

THE ORIGIN OF THE SUFFERING SERVANT IDEA

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THE Servant of the Lord, whose sufferings are so vividly and poignantly described in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, is, to many investigators, a most baffling figure. His identity is constantly being discussed. His mission in suffering is studied and, all the time, old views are giving place to new. Is there no possibility of discovering or ascertaining, once and for all, we may ask, what is the true meaning of Isaiah's beautiful chapter?

There are those who believe that this question can be answered and that it can be answered in the affirmative. The New Testament, they say, has given the answer and has done so in such a way as to make it clear that this unique fifty-third chapter is a very precious prophecy of the atoning death of the Saviour. This witness of the New Testament, however, is unfortunately not accepted by all. And it is for this reason that the scholarly world seems unable, for any length of time, to agree upon any one particular interpretation as being finally correct.

In recent times Dr. J. Philip Hyatt of Vanderbilt University has injected a much-needed note into the discussion of the problem.¹ He lays stress upon the importance of the origin of the idea of the suffering Servant. Dr. Hyatt himself believes that the conception of the Servant is shifting and fluid and that the Servant is not to be identified with any single group or individual. In fact, he thinks, the question of precise identification is much less important than the idea which the figure of the Servant embodies.² This idea is said

¹ J. Philip Hyatt: "The Sources of the Suffering Servant Idea", in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. III, 1944, pp. 79-86.

² "The precise identification is of much less importance than the idea which the figure embodies. The conception of the Servant is a fluid and shifting one" (*op. cit.*, p. 79).

to be "boldly original" and may be expressed as the fact that "suffering which is faithfully and willingly borne may be vicariously redemptive".³ What, therefore, was the source of this idea?

Dr. Hyatt believes that there were four principal sources from which the prophet drew and "which he combined into a new pattern to produce the figure of the Servant and the idea that suffering may be redemptive."⁴ These four sources are, 1) "*the idea of corporate personality*"; 2) "*the Hebrew conception of the prophet and his role, together with the actual experiences of individual prophets, particularly Jeremiah*"; 3) the ideas which underlay the system of sacrifices in Israel and 4) the wide-spread myth of the dying and rising god.⁵

As might be expected from so gifted an author this article is challenging and is suggestive of avenues of fruitful research. It is not our present purpose to consider each one of the suggested sources of the Servant idea. We wish to restrict our discussion to the last-mentioned source, namely, the myth of the dying and rising god and that particularly as this myth has found expression in the texts of Ras Shamra.

Before we turn to this discussion, however, there are one or two preliminary remarks which must be made. In the first place, we cannot agree that the Servant passages, and particularly Isaiah fifty-three, teach the idea that, if a man suffers willingly and faithfully, such suffering may be vicariously redemptive. For it is not the purpose of the chapter to teach a general principle concerning suffering, but rather to set forth, in most specific terms, the nature of the Servant's suffering. Now the sufferings of the Servant are utterly unique; they belong in a class all by themselves, and the reason for this uniqueness is to be found in the nature of the Person of the Servant. The Servant stands first of all in a unique and unparalleled relationship to the Lord. He is the Lord's, and the Lord has chosen and delighted in Him. He is the One in whom the Lord is to be glorified, who is to be the Lord's salvation unto the end of the earth, and who is to be exalted

³ *Idem.*

⁴ *Idem.*

⁵ *Op. cit.*, pp. 79-84.

and extolled and very high.⁶ No other figure in the entire Old Testament stands in such relationship to the Lord.

Hence, the sufferings of this unique Servant are themselves also unique. It is as a righteous One that He suffers, and thus He bears the iniquities of others. He does not make intercession for Himself, but He does make a prevailing and meritorious intercession for others. In this connection it is instructive to compare the prayer of Daniel, since Daniel is set forth in the Scripture in a most favorable light. Not one sin or blemish in his character is recorded, and likewise, no sin of the Servant is recorded. When, however, Daniel prayed, he said, "We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments".⁷ Daniel identifies himself with his people and makes intercession for himself and the nation. Not so the Servant. He makes no intercession for Himself, for He needs none. He is *the* righteous One, who "had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth".⁸ As a righteous One, He imparts righteousness to others in that He bears their iniquities.

