**THE FIRST PROMISE - OFFSPRING**

**THE INDIVIDUAL OFFSPRING**

**THE INDIVIDUAL OFFSPRING IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS (Part 2)**

**THE FIRST PROMISE OF THE OFFSPRING IN ACTS 3:25,26 FROM THE BACKGROUND OF THE SERVANT SONGS (ISAIAH 41-53)**

Peter also affirmed Christ’s participation in the promise. In Acts 3:25,26 he quotes from Genesis 22:18 ‘*Through your offspring all peoples of the earth will be blessed’* (3:25). He continued ‘*When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways’* (3:26). Peter understood Christ to be the mediator of the blessings of the promise. He saw Christ as the One who blessed (3:26) and that the One who blessed was the servant spoken of by Isaiah.

The servant concept is taken from Isaiah 41 – 53 and begins with ‘*But you, O Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants (*Hebrew: *zera* = offspring) *of Abraham my friend’* (41:8). Isaiah clearly tied the servant concept to the Abrahamic promise. On this basis, Peter was right to connect the Servant to the promise.

It is difficult to maintain that the Servant is always a reference to the nation of Israel, as some have argued. In some passages, it seems clear that it is (42:18-22; 44:1,2,21; 49:3) but in 49:5 the Servant acts to restore Israel to God: ‘*And now the Lord says – he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself*.’ The Servant is clearly distinct from the nation.

Nor can the Servant in 49:5 be seen as the righteous remnant of Israel. In the very next verse (49:6), His work is connected to the restoration of ‘*those of Israel I have kept*.’ They are clearly part of the nation, a remnant. They are to be restored to God (49:5,6) and to the land (49:8,9) and so cannot be identified with the having already returned exiles. Their restoration goes hand in hand with the conquest of the nations (49:18,22,23), the end of oppression (49:25,26) and the beginning of an era when Gentiles will recognise Yahweh’s might (49:26b).

The Servant is called a man in 53:3 who was stricken ‘*for the transgression of* (his) *people*,’ again distinguishing him from the nation. He suffers *for* the transgression of His people while Israel is consistently pictured as suffering for her own sin (40:2; 42:24,25; 43:24,25; 44:21,22; 48:1-8; 50:1).

The task of the Servant to bring salvation to the ends of the earth (49:6) is accomplished by His redemptive work: ‘*After the suffering of his soul … my righteous servant will justify many’* (53:11).

Since the Servant concept seems sometimes to be the nation and sometimes an individual, and since Isaiah identified the Servant with the offspring of Abraham, it easily follows that the individual Servant in Isaiah is also the offspring of Abraham. The New Testament’s proclamation is that the individual has appeared and in Him the promises are fulfilled. A figure who comes out of the nation rises far above the nation to effect its restoration and glory.

Like the Davidic king, the Servant is both the mediator and recipient of various terms of the promise. The Servant mediates the promise of God’s blessing to Gentiles (49:6). As a recipient of the promise, He is promised a great name (reputation): ‘*Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong’* (53:12). He is promised offspring: ‘*he will see his offspring and prolong his days’* (53:10). He will have a universal reign: ‘*he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on the earth’* (42:4). In 49:7 Isaiah says of the Servant who was despised by the nations, ‘*Kings will see you and arise, princes will see you and bow down’* and 52:15 says: ‘*Kings will shut their mouths because of him*.’

Only the promise of the land is not emphasised in the Servant songs, but it may be that this concept is expanded to include the whole earth. In 55:3-5 Isaiah says that Israel’s future dominance over the nations is a direct result of the promise given to David. This expansion of the promise of the land to include the whole earth is similar to Paul’s application of the same concept in Romans 4:13.

The promise of the offspring forms a strong bond between the Old and New Testaments. There is a theological continuum inherent in the promises that spans these two periods of redemptive history. This continuum exists because of the anticipatory nature of the promise in the Old Testament and the sense of fulfilment of the promises in the New Testament.

At the end of the Old Testament the people had returned to the land in the post-exilic period. Zechariah, a leader in that time, predicted a dark period for Israel when she would again come under foreign powers (11:4-17) but that she would be delivered by a king who came into Jerusalem riding on a donkey (9:9,10). At the end of the Old Testament period, the Gentiles had not come in significant numbers to Yahweh and the promise of an eternal Davidic monarchy had not been realised. But the New Testament writers were deeply conscious of the promise and affirmed that the offspring had come and that the terms of the promise were still in effect

This study is a summary of ‘*The Covenants of Promise’* by T. E. McComiskey, (Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, England, 1988, pp.30-35)