

# ISAIAH

## ISAIAH 50:10-11, FEAR AND OBEY

Next, we enter into a pericope the purpose of which is to encourage Israel. The Servant is no longer speaking; it is Yahweh now speaking through the prophet. He is calling His people to follow the Servant who has just been speaking to them. The Servant has set the example that His faithful people should follow—in good times and in bad times. These verses are another indication that the Servant is a Person and not the nation. “If one hears in obedience the voice of the servant, that one is a fearer of the Lord. In the light of this strong statement, it is difficult to understand how the servant can be the nation Israel or the best part thereof; but there is no difficulty if the servant is that unique individual who stands in an unparalleled relationship to God ... the suffering Savior” [Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, vol. 3, 3:303].

The Rabbis assign the identity of the Servant, especially the Suffering Servant, to the nation Israel, but the Rabbis before the First Advent knew that the Messiah was actually the subject. That changed during the *Diaspora* when Christians began evangelizing the Jews using Isaiah 53 to convince them that Jesus was the Messiah, which, of course, the unbelieving Rabbis rejected leading them to deny the Messianic identity of the Servant. Therefore, they had to deny the clearly personal characteristics of the Suffering Servant, particularly in Isaiah 53, and change the meaning to a supposed description of the suffering of the Israelites as the nation Israel. “There were others who assumed that the servant of the Lord represents ‘Ideal Israel’ or her spiritual core. However, the servant of all four passages in Isaiah is unique and so exalted, that he fits no known formerly human historical personality. Only Jesus of Nazareth comes close to the majestic figure of the suffering servant. In fact, until the appearance of Jesus, ancient Jewish commentators invariably interpreted the servant passages as applying to the Messiah. The interpretation of these passages as applying to Israel collectively came into vogue much later, during the Christological controversies between the Church and Synagogue” [Victor Buksbazen, *The Prophet Isaiah: A Commentary*, 390, n. 1].

Encouragement begins with calling to the people who fear and trust Yahweh and who listen to the Servant. “Who” may be properly translated “whoever” [cf. NET Bible; Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, vol. 3, 3:303].

Isaiah 50:10 <sup>10</sup>Who is among you that fears [יִרָא] the LORD, That obeys [שָׁמַעַ] the voice [קוֹל] of His servant, That walks in darkness [הַשְׁכָּה] and has no light [נֹגֵה]֑? Let him trust [בָּטַח] in the name of the LORD and rely [שָׁעַן] on his God.

There are two elements in the definition of fear that bear on every person's relationship with God. Fear, יִרָא, means to tremble, to fear, or to be afraid. The first element of the word pertains to being in a state of alarm resulting in fearing or in being afraid. The second element of the word means to revere or have reverence for, to be in awe of, or to fear in the sense of having profound respect for something or someone which, in this context, is used in relation to how a person relates to God. There is something to be said for being afraid of the God who can impose serious divine temporal discipline including

destruction, exile, captivity, and death. More importantly, fearing God in the sense of revering Him and worshiping Him is what every person should always be doing, and that is the emphasis here. When that aspect of fear, that is, reverence and worship, is in play, then the aspect of fright is greatly reduced in significance in terms of relationship and eternal destiny. Our security is in God and no matter what we face in this life, we have an eternal destiny that makes the troubles of this life now fade in significance.

Romans 8:18 <sup>18</sup>For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

2 Timothy 3:12 <sup>12</sup>Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

Both elements of the word “fear” are in play for the Israelites, but they were promised earthly benefits for obedience in the blessings promises revealed to them for fealty to Yahweh. Therefore, they had more reasons to be concerned about their physical life and well-being while living in the land God gave them. In this verse, God is telling them how to realize those blessings. In hindsight, we know they never took this revelation to heart.

In addition to fearing Yahweh, obedience to the voice of the Servant is a necessary element of trusting in and relying on God. One of the perpetual problems for Israel is that they have never had the appropriate fear of the Lord, either in terms of being afraid of His divine disciplinary hand on them, or in terms of holding Him in the appropriate position of respect and awe. Plus, they have never accepted the Servant. It is God who disciplined the Servant and gave Him the words to speak as a disciple (Is. 50:4), and it is to Him they must listen.

