

Robert Vannoy, Major Prophets, Lecture 14

Isaiah 40 Overture, Servant of the Lord Theme

Isaiah 40 Overture Introduction

See on your sheet, Isaiah chapter 40 is the “Overture,” following through with MacRae’s suggestion here of comparing this material with a musical composition. Chapter 40 is a unit in its own right, somewhat distinct from what follows. And MacRae has suggested that it compares to the overture of a musical composition in the sense that it touches on a number of the themes that reccur in subsequent chapters. It introduces these themes. Then in subsequent chapters these themes are further developed. But in chapter 40, everything seems to be quite general. It’s not nearly as explicit, or specific, as much of the material that follows; it’s quite general. God says he’s going to deliver, but the chapter doesn’t seem to have exclusive reference to one specific deliverance; it’s more general. There are people who are suffering, people who are in misery; and the idea is they will be delivered from their suffering. Now that would apply to people in exile, but it also could apply to people who are suffering from the results of sin—God is going to deliver them. In other words, he will deal with the sin problem and provide a means of deliverance from it. Of course, ultimately that comes through the coming of Christ. So there is a certain joy involved in the chapter, and that’s joy over the coming of Christ, as well as joy concerning deliverance from exile. All of that seems to be in view in chapter 40.

So, it’s not surprising that chapter 40 is one of the great chapters of the Bible. It certainly is a chapter that is often read by many people, particularly people who may be in misery or in suffering; people who are wondering what God is doing can find great comfort in this chapter.

Isaiah 40:1-2 Comfort to Jerusalem

Let’s look at the first two verses. “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been

completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.” Comfort is to come to Jerusalem. Jerusalem has been suffering. But now she is to be comforted; she is told her warfare is accomplished. That is, her hard service, her compulsory labor, her service of war have been accomplished. The last phrase, “She has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins,” that’s usually understood as punishment—she has received double for all her sins.

“Double”(?) or Substitute/Equivalent

But look at your citations—MacRae has an interesting suggestion there on page 29. Taken from pages 40-43 of his *Gospel of Isaiah*, which I might mention is on this section of Isaiah—a very useful little book. “A rather unusual interpretation has been the assumption that ‘double’ here means ‘double blessing,’ and that the phrase is a promise that Israel would receive double blessing in spite of all her sin. Such an interpretation lacks philological justification. There is no basis for introducing the idea of ‘blessing’ into the word ‘double.’ The solution of the difficulty lies in the recognition that the Hebrew word used here, one of several that are commonly translated ‘double,’ can properly be considered as similar to the English word ‘double’ when used to represent a person who looks so much like another that it is difficult to distinguish them.”

Saddam Hussein is said to have had a number of doubles, I understand. People who look so much like him that you never know where he is because he has a double. Each of them is but a double of the other, but neither is to be considered his equal or twice the other. It might be clear to render the Hebrew term “equivalent,” “counterpart,” or “substitute.” The phrase looks forward to the time when God will declare that the equivalent for the sin of all believers has been paid. No man could pay this penalty; only the divine servant of the Lord could do it. So you see MacRae understands the statement there, “She has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins” --the idea that she has received from the Lord’s hand an equivalent, a counterpart, a substitute for all her sins, and pointing forward to Christ. But in any case, God says his people are to be

comforted. That may be viewed as having some connection with deliverance from the exile, from Babylon, but I think more basically, and importantly, it has reference to deliverance from sin through Christ. Notice, I think MacRae's suggestion is certainly worthy of consideration, particularly because of that phrase in the middle of the verse, "Her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for." "Her iniquity is pardoned." Well, equivalent or substitute, a person equivalent to Israel has been substituted for her, and atoned for her sin, is the idea that he is suggesting. In other words, if you simply limit this to return from exile, it hardly means that her iniquity is pardoned. There seems to be more involved here.

Isaiah 40:3-5 God's Deliverance

Verses 3-5. The idea of deliverance is further stressed: "A voice of one calling: 'In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.'" Again the idea of deliverance—God's deliverance is at hand, a way is to be made straight. That could apply to the exile—in other words, the people in Babylon see the hills and valleys and difficulties of all sorts that separate them from their homeland being removed, enabling them to go back.