In the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah we are dealing, therefore, with a specific case. It is the suffering of the Servant which is vicariously redemptive, and that suffering alone. We are not dealing in this chapter with general principles but with a specific instance, the recounting of the "good news" that the Servant has set His people free from the bondage of their iniquities.

Hence, since we are not here faced with a general principle of suffering we find ourselves again before the old question: Who is the Servant? The answer, we believe, is that He is the redeeming Messiah whom God had long ago promised to His people as their Deliverer from sin. In other words, the Servant is Jesus Christ.

With these preliminary thoughts in mind we may now turn to a consideration of the Baal myth as an alleged source for the Servant idea.

⁶ Isaiah 42:1; 49:3, 6; 52:13.

⁷ Daniel 9:5.

⁸ Isaiah 53:9b.

1

Dr. Hyatt accepts Torrey's translation of Isaiah 53:8a, "From dominion and rule he was plucked down, and who could make account of his line?"⁹ He then points out that, before his death, Baal occupied a position of rule over gods and men. Also, during the time that Baal was dead, Ashtar was secured to be a ruler. The suggestion is also made, based upon Langdon, that Tammuz may have been originally a deified king and that in some forms of the Tammuz myth the reigning king was identified with the god.

We must first ascertain whether Torrey's translation is correct. Underlying it is the assumption that מִשְׁפָּט, which he renders "rule", is employed in the sense of exercising judgment.¹⁰ Thus, according to this view, the Servant was taken away from the state of exercising judgment, that is, from the seat of rule and authority. This connotation is strengthened, thinks Torrey, by the natural translation of מִשְׁפָּט and לִקְחָהּ together, and also by the whole context. Humiliation and disgrace had not always been the lot of the Servant; at one time He had been a ruler, but had been dethroned.

It is true that the word מִשְׁפָּט may be used in the sense of "exercising judgment". In Deuteronomy 1:17 it seems to be employed with such a connotation.¹¹ In this verse the command is given not to show partiality in the exercise of judgment since judgment belongs to God. The meaning here appears to be that the decision which is rendered in judgment is actually from God. The prerogative of judgment is His, and, therefore, when men exercise judgment, they should remember this fact and not exhibit partiality.

If the word מִשְׁפָּט stood alone in Isaiah 53:8, it might be

⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 85; cf. Charles C. Torrey: *The Second Isaiah*, Edinburgh, 1928, pp. 253, 419 f.

¹⁰ "The words מִשְׁפָּט לִקְחָהּ can only mean, it seems to me, 'he was taken away from [exercising] judgment,' that is, from the seat of rule and authority" (*op. cit.*, p. 419).

¹¹ לֹא־תִקְרִיּוּ פָנִים בַּמִּשְׁפָּט כַּקָּטָן כַּגֹּדֶל תִּשְׁקָעוּן לֹא תִגְוְרוּ מִפְּנֵי־אִישׁ כִּי הַמִּשְׁפָּט לֹא־לֵהֵם הוּא וְהַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר יִקְשֶׁה מִכֶּם תִּקְרִיבוּן אֵלַי וְשִׁמְעֵתִיו: In place of וְשִׁמְעֵתִיו Codex B of the LXX reads the singular κριweis.

difficult to determine its precise connotation. But when the word appears in connection with עָצָר its force is clear. It has reference to an unjust "judicial decision", and, as North has recently pointed out, is used in this sense elsewhere.¹²

The word עָצָר means restraint or coercion. It is true that in I Sam. 9:17 the verb is used in the sense of exercising restraint in ruling over a people.¹³ The noun itself, however, is not thus used, and in Isaiah 53:8 it cannot possibly bear the connotation of dominion or rule. North has given a most suggestive and helpful discussion of the word and presents a very good case for taking it in the sense of arrest.¹⁴ The thought of the passage may then be expressed by saying that the Servant was taken away from an oppressive judgment. At any rate, the word עָצָר implies that restraint of some kind, probably the physical restraint involved in connection with the judicial sentence, had been placed upon the Servant.

The passage, therefore, is not speaking of a condition of dominion and rule which had once been the Servant's and from which He had been removed. It is speaking rather of a restraint and judgment from which He had been taken away to death.

