah agrees that the people are engaged in turning, but he charges that instead of turning with their whole heart they are turning falsely (Jer. 3:10). When the Lord summoned His people to repentance and they arrogantly responded with an attitude of "eat, drink, and be merry," the Lord showed how seriously He looked upon such a lack of genuine repentance. He issued the fateful dictum to His people, "Verily, this iniquity shall not be purged from you till your death" (Is. 22:12-14). That the famous resolution to repent in Hosea 6 lacked genuineness is indicated by the superficial confidence which the people expressed in the words, "The Lord will come back to us just as certainly as tomorrow will dawn" (Hos. 6:3). Therefore the Prophet states ironically that instead of turning to the true God his people turn to a substitute, an *Ersatz* (Hos. 7:16).

Finally there is the response of faith that God looks for in man. Faith is a concept that has a prominent place throughout the Old Testament, but especially in such books as Isaiah and the Psalter. Isaiah's famous words to King Ahaz, "No faith, no staith! If you do not believe, neither shall you abide" (Is. 7:9), rank as one of the greatest tributes to faith in the entire Biblical record. The Prophet himself took courage in the midst of critical periods of his career by stating that he would hope in the Lord and wait for Him even when He had concealed His countenance from the house of Jacob (Is. 8:17). Whoever relies upon the Lord with a stead-

fast heart has the assurance that the Lord will keep him in lasting peace (Is. 26:3). The faithful are encouraged to trust in the Lord forever because in Him they have a Rock of Ages (Is. 26:4). Exegetically the reference to the tried and precious Cornerstone (Is. 28:16) is quite significant. Some scholars argue that the Cornerstone in this passage is not a person, but rather the Cornerstone is faith itself.¹⁶ Paul and Peter, however, identify the Cornerstone with the Savior.¹⁷ If the passage is thus understood, then it must be rendered as follows: "Whoever believes [in Him] shall not flee." According to Isaiah, the way to deliverance is simply turning to the Lord with confidence. Thus he stresses the two technical terms in the Old Testament for repentance and faith (Is. 30:15). The weak hands are to be strengthened, and the feeble knees are to be confirmed so that the weary may appropriate the Lord's promise of grace (Is. 35:3, 4). Those who wait upon the Lord are assured of new strength which will enable them to mount with wings as eagles, to run without becoming weary, and to march without becoming faint (Is. 40:31).

Faith also plays a very prominent role among the Psalmists. Here the word *trust* receives priority. Whoever trusts in the Lord will be surrounded by mercy (Ps. 32:10); will be as immovable as eternal Mount Zion (Ps. 125:1); need have no fear of what men may do to him (Ps. 56:11). Amidst great odds the poet confidently believes that he will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living (Ps. 27:13). The young Psalmist, who has been weaned from inordinate ambition as a child is weaned from its mother, not only *hopes* in the Lord himself, but he also bids his fellow Israelites to set their hope in God (Ps. 131:1-3). *Waiting* on the Lord, waiting with one's whole heart, waiting upon His word, waiting as intensely as watchers wait for the morning, that is the epitome of Biblical trust (Ps. 130:5, 6).

Even where the words *believe*, *trust*, *hope*, and *wait* are not used, there are passages which in their context give a high place to faith. The Psalmist is confident that he shall not be moved, because he has set the Lord always before him (Ps. 16:8). In the Introit for Oculi Sunday the poet says that his eyes are ever toward the Lord (Ps. 25:15). In other passages David states that the Lord's kindness is better to him than life itself (Ps. 63:3); that the Lord is

his light and his salvation (Ps. 27:1). The author of the great "nevertheless" climaxes the statements on faith in the Psalter with his classical words: "Nevertheless I am continually with Thee. . . . If I have only Thee, I ask for nothing else in heaven or in earth" (Ps. 73:23, 25).

There are a number of other high points of faith in the Old Testament. Especially significant is the early reference to the fact that Abraham believed, and the Lord counted it to him for righteousness (Gen. 15:6). Like his great contemporary Isaiah, Micah confidently asserts that in the midst of conflict and trouble he will look to the Lord and wait for Him (Micah 7:7). A century later the great Prophet of individualism says to the Lord, "Do not Your eyes look for faith?" (Jer. 5:3.) Jeremiah also urges the wise man not to glory in his wisdom, nor the strong man to glory in his strength, nor the rich man to glory in his wealth; but if anyone is to glory, then let him glory in this, that he understands and knows that Jehovah is the Lord (Jer. 9:23, 24). Jeremiah was advised by the Lord to purchase a parcel of land in his native town of Anathoth, despite the fact that the enemy was about to take over the entire country round about Jerusalem. The Prophet accepted the Lord's advice, purchased the field, and thus showed his confidence in the fact that the Lord would ultimately deliver his country from the hands of the Babylonians (Jer. 32:8, 9). Similar confidence was expressed in the famous words of Jeremiah's contemporary: "The just shall live by his faith" (Hab. 2:4).

The Lord still uses chastisement today as a means of bringing people to repentance. War and illness, drought and disaster, are sent by God to make men turn from their wicked ways and to seek Him. The Lord also expects of all members of His church that we daily engage in such a turning-about, such a spiritual about-face; He wants us to bring Him the sacrifice of a broken and contrite spirit; He wants our turning-about to be sincere and genuine.

But above all the Lord wants us to give Him our hearts in simple, childlike trust and confidence. He tells us that faith is the key to stait, that only the believer shall abide. Through faith He would have us appropriate all of the gifts of His grace and mercy that He so generously offers. May He bestow upon us this gift

of believing, trusting, hoping, waiting on Him; may He enable us to glory in only one thing, that we understand and know that Christ is our Lord and Savior!

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FOOTNOTES

6. H. H. Rowley, *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952), p. 5.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 11.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 54, 55.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 20.
11. Delitzsch, quoted in August Pieper, *Jesaias II* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1919), p. 118.
12. Rowley, p. 21.
13. Otto Proksch, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Verlag, 1950), p. 284.
14. August Pieper, p. 400.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 406.
16. Julius A. Bewer, *The Book of Isaiah*, I, 73.
17. Rom. 9:33; 1 Peter 2:6.