Obey, *שמע*, means to hear, obey, or listen to. In this context, obedience is the primary meaning although to hear or to listen to the voice of the Lord are appropriate and make the meaning clear, because that is another way of saying “obey.” Only the CSB and the YLT translations use “hearing;” every other translation interpreted this context as a reference to obedience. Obedience is the way the people indicate that they fear the Lord.

They were to obey His voice which is another way of telling them to heed the Word of God. The Servant is the Messiah, who is God, and they must heed His voice or words which are, as the Word of God, authoritative. In Isaiah 49:2, the Servant revealed that Yahweh had made His “mouth like a sharp sword,” and in Isaiah 50:4, the Servant revealed that the Lord God had given Him the “tongue of disciples” and the ability to “sustain the weary with a word.” Voice, *קול*, means sound, voice, or noise, but in this context, it is used to mean instruction, guidance, or direction in matters, often in matters of life and conduct. “The phrase ‘to hearken to one’s voice’ includes: to take note of and believe, to follow one’s suggestions, to obey a request, to obey a command, to answer (of God) a prayer” [Harris, Archer, Jr., and Waltke, s.v. “קול,” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 792]. In this context, obedience is the appropriate understanding of the use of the word. In the following verses, the command to “listen to Me (God)” is used three times (Is. 51:1, 4, 7) which, following the call to listen to the voice of the Servant, indicates they, God and Servant, are equal in authority.

In the preceding verses (Is. 50:4-9), the Servant was describing His life; He was not preaching a sermon. The fact that He was relating to things concerning His life and conduct is

pertinent to these two verses where Yahweh is telling people to follow the Servant's example. In Isaiah 50:6, He related to the torturous treatment He received indicating difficult situations, characterized as walking "in darkness," that His people might expect and through which they will need to persevere.

Too often, people assume that fearing God and obeying the voice of the Messiah Servant is the ticket to a happy, trouble-free life. This seems to be an especially common mindset in two places: the extremely prosperous and the extremely impoverished. Those living in abundance assume it is God's favor for their faithfulness. Those living in poverty are told by those who live in abundance to simply live in enough faithfulness and they will experience abundance as well. To poor people, that is a seductively powerful message—but it is untrue. "Those who follow this Servant may indeed walk with him into the darkness of frustration, injustice, humiliation, and abuse. But this does not mean they should forgo their reliance on God. Through all the ages the children of God have equated God's blessing with comfort and a sense of well-being. But that was not the way of the Servant. So the challenge is again and again: do not cast away your confidence. Wait on the Lord. Put your hope in him. Trust in the reputation and the character (*the name*) of the Lord, and rely on your God. That is the example that we have in the Servant ..." [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 329]. Life is not meant to be a bed of roses, trouble free existence for born-again believers living within the parameters of this satanic world system. We are promised trouble in this life just as our Lord experienced trouble in His life, and just as the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul, experienced trouble in his life.

When they are facing difficult times, they must trust in the name of the Lord. Trust, **בָּטַח**, means trust, to be confident, to set one's hope and confidence, or to rely on referring to believing in a person or object to the point of reliance upon. The sense of the word is to trust or to have faith relating to a strong confidence or reliance upon someone or something. "The imperfect verb **בָּטַח**: 'he will trust' is probably a modal imperfect (GKC [sec.] 107n) expressing what should be done" [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 40-66*, 386, n. 150]. All of us, not just the Israelites, should be maintaining our trust in the Lord, keep focused on Him, and persevering in faith during difficult times. Most of us, not just the Israelites, are probably not very good at maintaining trust in Him during difficult times in our lives.

We are to rely on Him during the dark times. Rely, **שָׁעַן**, means to lean oneself upon, rest against, and to support oneself referring to being in a resting condition, because one is in a stance or position of reclining, lying, or standing, often against an object for support. It has the sense of depending or relying on by placing trust in someone or something with confidence. While this verb is passive in form, it is active in meaning. "Leaning on can also mean trusting in persons, whether it be God; other people, or oneself. Ultimately, God should be trusted and leaned on, for He will never fail" [Baker and Carpenter, s.v. "שָׁעַן," *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament*, 1182]. Knowing that God will never fail, and knowing that our eternal destiny is secure with Him is one thing, but acting like we know it in the midst of the darkness or trouble that can envelope us can be difficult. That was and is no different for the Israelites.