Consequently, at this point there is certainly no connection between the Ras Shamra myth and the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. It is quite probable that the regal element in the Messianic concept is present in this remarkable passage concerning the Servant, but it does not seem to appear in verse 8a. The oppression and judgment mentioned in this verse simply serve as a specific instance of the general proposition stated in verse seven and found in the words, "he was oppressed and he was afflicted".

¹² Christopher R. North: *The Suffering Servant In Deutero-Isaiah: An Historical and Critical Study*, London, 1948, pp. 124 f.

¹³ וְשִׁמּוֹתָ לְרֹאשׁוֹ וְלְרֹאשׁוֹתָיִם וְנִהְיָה עֲנָו וְנִהְיָה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר אָמַרְתִּי אֵלֶיךָ זֶה יַעֲזָר בְּעַמִּי: The LXX (Codex B) reads οὗτος ἄρξει ἐν τῷ λαῷ μου. Some cursive manuscripts (bioc₂ of Brooke, McLean and Thackeray) read κατάρξει. In I Kings 12:24r, we find κατάρξω ὑμᾶς ἐν σκορπίοις as a translation of אֲיַשְׁרֵךְ אֶתְכֶם בְּעַקְרֵי בָּיִם. In the present passage I think that it probably means no more than ἄρξει.

¹⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 124.

2

Another suggested point of dependence is thought to be found in the statements concerning the Servant's death and the death of the god. In all the versions of the myth the god is put to death. In the Ras Shamra text it is Mot, the god of death, who is the agent of Baal's death. Let us examine the matter more carefully.

In approaching the Ras Shamra texts we shall seek first to examine the passages which tell of Baal's death and subsequent life. We may then offer some remarks on the nature and purpose of these texts and finally discuss the question of their relationship with the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah.

In 67:VI:6-25¹⁵ we are told of El's mourning for Baal when tidings are brought to him of the latter's death. Baal has been found in the "charm of the land of Dbr" (In 'my . arš . [d]br), in the beautiful fields (lit. at the beauty of the fields) of Šhlmmt (lysmt. šd. šhlmmt). Then follows the account of the finding of Baal (lines 8-10):

mğny . lb'l. n[p]l.¹⁶ la
rš . mt . aliyn b'l.
hlq . zbl . b'l . arš.

We came upon Baal. He is fallen to
the earth. Aliyn Baal is dead.
Perished the Prince, Baal (Lord) of the
earth.

This announcement is followed by the mourning of lṭpn . il. He descends from his throne (lksi) to his footstool (lhdm) and from his footstool to the earth and then engages in a mourning rite. In the midst of mourning he cries (lines 23-25):

b'l mt . my . lim. bn
dgn. my. hmlt. aṭr
b'l. ard. barš

Baal is dead. Woe,¹⁷ O, people of the son
of Dgn. Woe, multitude of Athr —
Baal. I shall go down in the earth.

¹⁵ I have used the numbering given in Cyrus H. Gordon: *Ugaritic Handbook*, Rome, 1947.

¹⁶ H. L. Ginsberg: *The Ugarit Texts* (כחבי אוגריית), Jerusalem, 1936, p. 55, comments on n[p]l: כלומר חלל. He appeals to Judges 3:25 הַנְּזֵה יְהוָה מֵאֶרֶץ מִתְּאֲרָצָה מֵאֶרֶץ מִתְּאֲרָצָה. Note that Ugaritic here employs the preposition, whereas the Hebrew has the locative.

¹⁷ Following Gordon (*op. cit.*, III, p. 245) I have taken *my* as an interjection. Ginsberg: *op. cit.*, pp. 55, 56, however, translates מִי גֵרֹדִי בְנֵי דָגָן. Ivan Engnell: *Studies in Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East*, Uppsala, 1943, p. 120, translates, "Where are the people of bn Dagan, where the crowd of Ba'lu's temple?" He regards *my* as a variant of 'א.

In 62:I:8-29 it is recounted that Baal's devoted sister Anat carries the corpse to Saphon and buries it. The following lines are of particular interest (12-20).