John The Baptist Reference [Lk 3:4-6; Mt 3:1-3; Mk 1:2-3; Jn 1:19-23]

But the interesting thing is, in all four of the Gospels, this section is taken as a reference to John the Baptist. "The voice of him who cries in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way of the Lord.'" Look at Luke 3:4-6, "As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: 'A voice of one calling in the desert, "Prepare the way for the Lord," make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all mankind will

see God's salvation.” In the context in Luke, that is speaking to the ministry of John the Baptist. Verse 3 says, “He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins; as is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet.” Matthew 3:3. Matthew 3:1 says, “In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.’ This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: ‘A voice of one calling in the desert, “Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.”’” Mark 1:2 and 3, “A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’” John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance. And then John 1:19-23, “This is the witness of John.” Down to verse 23, “He said, ‘I am not.’ Are you the Prophet? He answered, ‘No.’ Finally they said, ‘Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?’ John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, ‘I am the voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’”

So when you get to verse 5 and it says, “The glory of the Lord shall be revealed,” that’s certainly the climax and what can you think of but the Incarnation? “The glory of the Lord shall be revealed.” John 1:14, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” John announced the way of the coming of Christ.

Isaiah 40:6-8 Message to Be “Cried Out”

Now, when you get to Isaiah 40:6-8, there is a complete change in idea: “A voice says, ‘Cry out.’ And I said, ‘What shall I cry?’ ‘All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.’” The basic idea here is the failure of everything human and earthly to endure. In contrast to that, God’s Word stands forever.

Now, that's very general; it can be applied to many situations. Perhaps, to the people in exile, you could be thinking of the greatness of Babylonian power. What Isaiah is saying is human power is transient, it's illusory; all flesh is grass: it withers and fades, but the Word of the Lord stands forever.

Isaiah 40:9 God Brings Deliverance

Verse 9 reverts to the idea of comfort to Jerusalem because God will bring deliverance. I think, without getting into details of this, I think the NIV is a better translation there. Notice the King James says, "O Zion, that brings good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain," whereas if you look at the NIV, verse 9, "You who bring good tidings *to* Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings *to* Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, 'Here is your God!'" Comfort Jerusalem because God is bringing deliverance.

Isaiah 40:10-11 Greatness of His Deliverance

Verses 10 and 11 is the greatness of his deliverance. "See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young." The Lord is strong; he will accomplish what he desires. The King James says, "The Lord will come with a strong hand; his arm shall rule for him." So he is strong; he is able to accomplish what he sets out to do. But towards his own people he is like a shepherd, "who gathers the lambs in his arms, carries them in his bosom; he gently leads those that are with young." So, this speaks of the gentleness of his deliverance.

Isaiah 40:12 Transition

Then with verse 12 you again get a short transition. I want to give you a handout here and put an overhead up for the rest of the chapter. Verse 12 says, "Who has

measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance?” You get a sharp transition of thought between 11 and 12. Eleven talks about the shepherd carrying the lambs in his arms, gently leading those with young. Here you come in with a completely different idea: the gentleness of the Lord stressed in 11, but that’s not a sign of weakness.

Verse 12 and following compare the Lord with the gods of the heathen and point out how great his power is, particularly his creative power. Certainly that idea of the omnipotent power of God is one particularly important to people who are suffering. It would be important to people in exile; it would be important to people in Isaiah’s own day, in the time of Manasseh; it’s important to people in any time of difficulty and suffering. There is a tendency, when you’re in that kind of a situation, to think God doesn’t exist, or that he’s powerless.

There are a number of passages in the material that follows chapter 40 that stresses the greatness and the power of God. Now, if you look closely at the structure of verses 12 through 31, I think you can see that the chapter is very carefully constructed. Even though that structure may be obscured by shifting from one idea to another idea to another idea and back to a first idea—there’s a lot of movement like that—the chapter is not haphazard. It requires a fair amount of study and work to discover the structure and the relationship of the parts to each other. But remember the analogy with the musical composition. You can listen to music and be moved by the course of the music without really understanding anything about how carefully the writer structured things in order to give that force, to give that impression. So that without consciously realizing how carefully this has been structured, you can read through it and be impacted by it. But when you sit down and analyze it, you find that there’s very careful structure behind it.

Who Created the Universe?

Now, if you look at that handout, you notice that in verse 12 you have the

question, “Who created the universe?” And there are five aspects to the question and all have the answer: God. See, “Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance?” You have five phrases there. Who has done all these things? Who created the universe? All have the answer: God. That’s the first strophe.

Isaiah 40:13-14 Who Was God’s Helper at Creation?

The second one, both of which have to do with nature--and the second one is chapter 40, verses 13 and 14--there the question is: “Who was God’s helper at Creation?” And again you get five aspects to the question. See there’s a structure there—five and five. But here, all have the answer: “No one.” “Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed him as his counselor? Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding?” Again this breaks down into five phrases. All with the answer: “No one.”

