

Allan MacRae, Isaiah 40-56, Lecture 4

This is lecture 4 delivered by Dr. Allan MacRae at Biblical Theological Seminary on Isaiah 40-56:

In reading any book, it is very important that we see exactly what a sentence means. Every sentence has words in it that could be interpreted in more than one way and have to be interpreted in the light of context. In fact, almost every sentence any of us say has to be interpreted in the light of context either expressed or understood. Yet there are usually certain words that are definite and are unmistakable in meaning, and we take those as a foundation as we go forward in the interpretation of the verse.

It has been said that "all roads lead to Rome." Well now suppose the road starts going to Rome. It can easily come to a lake and have to turn right or left in order to go around the lake. It may even have to step back on itself in getting around the lake or find a bridge. It may be actually going to Rome, but it may seem even, temporarily, going in an opposite direction.

Everything in the Scripture looks to Christ. The whole Old Testament looks forward to Christ, but that does not mean to say that we take every verse just out of its context and say this verse is directly speaking about Christ; it is leading toward Christ.

God gave us the Old Testament in the first place to keep alive the memory of the existence of God when people tried to put him out of their hearts and forget him. So God's greatness, his power, his majesty are a tremendous element throughout the Old Testament. In addition to that, he gave us the Old Testament to tell us how to live, to give much that is of tremendous value in our daily lives. He gave us the illustration of the history of his people in ancient times, showing how he blessed them, showing how they went astray, showing how he led them back. By analogy, it can be of tremendous value to us, even though it's direct value in showing the progress of revelation and the progress of God's dealing with his people may be rather indirect in its relationship to us.

So it is important that we always look at a verse and see what we can get from the verse itself in its original setting and meaning before we go on to interpret it in the light

of other matters. That is why I asked you for today to take nine verses, every one of which has a clear evidence that it is talking about Israel, that Israel is the subject. Of course, you can say that “Israel” can be interpreted in different ways and of course that is true. Israel is a man, Jacob. Israel is the physical descendants of this man. Israel is also the spiritual descendants of this man. The word “Israel” can be taken in different ways, but we all will start with the most literal; is it talking about Israel the man? Next we ask: is it talking about Israel the physical nation? Is there evidence in the context that it is talking about Israel in the broader, or more extended, or different sense than this? We have those questions to ask.

But in every verse that I gave you there was either a statement, “Thou Israel art my servant,” or something like that that specifically said in this verse, “Israel is the servant.” Or else there was a statement, “Who is weak but my servant, who is blind but my servant.” Something that could certainly not be spoken about the Lord, Jesus Christ.

So in every one of these nine verses, I asked you very specifically to deal with the meaning of “Israel” from the verse alone without drawing anything from the broader context, or from other parts of the Bible, or from other knowledge. See what is in each verse, and I would say the first step in every one of these nine verses is to realize that it specifically says that the servant of God is Israel. There are verses in the Old Testament in which the word “servant” very definitely refers to Christ; there are such verses, but not one of them was in the nine verses that I gave you.

How does it come that the term “servant of God” can sometimes mean Christ and can sometimes mean Israel? How does that come? What is the relation, what is the development of thought? I believe this is a very important thing for us to understand, and we want to go into that particular matter today.

We noticed in chapter 41 that it was very specifically said that Israel should not, like the other nations, be filled with terror when this great horde of Persian troops came flooding in from the east, and then from the north. Now, it could be like the Babylonians that sent an army against Israel. They came from the east, but they had to go northward around the desert that separates Israel from Mesopotamia, so they came also from the

north. Practically all the enemies of Israel, except the Egyptians, came both from the east and from the north, and the two directions were frequently used right in the same verse, or in the same context, for an enemy God had brought; that is a great powerful enemy that is from the east and also from the north.

So this great one who is coming, Cyrus is filling the nations with terror, and they are looking to their idols for help. But Israel should not be filled with fear because God said in chapter 41, verse 8, “But you, Israel, are my servant; Jacob whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend.” The last two statements are ideas that we’ve had very frequently in the Bible: that the Israelites are the descendants of Abraham, and that Abraham is the friend of God. God said that through Abraham all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Abraham was the friend of God. So that is something that we’ve often heard. We also read that Jacob was the one whom God chose rather than Esau even before the children were born. Scripture goes on to tell us that God had elected Jacob to be the one through whom the promise would come, that is, Jacob whom he had chosen. So the Israelites had great reason to look for blessings from God because they were descendants of Abraham, and because they were descendants of Jacob whom God had chosen.