'ms m' . ly ¹⁸ . aliyn. b'l	"Load, I pray, on me Aliyn Baal.
tšm' . nrt. ilm. špš	There hearkens the light of the gods, Sun,
tšu aliyn . b'l. lktp	she lifts Aliyn Baal, on the shoulders
'nt. ktšth. tš'lynh	of Anat she places him. She raises him up
bšrrt . sp'n tbkynh	on the heights of Saphon. She weeps for
	him,
wtqbrnh . tštnn . bħrt	and she buries him. She places him in
	the grave,
ilm . arš. tħbħ. šb'm	of the gods of the earth. She slays seventy
rumm . kgmn . aliyn	buffaloes as a GMN for Aliyn
b'l . ¹⁹ tħbħ . šb'm. alpm.	Baal. She slays seventy oxen.

The text continues with a list of the various animals which Anat slays by way of memorial for Baal. Among the various items which are offered are the following: buffaloes (rumm); oxen (alpm); small cattle (šin); deer (aylm); wild goats (y'lm) and, possibly, deer (yħmrm?).

Anat proclaims to El that Baal is dead, and El then commands Asherah of the Sea to give one of her sons to be king. She suggests that they should make Athtar king, and this is followed by the account of Athtar's ascent to the throne (49:I:28-37):

apnk . 'ttr . 'rç	Thereupon Athtar Ariz
y'l . bšrrt. špn	ascends to the heights of Saphon.
yħb . lkħt aliyn	He sits upon the throne of Aliyn
b'l . p'nh. ltmgyn	Baal. His feet verily reach
hdm rišh. lymgy	the footstool; his head verily reaches
apsh. wy'n. 'ttr. 'rç	its (<i>i. e.</i> , the throne's) top. And Athtar
	Ariz answered,
lamlk. bšrrt . špn	Verily, I am king in the heights of Saphon
yrd . 'ttr . 'rç . yrd	Athtar Ariz goes down, he goes down
lkħt . ²⁰ aliyn . b'l	from the throne of Aliyn Baal
[w] ymlk . barš. il . klh	[and] rules in the land of El, all of it.

¹⁸ Ginsberg (*op. cit.*, p. 57) takes ly in the sense עלי.

¹⁹ Translated by Ginsberg (*op. cit.*, p. 57) הטבח שבעים ראם כנמול אל'אין. The precise significance of GMN is not clear, but the word evidently has reference to a memorial for the dead. Montgomery and Harris: *The Ras Shamra Mythological Texts*, Philadelphia, 1935, p. 93 translate "to cover over" and suggest a comparison with the Akkadian kamānu.

²⁰ Engnell (*op. cit.*, p. 122) translates "ascends, he ascends to the throne",

Mot then tells Anat how he slew Baal (49:II:15–24):

an . itlk. wašd . kl gr. lkbd . arš . kl gb'	I was going and hunting (?) every mountain in the midst of the land, every hill
lkbd. šdm npš . ḥsr̄t	in the midst of the fields. A soul was lacking
bn . nš̄m . npš . hmlt. arš . mgt. ln'my. arš	among men. A soul of the multitudes of the earth. I came to the pleasant places of the land
dbr. ysmt . šd . šḥlmm̄t ngš. ank. ²² aliyn b'l	of Dbr, the beauties of the fields of Shlmm̄t I meet Aliyn Baal
'dbnn ank. (k)imr. bpy klli . b ṭbr̄ngy. ḥtu hw.	I prepare him like a lamb in my mouth; like a kid in my mouth; crushed is he.

After a time Anat takes her vengeance upon Mot and, after slaying him, plants his remains in the fields.

It now appears that Baal is again alive. The evidence for this is that El dreams of the heavens raining oil and the valleys flowing with honey. Hence, he exclaims (49:III:6, 7):

šmm. šmn . tmṭrn nḥlm. tlk . nbtm.	The heavens (with) oil are raining. The wadies flow (with) honey.
wid' . kḥy . aliyn b'l kiṭ . zbl . b'l . arš	And I know that alive (is) Aliyn Baal, That there exists the prince, Baal of the earth.