Isaiah 40:15-17 The Nations are as Nothing

Then you move to the third strophe, which is the first climax, verses 15-17, “The nations are as nothing.” You make a transition; the first two strophes deal with nature: “Who created the universe; who was God’s helper at Creation?” The third strophe moves to history, so that in verses 15 to 17 you read, “Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust. Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings. Before him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing.” So the nations are as nothing. Babylon may look powerful, particularly if you are in exile in Babylon, but before the power of God, nations are as nothing. They are as nothing; they are like a drop in a bucket; they are counted as

small dust on the balance—see those kinds of images point out the insignificance of the power of nations.

Isaiah 40:18-20 Theme of Idolatry and the Futility of Idolatry

If you go on the fourth strophe, verses 18-20 you have radical change of idea again. You move to this theme of idolatry and the futility of idolatry. Idols don't move; chapter 40, verses 18-20, "To whom, then, will you compare God? What image will you compare him to? As for an idol, a craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it. A man too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot. He looks for a skilled craftsman to set up an idol that will not topple." Notice that phrase is introduced by this question, "To whom will you compare?" To whom will you compare God? Or what likeness will you compare to him? Are you going to compare God to these pieces of wood created by man? So the thought of the first section is developed by comparison. God is the Lord of nature; he's the Lord of history, and you compare that with a stick of wood. To whom will you liken God?

Isaiah 40:21-24 God is the Lord of Nature and of History

When you get to the fifth strophe, verses 21-24, you have a second climax. God is the Lord of nature and of history; nature and history are brought together. Chapter 40, verses 21-24 read, "Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff." Now, in this second climax, you have it again introduced with a question here, "Have you not known? Have you not heard? Hath it not been told you from the beginning?" God is the Lord of nature

and history, and in the literary construction you have four “have not’s.” Verse 21, introduced with this Hebrew expression *ha’l’o*? “Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told to you? Have you not understood?” There are four “have you not’s”—*ha’l’o*. Then three participial double lines, verses 22-23. Three participial double lines: “He who sits,” verse 22, “He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.” So he that sits, spreads, brings: you have these participles. Then three verbs introduced by “scarcely” or “hardly”—it’s in the Hebrew. “Yea,” the King James says, “they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown: yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth.” Three verbs introduced by “scarcely,” or “hardly,” in verse 24. Then the sharp *we’gam* introduces the conclusion in 24b. The King James says, “And he shall also,” but that’s *we’gam*. “And he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away like stubble.”

Now that conclusion provides the second climax, which makes the first one more definite. The first one—nations are as nothing. But here he is going to blow on them; they are going to wither and be taken away like stubble. Notice the comparison, or correspondence, between the triad of verse 22 and 23—that’s those participial double lines—with the first three strophes. Verse 22, God is Creator. See, verse 22 speaks about the one who sits on the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a curtain, spreads them out like a tent of dwelling. That God is creator compares with that first strophe, “Who created the universe?” Whereas verse 23 is God’s work in history, which compares with the third strophe, “The nations are as nothing.” You see the participles, “he who sits” and “he who spreads”—the first two strophes. “He who brings the princes to nothing”—that’s history, and that compares with God’s work in history that you see in the third of those double participial lines. You get a repetition of structure moving from nature to history: two each of nature, one of history, in both places.

Isaiah 40:25-27 To Whom Will You Compare Me? Lord is Incomparable

Move on to the sixth strophe, chapter 40 verses 25-27, “‘To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?’ says the Holy One. Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God’”?

Verses 25-27, the Lord is incomparable. You have that same question, you see, introducing strophe six as you had strophe four, “‘To whom will you compare me?’” The Lord is incomparable, and you see the real focus of that section, in 25 to 27, is in verse 27. Whom will you compare the Lord to? You now look at his creative power. How can you say, in verse 27, that my way is hidden from the Lord? You might be in difficulty, you might be in misery, you may not understand what’s going on, but when you focus on who God is, on his rule over nature, his rule over history, how can you ever question that he doesn’t know what’s going on with you?

History is the ultimate comfort for God’s people in distress. Again, that’s introduced by the question, “‘Have you not known?’” just like in that second climax. “‘Have you not known? Have you not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, faints not, neither is weary? There is no searching of his understanding. He gives power to the faint; to those who have no might he increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.” So you see in verse 27, the preceding verse, how can one who is so powerful forget those whom he has set apart for his own purposes? Why do you say, “‘My way is hid from the Lord?’”