But before stating either one of those two terms, God said, “You, Israel are my servant,” and in chapter 41, verse nine, he said, “I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you; I said, ‘you are my servant.’” Now, this is not a new idea in Isaiah, but it is an idea that has not been much stressed before. One could read the earlier parts of the Bible and easily get the idea that Israel was simply the group God picked to be recipients of his favor, so God blessed them. Now that would not be a correct understanding of the earlier part of the Old Testament; there’s more to it than that. But one could easily get that idea that Israel is the one whom God has simply chosen to show special favor too, simply as an act of will, picking this nation rather than some other nation.

Now, of course, Abraham was God’s friend, and so there’s more to it than that. But this idea of the servant, if it has been touched on at all before, has certainly not

been stressed before in Isaiah. Isaiah now is laying stress on this idea: Israel has been chosen because Israel is to be God's servant. Through Israel, certain great things are to be accomplished, and therefore, since Israel is God's instrument for the performing of certain great things, we can be sure that God will protect Israel.

So, among the many important ideas in chapter 41 we find: the idea of the coming of Cyrus, the fear of the nation, the idea that Israel need not fear, the idea that idols are worthless, idols will not give you any protection that's worthwhile, the idols and the false gods cannot predict the future. God has shown that he is able to predict the future by predicting the coming of Cyrus 150 years before it happened. There are many important ideas in this chapter, but none is more important than this idea introduced in these two verses: Israel is God's servant. God has a great purpose to be performed, and Israel has been called out and selected to be his instrument in the performance of this purpose.

There is much else that is of great interest and importance in chapter 41, but that's the new idea and one that is greatly stressed there. We notice in verse 25 that the theme of Cyrus is again touched on. In chapter 41, verse 25 we read, "I have stirred up one from the north, and he comes, one from the rising of the sun who calls on my name." You see here, north and east are put together. He comes from the north; he comes also from the east. He has come first from the east, then has gone up to Asia Minor, and then has come south from Asia Minor against Babylon, and if he were going against Israel, he would again have to walk around the desert and would come from the north again.

So, the idea of Cyrus coming is being stressed. Here we have a great conqueror. No one knows what this great conqueror is going to do. You always fear when a great conqueror comes, that he is going to introduce terrible violence, terrible ravages, a new type of dictatorship, something that is going to be very bad. You are filled with fear. God says you needn't fear Cyrus; God is going to protect you from him. And now he has said the reason he'll protect him is because they are his servant. Now in chapter 42, he deals very specifically and directly with the servant of God.

Now Isaiah chapter 42, verse 1, as we start here, we find that there is a picture given that is very difficult to think of Israel as performing at that time. Israel was captive

to the Babylonians; Israel was weak; Israel was a small nation. How could Israel perform this service? "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." Is Israel going to have the power now to overcome Cyrus? Well, you hardly expect so, because God says he's brought Cyrus, that Cyrus is his instrument too, for certain purposes. But here is his servant going to bring justice to the nations.

There's never been justice to the nations. There's always been just a "getting along" together. Getting along – one gives up something, one gives up and the other gets something. There's always been those who have felt that there has not been justice among them. But he, the servant, is going to bring justice to the nations. The nations are going to have justice in their dealings with each other; they're going to have justice within themselves. This is going to be produced by God's servant. How can Israel do that? "I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations." Well, he might put his Spirit on a small nation, and in a way of physical conquest, they would conquer a great many others, yes. But will they really bring justice then? They are sinners after all – that has been brought out earlier. The reference is to the sin of Israel. There has not been much reference to it in these two chapters 40 and 41, but there was plenty three chapters back in chapter 39 where it said that for their sin, God was going to send them to captivity in Babylon. They are sinners – how are they going to bring justice to the nations? And so this passage here is not describing the servant of God at the time in which Isaiah is speaking. It is not describing their current condition; it is describing something that will happen in the future, something for which Israel has been raised up, something for which Israel has a responsibility that it be done, something that God says is going to be done.

Now, how can this be that God has raised up Israel and protected Israel in order to bring justice to the nations? God, who is all powerful, is going to perform his purpose; he is going to put his Spirit on his servant, and the servant will bring justice to the nations. How could Israel do this? How could Israel do this if it were 10 times as large as it is? If it were 10 times as large, it might have power to conquer all the nations, but

would it have the *wisdom* to establish true justice among them? I think we must say that in chapter 41, and at the end of chapter 42, we speak of Israel and their present condition today. They are God's servant, but they are a servant that has been greatly injured by sin and by the results of sin. We find this same thought in chapter 42, where in verse 18 he says, "Hear you deaf, look you blind. 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?" There's the word "servant" twice in that chapter. And the servant is said to be blind, said to be deaf, and said to be unable to know what God's will is--to say nothing of doing it. That's the condition of Israel today; and in spite of that condition, Israel is God's servant. So we have to say that verse 1 is not a picture of the condition of Israel as it is, but is a picture of the work that God's servant is to do -- a work for the doing of which God has brought Israel into existence.