El then tells the good news to Anat, who carries it to the Sun, and asks where Baal is. The Sun finds Baal engaged in vicious combat with Mot (49:VI:16–22):

yt'n. kgmrm mt 'z . b'l . 'z . yngh̄n krumm . mt . 'z . b'l They fight like Gmrm Mot is strong; Baal is strong; they gore like buffaloes. Mot is strong; Baal
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and assumes that Athtar Ariz is speaking of himself in the third person. Ginsberg (*op. cit.*, p. 60) translates לִכְסֵם לְרֵד, but it is difficult to tell from this what force he gives to the preposition. It seems to me that this is a case where the preposition *l* should be translated *from*, a phenomenon which also appears in the Old Testament, e. g., Gen. 3:24. See Gordon: *op. cit.*, I, p. 81 for an excellent discussion of this point.

²² It is interesting to note the interchange of the personal pronouns *an* and *ank*. The word *ngš* I have rendered "I meet", which seems preferable to "I chew". Cf. Gordon: *op. cit.*, III, p. 249. The rendering "to chew" is given by Engnell: *op. cit.*, p. 122; Gordon: *The Loves and Wars of Baal and Anat*, Princeton, 1943, p. 9; Ginsberg: *op. cit.*, p. 62. translates אוֹכֵל חֶדְשֵׁרֶק גֹּשׁ, שאֲנִי מַחְבְּרוֹ גֹּשׁ, אֶכֶל בְּאַרְמִית אֶרְצֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵלִית, and comments, Montgomery and Harris: *op. cit.*, suggest comparison with נָגַשׁ "to oppress".

'z . ynṭkn . kbṭnm	is strong. They bite like serpents
mt. 'z. b'l . 'z . ymṣḥn	Mot is strong; Baal is strong. They trample
klsmm . mt . ql	like steeds. Mot has fallen;
b'l ḥ ql .	Baal has fallen.

At this point it is necessary for Šapšu, the Sun, to intervene and warn Mot, lest El remove his throne.

It will now be possible to institute a brief comparison between the account of Aliyn Baal and the picture of the Servant of the Lord, given in Isaiah fifty-three.

It is widely maintained that the death and resurrection of Baal was an annual occurrence. If this interpretation were correct, it would of course offer a striking difference between the death of Baal and the death of the Servant. For the death of the Servant was a unique death, whereas that of Baal was an annual event. Gordon, however, has clearly shown that this interpretation is incorrect.²² Hence, we may regard the celebration of Baal's death as annual, but not the death itself.

When Baal dies, his body is not immediately buried, but is left in the open fields. It is apparently by chance that messengers have found him, "fallen upon the ground". Here again, there is nothing in Isaiah fifty-three which can be compared with this conception. The death of the Servant and His burial are linked in the closest connection. "And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death" (Isaiah 53:9a). There is not a hint in this passage that a considerable period elapsed between the Servant's death and burial. In fact, the mention of the grave before the death seems entirely to preclude such a possibility.

The Sun must lift Baal's corpse upon the shoulders of Anat who carries him to the heights of the mountain Saphon and there buries him in the graves of the gods of earth. It should be noted that Baal's burial is quite an honorable one. He is

²² Gordon: *Ugaritic Literature*, Rome, 1949, pp. 3 f. Even if the conclusions of the Scandinavian scholars, Grønbech, Hvidberg and Engnell are correct, namely, that we have in these texts a writing down of an annual cult festival, I do not see that they really militate against Gordon's thesis.

buried upon the sacred mountain. Whatever may be the precise significance of the term *ilm. arš*, it at least seems to indicate that the burial was an honorable one.²³

How different this is from the statement of the Servant's death! His grave was not made with the "gods of the earth" nor was it upon a sacred mountain. His grave was appointed among the wicked. It was a dishonorable burial.²⁴

It should be noted that Anat now proceeds to offer sacrifices as a memorial for Baal. This is in most striking contrast with what is said of the Servant, "And among his generation, who considered that he was cut off from the land of the living?"²⁵ Special memorial sacrifices were offered for Baal; no one took thought of the Servant's death.