Isaiah 40:28-31

Chapter 40, verses 28-31, are the answer to that question. The answer, again, is

given in general terms, I think, that apply to all situations where people are tempted to doubt God. If God's plan doesn't seem to be working out, you can be sure it's not because he is too weak to do what he chooses. It's rather because we don't fully understand his plan. "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom." We can't search his understanding; he knows the end from the beginning—we don't. We might not understand exactly what the reasons are for the situation in which we find ourselves, but his power is sufficient to accomplish all that he undertakes to do; he never faints, he is never weary. But not only that, he gives power to those who tend to become weary--if they will wait upon the Lord. That's the message, then, to God's people: to wait upon the Lord, and they will renew their strength.

So, chapter 40 is a remarkable chapter. We rushed through this, but I hope this diagram gives you some idea of the complexity of the organization and the careful way in which it was constructed, even though if you read through it and try to outline it, it's pretty difficult to outline. But there's a very careful structure there: repetition of things, structural organization that hits you forcefully when you read the chapter, even though you don't have it analyzed. But you know it's one of people's favorite chapters in the Bible, Isaiah Chapter 40, with good reason.

Servant of the Lord Theme – Four Servant Psalms

What I want to do from this point, as you notice on your outline, is move to the Servant of the Lord theme. I gave you those 5 or 6 themes. It would be nice if we could move through Isaiah 41 on through 66 and trace the way all those themes are developed. It's unfortunate to have to leave one out because you won't get their full impact, for they're all so closely related--they work together. But with time considerations, we just can't do that. So what I want to do is take one theme, the Servant of the Lord, and work through that theme. It certainly is one of great importance, particularly from a Messianic perspective. Let's see how that works.

Now, a few comments just in general before we get into specific passages. Critical scholars have often attempted to isolate what they call the “Four Servant Psalms.” We read there in Whybray the comment about the four so-called “Servant Psalms,”—that’s at the top of page 29 of your citations. But the four that are normally isolated are 42:1-7; it’s really not correct to limit the servant passages to those four passages, but those are certainly four major passages. But critical scholars often isolate those four and say they have their own separate origin and authorship; they are secondary to the original text and have been inserted into the original text. But as I mentioned, that theme is much more complex than being limited to just those four passages. It’s found in numerous other places as well. What I want to do is trace through every reference to the servant in this section of Isaiah as we look at the servant theme. So let’s begin that, and what we want to do is see how the servant theme relates to this larger problem of the exiles--what the connection is and, of course, how it relates to the coming of Christ.

1. Isaiah 41:8 Israel, you are my Servant

The first one is Isaiah 41:8 and following. You read there, “But you, O Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend. I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, ‘You are my servant’; I have chosen you and have not rejected you. So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” I’m not going to read further for the moment. But that’s the first occurrence, you see, in verses 8 and 9, of the expression the Servant of the Lord: “You are my servant,” the Lord is speaking.

Now, elsewhere in the Old Testament the term “servant” is used in a variety of ways, often simply of godly people; sometimes, more specifically, of prophets—it’s used of Moses, it’s used of Joshua, and it’s used of Elijah. But as used in Isaiah, it takes on a particular significance. That becomes clear as we trace the theme. It begins here in chapter 41; it then grows in importance and reaches its climax in chapter 53. As we will

see, at first it is not altogether clear exactly what is meant by the servant phrase. Even though this verse 8 seems quite explicit, it gets more complicated as we move on. It seems here—"Israel, you are my servant." Who is the servant?--it seems clear here that Israel is the servant. What we find in this passage is, the Lord gives the reason why he is going to protect Israel; he says he has chosen Israel as the one to be his servant, "You Israel are my servant."

Verse 10: "Fear not, for I am with you. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will uphold you." If you go down to verse 13, "For I am the LORD, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, 'Do not fear; I will help you. Do not be afraid, O worm Jacob, O little Israel, for I myself will help you,' declares the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. 'See, I will make you into a threshing sledge, new and sharp, with many teeth.'"

If you read through the passage, the servant is called by God and will not be cast off. The enemies of the servant will be confounded, but the strength of the servant is to be found in the Lord, not in himself. See, verse 14 says, "'Do not be afraid, O worm Jacob, O little Israel, for I myself will help you,' declares the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. 'See, I will make you into a threshing sledge.'" So it seems clear, in chapter 41, that the servant is Israel. The extent of the passage is not altogether clear, how far this theme goes; probably down to verse 19, but that's debated. But all is quite general there.