What is the end game for fearing, obeying, trusting, and relying on God even when the darkness of a fallen, satanic world system seems to envelope us on all sides? For the Jews, it will be the realization of all the covenanted Kingdom blessings in an everlasting Kingdom.

Daniel 7:13–14, 27 <sup>13</sup>"I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. <sup>14</sup>"And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and *men of every language* Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed.... <sup>27</sup>'Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of *all* the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom *will be* an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.'

The eternal nature of the blessings for the Israelites are the basis for faithfulness and trust even in the midst of other than pleasurable circumstances. That is truth applicable to the church as well. Our eternal destiny, eternal life and ruling and reigning with Christ as the body and bride of Christ are blessings that far outweigh whatever difficulties we experience in this life. We need to be engaged in fearing God, obeying the voice of the Messiah Servant, trusting in the name of Yahweh, and relying on Him.

The light of the Lord will be a permanent part of life during the Messianic Kingdom (Is. 2:5), and this applies to both Israel and the world. This is in contrast to the darkness that existed in Israel for so long (Is. 8:22-9:2). Light and dark are often used in the abstract or figurative sense in the Bible where spiritual matters are the subject, but they obviously also relate to physical realities.

Darkness, *הַשְׁכָּה*, means darkness, the dark referring to the lack absence of light or illumination. It has associated meanings of distress or mystery. This word denotes intensity in Hebrew. "... a more or less intensive focusing of the characteristics inherent in the idea of the stem (*abstract plurals*, usually rendered in English by forms in *-hood, -ness, -ship*)" [Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, [sec.] 124a1 (b), 396]. Darkness may refer to the spiritual darkness in which the world for the most part operates, or it may refer to the challenges people face in life whatever difficulties they may be and however serious they may be. In the case of Israel, it also refers to the divine discipline the nation has experienced in the form of persecution and dispersion. In this verse, there are elements of all these things. The Servant just revealed that He was dealing with spiritual issues and with physical persecution, but just as He persevered through it all because God was His Help, so too will those who are His experience darkness at times, and they must persevere through it as well.

"The Israelites too, like the Servant, were walking in darkness, not the darkness of sin but the darkness of being called by God to a mission that involved suffering and misunderstanding. Such a people should trust in the reputation and character of the Lord, and rely on Him, like the Servant" [Thomas L. Constable, "Isaiah" in *Thomas Constable's Notes on the Bible, Volume IV: Isaiah-Daniel*, 4:145].

The word used here for light is not the word used to refer to the physical properties of light as we think of daylight or a lamp and that word is אור. Light, נְגִידָה, means radiance or brightness, which refers to the quality or state of having a relatively strong light. It may also mean knowledge referring to what is known which can then be responded to, which is the context here as it involves a moral and ethical understanding of the Lord's ways. However, I would not entirely dismiss the idea of light as a figurative representation of spiritual matters.

“Thus the prophet is saying to his people, people who are wondering whether their dark situations are evidence that God has forgotten them (cf. 49:14), that they must trust God in the darkness if they are to become the servants of God they are called to be, in the image of the Servant who declares God's way to them” [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 329]. “The exhortation has a positive (trust God in the darkness) and negative (do not trust oneself in the darkness)” [Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer, “Isaiah” in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, 1084].

In contrast to verse 10, verse 11 deals with those who will not trust and obey.

Isaiah 50:11 <sup>11</sup>Behold, all you who kindle a fire, Who encircle [אָזַר] yourselves with fire-brands [זִיקָה], Walk [לְכִנּוּ] in the light of your fire And among the brands you have set ablaze. This you will have from My hand: You will lie down in torment [מַעֲצָבָה].

Instead of fearing the Lord and obeying the Servant, people who reject God must try to go their own way by imagining they can create light by their own means, in their own power in order to escape the darkness. Every person living under the constraints and the evils of Satan's world system has to navigate the darkness, but people also instinctively know they need to get out of that darkness. Those who reject the drawing ministry of God the Father (John 6:44) and God the Son (John 12:32), and the convicting ministry of God the Holy Spirit (John 16:8) have no recourse but to try and figure their own way out of the darkness. If not God, then what? Then they have to rely on themselves, which is the mission of a fool.

Isaiah 59:10 <sup>10</sup>We grope along the wall like blind men, We grope like those who have no eyes; We stumble at midday as in the twilight, Among those who are vigorous we are like dead men.