Now, are we to say sometime in the future Israel is going to do this work? Sometime in the future, is Israel is going to bring justice to the nations? In the future, is Israel going multiply until it is a large enough nation to conquer all the other nations? But when it does, it will bring justice to them? There will be no graft among these people; there will be no corruption among them, and they will not permit graft and corruption among the peoples whom they conquer because they will bring justice to the nations. Can we say that of an Israel that is blind and deaf -- an Israel that has sinned?

I believe we have to reach two conclusions about this verse. The first of them is that this is a picture not of what the servant--who is specifically said in the nine verses we looked at to be Israel--it is not a picture of what the servant is doing. It is a picture of what God is going to accomplish through the servant. Thus, it is a picture of the ideal servant. It is a picture of what God desires the servant to do. I think we can say beyond that, in the second place, that it is a picture of what God is determined that the servant will do. God is promising that this is to be done through his servant, and his servant is Israel. So the responsibility for the fulfillment of 42:1 rests upon the servant, and the servant Israel. It rests upon Israel to do this.

Now, when you say it rests upon Israel to do this, you might say that when the

United States armies overwhelmed the armies of Hitler in 1945 and all of Germany lay at their feet, and they could do anything they wanted to; that the armies of America had gone into war because as Roosevelt said, “We wish to establish a world in which there will be freedom from fear, in which Hitler’s Gestapo will not come to the house and rap on the door and grab somebody and take them off to a concentration camp. There will be freedom from fear.” He said of the Atlantic charter, “We want to establish a world in which there will be freedom from hunger, where everyone is to have plenty to eat.” He said, “We are going to establish a world in which there is freedom of religion, where everyone can worship God as they choose.”

The Atlantic Charter was the reason why, before the war began, the United States, despite the neutrality treaty that said, “We won’t enter into any foreign wars,” was sending great amounts of goods to Britain and France and Russia to help them overcome Hitler. We were going to establish these things in the charter. Well, I think that in 1952, in West Germany, the people said, “The United States of America has given us freedom from hunger. The Marshall Plan has brought in food for us all. For two or three years we had to live in cellars eating stuff we got out of garbage heaps. We had a difficult job to get along but now we all have sufficient means to live. They have given us freedom from fear. The Americans are not coming to our houses and grabbing us and taking us off to concentration camps. We have freedom from the fear that we had not when Hitler was governing the country. We have freedom of religion. We are free to worship God, each one of us as we choose.”

But did that mean that every American over there was somebody to whom they could look to for justice, to freedom from oppression or freedom from hunger? An American soldier said to me, “When we went into Germany, there was a man who was walking near me, an American soldier who stepped up to a German civilian and he pointed to his wrist where there was a nice watch and said, “Give me that watch!” and the German didn’t understand English and he said, “Vas?” And he hesitated; and when he hesitated, the American soldier fired his gun and killed the man and took his watch and walked on. There is no doubt that there were Americans who did not introduce the

various freedoms that Roosevelt had promised into Europe. But America did introduce them as a whole.

Israel is to bring justice to the nations. Does this mean that every Israelite is included in the servant of God who is to bring justice to the nations? Will there be none of them who engage in wrath, none of them who are affected by sin so that they cannot do what God wills? No! It is absurd to say that when Israel is God's servant that every single Israelite is God's instrument in bringing justice to the nations.

Certainly there are the wicked people; there are the violent people, there are the malicious people among them as there were among the American army, though the Germans rushed to try to get to be prisoners of the Americans rather than of the Russians because they knew that on the whole, they would be given a fairer deal and would be treated much better by the Americans than if they fell into the hands of the Russians.

Israel is to bring justice to the nations. Does this mean that all of Israel is to do that? Or does it mean that there is a small portion of Israel that is to fulfill the work that God has laid out for the servant of the Lord to accomplish? That a small portion of Israel is to perform the great task that God has laid out? Is it even possible that there is to be one person who is to come from Israel, who is to represent Israel, who is to do the work on behalf of Israel for which God brought Israel into the world and who is to bring justice to the nations? We cannot jump to a conclusion on that from this verse alone. But we can say that we have a picture here of the ideal servant, of the task of the servant, of the work for which God has brought Israel into the world. We have an assurance that God is going to perform the work. He doesn't say, "I hope that Israel will perform this." He doesn't say, "I hope that this is going to happen," He gives us an assurance that justice is to be brought to the nations and the one who is going to bring this justice is Israel. But it doesn't mean every single Israelite. What part of the nation does it mean? What more can we learn?

