

60 The Servant of the Lord Introduced

which did not become entirely clear until later passages were reached were already suggested in earlier ones. As we come to the passages dealing with this theme we shall examine each in its context, to determine its possibilities of meaning and to note how the thought develops.

When the term "my servant" first appears, in Isaiah 41:8-9, it refers to the nation of Israel. The context is very clear. ^{^*} The surrounding peoples are filled with terror because a great conqueror is coming from the east. Cyrus is overwhelming country after country. The distant lands are terrified and begin to prepare new idols in order to find some hope of safety from this great aggressor who is making nations "like dust with his sword, like wind-driven chaff with his bow" (Isa 41:2). After vividly describing the terror of the nations in the aggressor's path, the LORD declares that Israel should not similarly fear, because Israel is His Servant whom He has chosen, whom He has taken from the ends of the earth and to whom He has said, "You are my servant."

This statement gives a very important insight into God's relation with Israel. God looks back to the time when He called Abraham to be the progenitor of the nation of Israel and explains the reason. He declares that it was not simply a matter of arbitrarily selecting one upon whom He would put His love, so that thereafter the Israelites could count on His protective care, no matter what they should do. God called Israel for a special purpose, in order that a certain work would be performed. Israel can know that it is God's Servant and that therefore God will preserve it.

There is no intimation given at this point as to the precise nature of the work that the Servant is to accomplish. Looking back, we know that Israel preserved the knowledge of the true God when most of the world had tried to forget Him. Israel produced the writers of most of the Old Testament books through which God gave His revelation to the world. These were great services. Yet as we examine the passages that discuss the work of the Servant, we shall see that they include ideas

*See p. 55.