Acts 17:26–27 <sup>26</sup>and He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, <sup>27</sup>that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;

How one navigates the darkness is the issue at hand. People cannot create anything but false hope for themselves apart from God, and it is nothing but foolishness to try. The problem for those who try to navigate their own way out of the darkness is that they are opposing God for so doing, and they will incur judgment for doing things their own way apart from Him. This is a universal truth. Whether the issue is the upcoming Babylonian destruction of Judah and the subsequent captivity, the *Diaspora*, or the Tribulation, all

who try to “fix” it themselves will not only fail, but they will suffer God’s judgment for rejecting the divinely ordained way to work through the darkness.

“The Lord contrasted the way of sorrow, in this verse, with the way of trust, in verse 10. The Israelites who refused to trust God and obey the Servant in their dark mission, and instead tried to escape the dark by lighting their own fires, would experience torment. They would encounter this if they refused to trust God for deliverance from the Babylonians, and they would encounter it in their larger relationship with God. The Lord would send them torment, not vindication” [Thomas L. Constable, “Isaiah” in *Thomas Constable’s Notes on the Bible, Volume IV: Isaiah-Daniel*, 4:145]. There is a price to pay, temporally and eternally, for those who refuse to fear God and obey the Word of God.

The verse begins with “behold,” which is a marker of emphasis informing the listener to pay attention to what follows and heed the truth it is revealing. Given the fact that God’s judgment is going to fall on those who fail to heed the warning, beginning the verse this way seems to be a pretty good idea!

There is some sarcasm evident in this verse when God, through the prophet, seemingly encourages those who reject Him to go ahead and walk around in the midst of their own fiery light and thereby ensure their own destruction. We know that God is not trying to see people destroyed; He is trying to get them to see the true light and turn to it by abandoning the light they have tried to create for themselves. Walk, לָכוּ, is literally translated “you walk” from הָלַךְ meaning to go, to come, to walk. This is a command from God to go ahead and walk in the light of your own making and, as a result, reap the judgment of God. Grammatically, this construction is a command that “is used in the sense of an ironical challenge (often including a threat)” [Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, [sec. 110a1a], 324], which is exactly the situation in this verse.

“It is possible, as Calvin suggests, that this command contains a touch of irony, as though the prophet had said, ‘You have rejected the Lord and kindled your own fire to escape the darkness; well, go now and take your course of life in that very fire. See how it will become not your salvation but your destruction!’” [Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, vol. 3, 3:305].

Encircle, אָוַר, means to bind around or to gird in order to place something at one’s own disposal. In this verse, it has the sense of equipping by providing oneself with firebrands for a specific purpose. The purpose here is to try and find their own way out of the God rejecting world of darkness by creating their own ungodly light.

Firebrand, זִיקָה, means flaming torches referring to an implement used for lighting a path as an aid for walking at night, or it may be a reference to a fiery missile of some sort, possibly a flaming arrow.

There is an alternate view to the meaning of the firebrands and how they are put to use. Some theologians believe that it could be a reference to those who attack the people of God in the same way a city is attacked while under siege and burning arrows are fired into to it to set it on fire. Proverbs 26:18 does use the word in connection with arrows and death, but that does not seem to be the context, and I discount that theory here. The

context concerns the darkness of the world system that is exacerbated by rejecting God and from which people try to create their own light in order to escape the darkness.

The flaming torches are said to be girded onto the person. This suggests that the torches may be bound to the body while one gropes about trying to find his way out of the darkness. There is also an alternate view of this as well which suggests that the lights are bound to the person so the hands are free to be used for self-defense. Again, that does not fit the context as well as the first suggestion does.

It should be obvious that it is quite dangerous to gird up with lit torches bound to one's body. Burning oneself to death becomes a very real possibility for those who engage in such a dangerous practice.

My thought is that pagan religion is the primary way people create their own light in their futile attempts to work their own way out of the darkness and all the while rejecting God and His Word. Isaiah touched on this issue earlier in his book.

Isaiah 8:19–22 <sup>19</sup>When they say to you, "Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter," should not a people consult their God? *Should they consult* the dead on behalf of the living? <sup>20</sup>To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn. <sup>21</sup>They will pass through the land hard-pressed and famished, and it will turn out that when they are hungry, they will be enraged and curse their king and their God as they face upward. <sup>22</sup>Then they will look to the earth, and behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish; and *they will be* driven away into darkness.

