

Isaiah Series Part 20

The Servant and the Christian Life



Introduction

“Chosen” / “Predestination” language in the Bible has for ages perplexed its readers. Perhaps one of the key reasons is... many see this language as purely New Testament (Pauline) teaching.

The simple truth regarding the New Testament theological statements contained therein, all find their origin in the Old Testament.

Both Peter and Paul use this language frequently and it's obvious that their understanding comes from the “Servant Songs” in Isaiah.

New Testament Passages

²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.
³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. – **Romans 8:29-30**

⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will...
- **Ephesians 1:4-5**

N.T. Wright

How Wright handles “predestination” in Romans 8

In his comments on **Romans 8:18–30**, Wright argues that “foreknowledge/predestination” is **God “setting people apart in advance for particular purposes”** (i.e., vocational and teleological, not a mechanistic determinism).

How Wright handles “predestination” in Ephesians 1

In a public discussion tied to his book ***The Vision of Ephesians***, Wright says Paul’s language about “predestination” in Ephesians is “**vocational before it’s destitutional**”—the church is chosen **to live for God’s glory and purpose in the present**.

N.T. Wright

For Wright, these verses are **not primarily about an abstract decree determining who gets saved, but about God's eternal purpose to create a people whose present-life vocation reflects his holiness.**

Wright frequently summarizes this as:
Election is vocational before it is destitutional.

The Servant's Song as Theology

1. The Servant is “chosen” for a purpose

Isaiah doesn't introduce the Servant as a curiosity; he introduces the Servant as **YHWH's chosen agent** who will *do* something in the world.

Isaiah 42:1 — “Behold my servant... my chosen... I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.”

Chosen → Spirit-endowed → mission (justice, the nations).

That's the same moral-teleological shape as Ephesians 1:4:

Chosen → to be holy/blameless before Him (i.e., a people who embody God's character publicly).

The Servant's Song as Theology

2. “Formed” and “called” from the womb: purpose precedes performance

Isaiah repeatedly stresses that the Servant's vocation is rooted in God's prior intention.

Isaiah 49:1, 5–6 — called “from the womb,” “formed... to bring Jacob back,” and also made “a light for the nations.”

Isaiah 44:2, 24; 49:5 (same theme) — God forms his servant for his work. That's a conceptual bridge to Paul's “before the foundation of the world” language: not the same phrase, but the same point:

God's purpose comes first; the life of obedience flows from it.

The Servant's Song as Theology

3. The Servant's holiness is missional: he embodies God “before him” and before the world

Ephesians 1:4 aims at “holy and blameless **before him.**” In Isaiah, the Servant stands **in loyal obedience to YHWH** and **as a public sign to the nations.**
Isaiah 42:6–7 — “I will take you by the hand... I will give you as a covenant... a light for the nations.”

The Servant is not only a covenant-keeper; he is **covenant-in-person**, the means by which God's covenant purpose reaches outward.

So “holy and blameless before him” isn't private perfectionism; it's **covenant faithfulness with public fruit.**

The Servant's Song as Theology

4. The Servant's "predestined" path runs through suffering for others

Romans 8:29–30 climaxes with being “conformed to the image of his Son.” Isaiah shows the Servant’s obedience taking the shape of **suffering love**, which is exactly the “image” Paul has in mind (cross-shaped sonship).

Isaiah 50:4–7 — obedient listening, suffering, steadfast trust.

Isaiah 52:13–53:12 — the Servant bears sin, carries griefs, is vindicated (“shall see... be satisfied”).

Wright’s move is: **the people “in Christ” share the Messiah’s vocation**, and therefore suffering is not a sign you missed election; it’s often the place where vocation is forged (Romans 8:17–18 sits right next to 8:28–30).

The Servant's Song as Theology

5. The Servant expands into a Servant-people

Isaiah keeps a deliberate tension: sometimes the Servant is **Israel** (collective), sometimes an **individual representative** who does what Israel could not.

Isaiah 49:3 calls the Servant “Israel,” yet the Servant also **restores Israel** (49:5–6). That only makes sense if the Servant is **Israel-in-one**: a faithful representative.

That maps neatly onto Paul:

Christ is the faithful Israelite / true image-bearer

The church is chosen “**in him**” and therefore shares his Servant vocation

So Ephesians 1 (“chosen in Christ... to be holy”) reads like the **Servant vocation applied to the Messiah's people.**

The Servant's Song as Theology

6. The end goal is new creation life

Isaiah 40–55 moves from return/restoration to a renewed world.

Isaiah 54–55 — covenant renewal and creation language together.

Isaiah 61:1–3 — Spirit-anointed mission producing “oaks of righteousness” (public holiness).

That's Romans 8 again: not merely individual salvation, but **God's new-creation project** with a people shaped to embody it.

Chosen for the World

From Isaiah's Servant to Paul's Vision of the Church

I. The Servant Is Chosen *for Mission* (Isaiah 42; 49)

Key texts: Isaiah 42:1–7; 49:1–6

Core Observations

The Servant is explicitly “chosen”

“My chosen, in whom my soul delights” (42:1)

Election language appears **before** obedience or suffering

The Servant is Spirit-endowed for a task

“I have put my Spirit upon him” (42:1)

Election is **empowering**, not merely selecting

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Core Observations

The Servant's holiness is missional

Justice, light, covenant, nations (42:6; 49:6)

Faithfulness to God is meant to be *seen*

Theological Point:

In Isaiah, being “chosen” never ends with privilege; it always moves outward in vocation.

Conclusion

Isaiah's Servant reveals that God chooses and forms a faithful representative through suffering for the sake of the world; Paul proclaims that in Christ, the church now shares that same Servant-shaped vocation—being formed into the Son's image for holy, persevering witness until glory.