

I've been writing up a storm on my Bible Introduction. It's a god awful amount of work, but I'm making really good (OK, disgustingly good) progress. Here's a chunk I wrote up today, when dealing with the post-exilic prophets. It's obviously (maybe too obviously for you!) just a rough draft.

Brief context: at this point I am discussing Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40-55), almost universally thought by scholars to be written by a different author from chapters 1-39 (themselves written by Isaiah of Jerusalem in the 8th c. BCE). Second Isaiah was writing after the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem (including the temple) in 586 BCE, while the leaders of the people and many of the elite had been taken into exile in Babylon, in what is known as the Babylonian Captivity.

No passage of Second Isaiah has intrigued readers and interpreters - especially among Christians - more than the four passages that are dedicated to describing a figure known as the "Suffering Servant." Some scholars have called these passages "songs," or "songs of the suffering servant." The passages are Isa. 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12. It is not known whether the author of 2 Isaiah has inherited these passages from an earlier tradition that he has incorporated into his book or if they are his own creation.

In these passages, the Servant of Yahweh is said to have suffered horribly for the sake of others; but God will vindicate him. He, in fact, is the delight of Yahweh and will be used by him to accomplish his will on earth: "I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations ... He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth (42:1, 6).

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