"... persons who have refused the light of God are plunged into a deep darkness in which they turn to the occult to light the way for them. Those flames may well eat their bearer alive. There is only one light in the darkness of human sin: the one kindled by God in and through his Servant. To refuse that light and to embrace some other is to open oneself to a devouring flame" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 330].

The end result for these people is that God will execute judgment on them and send them to a place where they will "lie down in torment." Torment, מַעֲצָבָה, means a place of pain, affliction, torment, and suffering referring to the state of pain as punishment. It may be used to refer to a figurative extension of a place of torture such as a prison. The sense is that of intense feelings of suffering relating to acute mental or physical pain. The root of this word, עָצַב, relates to physical pain as well as to emotional sorrow. This is the only verse in the Bible where this particular word is used. In this verse, it is referring to a place of pain as the result of divine judgment. There are serious consequences for rejecting God and His Word to remain in the darkness of unbelief.

Some theologians relate the torment to the pains of sin. "It is not simply that those who opt for a do-it-yourself approach to life's darknesses [sic] have then no other resource to turn to; but, refusing the way of trust and reliance, they incur divine opposition. The *hand* of God goes out against them. *Torment*, is only found here but its verb guarantees its meaning of grief, pain and displeasure—even 'the place of pain'—specifically the pains

of sin under the curse of God" [J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*, 319]. This does not seem to be a tenable position to take. The whole point of the discussion was to show that they were in darkness and had no light, but by turning to, trusting, and relying on God, they would make it through the darkness and into the light. The people who do not reject God and His Word are still in the darkness of the world system, which includes the pain of sin, but God is not subjecting them to the place of torment. This comes from the hand of God which is an imposition of judgment for the people who reject Him. It is far more than simply suffering the grief, pain, and displeasure of sin's consequences while the earth is under the curse of God due to the Fall.

Keil and Delitzsch allegorize this verse into something that is unrecognizable in terms of the truth it is revealing. "The fire is not the fire of divine wrath, but the fire of wickedness, more especially that hellish fire with which an evil tongue is set on fire ... shots, and indeed burning arrows, are figurative, and stand for the blasphemies and anathemas which they cast at the servant of Jehovah.... they gird burning darts, i.e., they equip or arm themselves with them for the purpose of attack. But the destruction they prepare for the servant of Jehovah becomes their own ..." [C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Isaiah*, vol. 7, 7:483-484].

Certainly, figurative language is being used in these two verses, but this verse is addressing the issue of people trying to make their own light and go their own way which will result in the judgment of God being levied against them. Those people do engage in attacking God and they do engage in wicked behavior that results, absent faith, in eternal death, but that is not the point being made in these verses. The point is that they are trying to work their own way out of the darkness and that is an exercise in futility.

Unger compared this to the strange fire that Nadab and Abihu used in the Temple (Lv. 10:1-2), but I'm not so sure we can say that those men were unbelievers. He does correctly say this represents "acting in religious matters apart from the revealed Word of God, mere 'will-worship' (Col. 2:23). All who kindle such fire—reject the words and redemptive work of the Servant and substitute human ideas and devices for salvation—generate sparks that go out in an instant in darkness" [Merrill F. Unger, "Isaiah" in *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*, 1285].

The fact that the God rejecting people "lie down in torment" certainly suggests death and the eternal consequences of unbelief that follow death. This is a much more serious situation than the consequences of sin while still living this life in the darkness that characterizes the world system. The consequences for personal sin may be mitigated as life moves on, but once dead, the torment the unbeliever faces is eternal and there is no relief from it. Unbelief can be remedied by belief, but the opportunity for that remedy is lost upon death (Heb. 9:27).

Isaiah 66:24 <sup>24</sup>"Then they will go forth and look On the corpses of the men Who have transgressed against Me. For their worm will not die And their fire will not be quenched; And they will be an abhorrence to all mankind."

"The outcome is decreed of God. It comes from His hand, i.e., from His power. Probably the word *this* refers primarily to what follows, the final punishment of the wicked. The

prophet's writing is forceful. With respect to the place of torment, *ye shall lie down*" [Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, vol. 3, 3:305].