Dr. Hyatt remarks, "The connection of sacrifice with the death of the god is important for the Suffering Servant idea, for the death of the Servant forms a sacrifice, as noted above" (*op. cit.*, p. 85). It should be remarked, however, that there is no *essential* or *necessary* connection between the death of Baal and the sacrifices mentioned. The nature of these sacrifices can be ascertained only by a careful examination of the context. When this is done, it becomes clear that they are offered as a result of Anat's mourning. Before carrying Baal to the mountain, Anat had drunk tears like wine until her weeping was finished (62:I:8, 9). At the burial also she had wept for him. Then follows the account of the slaughter of animals. In each case the verb *ṭbh* is employed, and in each case seventy animals are slain. Furthermore, in each case the

²³ Literally, the words mean, "gods of the earth". Gordon: *Ugaritic Handbook*, III, p. 210, suggests "ghosts of the earth".

²⁴ This fact is emphasized by the marked contrast of the innocence of the Servant Himself.

²⁵ Isaiah 53:8b. The meaning is essentially the same if we should translate with Driver, "and who doth consider his state?" He refers to the Akkadian *dūru*, "lasting state, permanent condition", and to the Arabic *ṣūḥ* "change of fortune", "turn". The meaning might then be paraphrased, "Although He was taken away from an unjust judgment to death, who gives any consideration to His fortunes?" To my mind, the principal objection to this translation is the difficulty caused by the following *ʾā* clause. See G. R. Driver: "Linguistic And Textual Problems: Isaiah XL-LXVI", in *The Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol. XXXVI (1935), p. 403.

formula, *kgmn. aliyn. b'l*, is used. The precise significance of *gmn* is not known, but the context shows that it must mean a memorial or sacrifice for the dead person. The point to be stressed, then, is that the death of Baal is not itself a sacrifice.

When the Servant dies, no one offers memorials for Him. Rather, it is His death itself which is a sacrifice for the sins of others. There simply is no connection in thought at this point between the Servant's death as a sacrifice and the memorials which Anat offers for Baal. The righteous Servant justifies the many who are unrighteous, and this He does by bearing their iniquities. This thought differs *toto coelo* from anything that is found in the Baal myth.

A word must also be said concerning the nature of Baal's death. As to its manner, we really know nothing. Engnell, however, calls attention to a mourning rite in which, he believes, the destruction of Baal's body is represented materially. The destruction of each limb symbolizes the destruction of distinct parts of nature. The actor in this revolting scene is *Lṭpn 'il dp'id*, who, after the completion of his gruesome task, cries, "Baal is dead".²⁶

It may well be, as Engnell suggests, that the one represented by the phrase, *Lṭpn 'il dp'id* is the king, El. At any rate, this description occurs after the announcement of Baal's death. Baal's body is dismembered and ploughed. It is not until later that Anat carries the body to the heights of Saphon and buries it there. In connection with the Servant, however, the death and burial, we may remark again, are most closely connected.

The only lines in the poem, it seems to me, which shed some light upon the manner of Baal's death are found in the words of Mot, who relates that he met Baal and prepared him as a lamb in his mouth, and then asserts, "Crushed is he". Whatever the precise significance of these words may be, there is certainly nothing in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah to compare with them.

There are two emphases in the Servant passages which in this connection must be stressed in particular. One is the Servant's patience in suffering and His willingness to suffer.

²⁶ Text 67:VI:11-25.

There is nothing to parallel this emphasis in the account of Baal's death. The closest approach to it appears in Baal's announcement that he is the servant of Mot, "Thy servant am I and thy eternal slave".²⁷ These words can be little more than a formula, however, for after his return to life Baal is found engaging in most vicious combat with Mot.

The second emphasis to be stressed is the innocency of the Servant. Of particular interest is the statement "He had done no violence" (Isaiah 53:9b). This stands out in marked contrast with the description of Mot and Baal in combat, "They fight — they bite — they trample". It certainly cannot be said of Baal that he has done no violence.

That which rules out the Ras Shamra texts as the background for the Servant passages is the nature of Baal and of the Servant and the purpose of their death. Baal is not a real figure, and did not really die.²⁸ The Servant, however, is a real figure who is to appear once for all upon the scene of history.

