

62 The Servant of the Lord Introduced

the years. From the viewpoint of responsibility, the entire nation of Israel is God's Servant.

Second, however, there is the aspect of accomplishment. Like all nations, Israel included all sorts of people, both good and bad. As we read through the Old Testament, we find a great amount of denunciation of those Israelites who were wicked. Such individuals could hardly share in the accomplishment of God's work. How large a part of Israel is to be considered a part of the Servant who will actually perform the work? Will the fulfillment of Israel's responsibility involve nine-tenths of the nation? Will it involve half of the nation? Will it involve a fourth of the nation? Or is it even possible that the great work for which God has called Israel into existence is actually to be done by one individual, who is himself an Israelite and therefore can represent the nation in the fulfillment of the task? Answers to these questions become clear as the concept of the Servant is gradually developed and clarified in later passages.

Thus it is altogether proper to speak of Israel as the Servant of the LORD, because Israel has the responsibility to carry out the work of the Servant. Yet one must keep in mind the possibility that careful examination of the passages will show that, when it comes to accomplishment, the term describes a remarkable individual; he is himself an Israelite, so that he can represent Israel in fulfilling its responsibility, yet he possesses characteristics that could not conceivably describe an entire nation. Where responsibility is in mind, the term may describe Israel. Where accomplishment is in mind, each passage must be examined in order to determine whether there emerges a picture of a large group of people or of an individual.

Although most of the references to the Servant of the LORD are rather short, there are a few passages of greater length. The first of these, which consists of the first seven verses of Isaiah 42, will be examined in our next chapter.