2. Isaiah 42:1-7 The Works the Servant Will Do

Let's go to the second passage, and that's one of the major ones--Isaiah 42:1-7: "'Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope.'

This is what God the LORD says-- he who created the heaven.”

Here you get an interspersal of the verse with that creative power theme. “Who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it: ‘I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison, and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.’”

So in Isaiah 42:1-7, again you’re talking about the servant: “Behold my servant.” A picture is presented of the work the servant will do. The servant is to do a work in the world for God. Here it doesn’t say who the servant is, as Isaiah 41:8 and 9 where it said, “You, Israel, are my servant.” Here it doesn’t say who the servant is, but a picture is given of the work the servant is to accomplish. It’s interesting; if you turn to Matthew 12:18-21, this passage is applied to Jesus. Matthew 12:18, “Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory. In his name the nations will put their hope.” That’s in the context applied clearly to Jesus. But here is what it says in one verse of chapter 42, “Behold my servant, whom I uphold; my elect,”—the servant is God’s elect, in whose soul he delights, and the Spirit of God is on him, and he is going to bring justice to the nations--to the Gentiles.

In verses 2 to 4, you have the dignity and gentleness of his conduct. He is not going to cry or lift up or cause his voice to be heard in the street; a bruised reed he shall not break. He doesn’t exert violent effort to accomplish his task. But his work is to be worldwide. Notice in chapter 42, verse 4, “He will not fail nor be discouraged till he has set justice in the earth: and the coasts shall wait for his law.” “Coasts” is a reference to distant lands.

Verse 5 sort of interrupts this description of the work of the servant to answer the

questions: “How can this be?” and “How is this possible?” Well, it’s possible because God says so, and God is the Creator of the heavens. “Thus saith God the LORD, he who created the heavens, and stretched them [or spread them] out.”

Questions Arising

Now, questions begin to arise at this point. You see, in Isaiah 41:8 and 9 it says, “Israel, you are my servant.” But the question that arises is, how can Israel fulfill what’s described here? How can a people in bondage, misery, and exile do what it is said here, that the Servant of the Lord will do? See, verse 6 and 7 says, “I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people, and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison, and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.”

Isaiah 42:19-24 How Can Israel Do That When Israel Herself is a Prisoner?

How can Israel do that when Israel herself is a prisoner? That question is not just one that might come to your mind as you read it, or to the mind of the person who heard it; it’s one that’s expressed later in the chapter, as well. Let’s go down to verse 19, “Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like the messenger I send? Who is blind like the one committed to me, blind like the servant of the LORD? You have seen many things, but have paid no attention; your ears are open, but you hear nothing. It pleased the LORD for the sake of his righteousness to make his law great and glorious. But this is a people plundered and looted, all of them trapped in pits or hidden away in prisons. They have become plunder, with no one to rescue them; they have been made loot, with no one to say, ‘Send them back.’” So in verse 19 that very question is expressed: how can Israel do this when she herself is blind and deaf?

But verse 21 says, the work of the servant will be done: “The LORD is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honorable.” Then in verse 22, again you have that difficulty: How can Israel fulfill the demands of the

work of the servant when Israel is a people robbed and spoiled, snared in holes, hidden in prison houses? The problem seems unanswerable.

But there's an additional note in verse 24 that says, "Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? Did not the LORD, against whom we have sinned?" Verse 24 points out why Israel is in the condition they are in. Why is Israel robbed and spoiled? Why is Israel in the prison house? Why is Israel blind? It's because they sinned. And because they sinned, God gave his people into exile and suffering. "Which of you will listen to this or pay close attention in time to come? Who handed Jacob over to become loot, and Israel to the plunderers? Was it not the LORD, against whom we have sinned? For they would not follow his ways; they did not obey his law. So he poured out on them his burning anger, the violence of war."

So you see in chapter 42, you have the servant presented as one who is to bring light and deliverance to the ends of the earth, to the Gentiles, to the nations; to deliver from captivity, prison, and bondage. Isaiah 41 has said Israel is God's servant. But the question is, how can Israel do that when Israel herself is in bondage and in darkness because of her sin? So we have to trace this theme further. You see up to this point, you have a lot of questions. Israel is the servant, Israel has a task to do, but it doesn't seem Israel is able to do the task because Israel herself is sinful and is in bondage. You need some kind of resolution for that as we go further.

My time is over. We'll pick up the theme further.

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