Baal is a nature god. His death, apparently, is unavoidable. It is, at most, a symbolical or figurative death, and brings no salvation to man. The Servant, however, in His death, offers Himself as a sacrifice for sin. The sins of the many unrighteous are laid upon the Servant who is righteous. It will not even do to declare that the Servant is a soteriological figure and that Baal is merely a nature god. The Servant is, of course, a soteriological figure, but more than that, He is a unique soteriological figure with whom none other can be compared. For, by His death, He has accomplished a *spiritual* salvation. He has delivered His people from the guilt of their sins and has imparted to them His own righteousness. If we are to seek for the antecedents of this teaching we shall find them, not in the mythological poems of Ras Shamra, but in special divine revelation.

²⁷ Text 67:II:12, 19, 20 'bdk . an. wd'lmk.

²⁸ The participants in the ancient cult festival, if such an interpretation be correct, were giving a symbolical representation of the changes of nature. To what extent they themselves actually believed in the objective metaphysical existence of Baal can of course never be determined. One thing is surely clear; the seriousness of belief in the reality of the Servant which pervades the description in Isaiah 53 finds no parallel in Ras Shamra.

3

When El dreams that the heavens rain oil and the valleys flow with honey, he knows that Baal is once more alive, and he rejoices in this fact. But, although the evidences for Baal's existence abound, where is Baal himself? The sun declares her intention of looking for him, "And I shall seek Aliyn Baal".²⁹ When she finds him, Baal is engaged in ferocious combat with Mot, and the Sun must warn Mot to desist, lest El deprive him of his throne.

How different this is from the account of the Servant! In the first place the living again of the Servant is intimately connected with His death. In 53:10 the fact is stated that the ultimate cause of the Servant's death is Jehovah. The interpretation of the Servant's death is then given, and it is stated as the protasis of a conditional sentence, "When his soul shall make a trespass offering". The apodosis follows with a grand declaration of the Servant's living again. It is asserted that the Servant will see a seed and that He will prolong days. In 53:12 He is set forth as the greatest of victors, "He shall divide the spoil among the strong".

There is one final point which should also be stressed. The prophet was not merely setting forth a picture or complex of ideas. He was writing with the deep conviction that the Servant was a real person who would one day stand upon earth and die at the hands of sinful men for the salvation of sinners. The mission of the Servant was a subject which the prophet understood, not because, after having drawn from this and that source and after having added something of his own, he had then pieced it all together, and produced the Servant-picture. It was, rather, a subject which had been communicated to the prophet directly by God.

Without doubt the crude mythology of the ancient world found its way into the thought and practice of Israel just as crass superstition is to be found among Christian people today. And with this crude mythology the prophets of Israel were surely familiar. Their attitude toward it however was one of disgust and revulsion, and at times of sheer mockery. They

²⁹ Text 49:IV:44 wabqt . aliyn . b'l.

did not choose from this background of mythology ideas which they thought were good and useful for their own purposes. Nor did they regard this mythology as in any sense a source from which they might derive ideas and then purify these ideas in order to make them more suitable for their teaching.

The prophets believed themselves to be recipients of a message which had come from God, and we believe that this psychological conviction upon their part was correct. God revealed His saving truth to men who lived in a world where the grossest of mythological conceptions were held. It is to be expected that the form of words in which this revelation was couched might have a superficial and accidental resemblance to the ideas which were present in the world at the time. The content of the revelation, however, was as light shining in the darkness; it was utterly unique.

An example should make this point clear. There are, of course, superficial resemblances between the Servant passages and the Ras Shamra epics. The Servant died and Baal died. The Servant lives again, and so does Baal. The resemblance, however, is merely accidental. Belief in immortality has always been held among men. For that matter, belief in life after death such as appears in the Tammuz myths has probably also always been held among men. Special revelation was not made to men in a vacuum. It was made to men who lived in a world bound by error's chains.

Whereas, however, there may be accidental resemblances between the Servant passages and the ideas which were present in the world at the time when these passages were revealed, there is no essential resemblance, but rather a profound difference. The righteous Servant suffering for the sins of those who are unrighteous is a conception which could never have been conceived by the unaided mind of man. For this conception involves the truth that salvation from the guilt of sin is by grace and not by man. It is a conception which is to be found only in the Bible. In the religions of antiquity, and, for that matter, in those of the modern world, it does not appear. If, therefore, we are to look for the sources of the idea of the

Suffering Servant, we shall find them not in the religions of antiquity, but in a special revelation from God. "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (II Peter 1:21).

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