Well we go on to the next verse and we find a picture of how the servant is to carry out either all of his work or a vital portion of his work. We read in chapter 42, verse 2, "He will not shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets." Can you imagine a

conquering army coming in to change conditions in a nation, to put down all that is wrong and wicked, and not shouting or crying out or raising its voice? Can you imagine that happening? Is God dealing here, when it comes to bringing justice to the nations, simply in establishing good external conditions? Or is he dealing with a sin that is in the heart, which is necessary to be removed in order to bring justice to the nations? If you do not have officials who wish to perform decently; if you have men who, while talking piously, are accepting graft on the side, you do not have justice. So is he talking about one who is going to deal with the sin question described in chapters 40 and 41? We read, "He will not shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets." The Jews have been very successful in accomplishing their undertakings. They have been very successful in the world, even small groups of them in most nations, in amassing great sums of money and in accomplishing great purposes. I don't think that we can say that this passage describes a typical Jew: "he will not shout or cry out or raise his voice." I don't think we can say that this is a typical description of a Jew.

We go on to chapter 42, verse 3, and we find a description how he is going to deal with people. Is he going to just push aside and destroy everything that is wrong? "A bruised reed he will not break." Here is one who is trying to do what is right. But he is not succeeding, he is a bruised reed. You and I would say, push it out of the way, tear it up and throw it away. "But a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out." Here is one who is trying to serve God, trying to do what is right but is not very successful. He's like a wick in a lamp that is smoldering instead of giving light. You or I would say snuff it out; clean up the wick; clean up the lamp and start again.

But he says "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 and his law in the islands." That means the distant lands, it means the whole world, actually, "will put their hope in him." And so we have this description of what the servant is going to do. It is a picture of the ideal servant. It is the purpose for which God called Israel and for which God protected Israel through all these years. It is the purpose for which God

will not let Israel be destroyed. It is in order that there be accomplished a work that will be accomplished in the way that is here described.

You can imagine an Israelite reading it and saying, “We are God's servant; we are to accomplish a work for God, but how will we bring justice to the nations? And how will we do it in such a way as this--without great effort, with simply walking forward gently and kindly, not breaking a bruised reed, not snuffing out a smoldering wick and yet bringing forth justice and not faltering or being discouraged until justice is established in the earth? How are we going to be able accomplish this?”

Well, as we saw, it will not be the whole nation; that is inevitable when you speak of any nation. It is not the whole nation. The nation has work to do, but there are evil men among those of the nation. It is not the whole nation. How large a part of the nation is it? The description gives at least a suggestion that it is not speaking figuratively of a nation, but that it is speaking of an individual out of the nation who represents the nation and who performs the work for which the nation has been called into being. Who truly can be said to be the nation's representative and yet who is able to perform this work. We will find in the United Nations today that Russia says, America says. Yet how many of the people in those nations have said this? How many would necessarily back up what is said? U.N. ambassadors are representing the nation. They have the power of the nation. They represent the will of the nation. They are able to call forth the forces of the nation, to accomplish the purpose they set forth. If they don't, they should not speak on behalf of the nation. So, is this a part of Israel, or is it, in fact, an individual who is out of Israel and who represents Israel, who does the work for which Israel has been called, but nevertheless, is an individual? It certainly sounds like it so far.

As an Israelite reads these three or four verses, or as he hears Isaiah say it, he says, “How utterly ridiculous! How on earth can we accomplish this; we who are sinners; we who have fallen so far short of the purpose for which he has called us that he has permitted us to go into exile and to be subject to the Babylonians? We have to move at every slightest whim of the Babylonian conqueror. How are we going to accomplish this purpose that is the ideal that is pictured, the objective for which God called his servant

Israel into being?

So as you have this question in the mind, this objection, immediately Isaiah answers it in chapter 42, verse 5, and he says, "This is what the LORD says, he who created the heavens and stretched them out, 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."

There is a most ridiculous and yet very learned series that is being shown on the TV for the next 6 or 8 Sunday nights. It is Professor Sagan of Cornell University. He calls it "Cosmos," and he says, "The cosmos is everything that has ever existed or that ever will exist." This rules God immediately out of existence altogether because God, of course, is not a part of the cosmos. Sagan gives a great picture of the beginning of it all when it burst into flames, and all the galaxies and various planets and the various suns came into existence. He describes the tremendous distances covered and the tremendous nature of them. Then he goes into one little planet, and he shows how in Alexandria there was a great library that contained all the wisdom of the ancient world, and how the director of the library was able to tell within a very small margin of error exactly how far it was around the world. We see the great learning of the ancient world, and then there came that horrible thing of the middle ages, which destroyed learning and caused it to disappear. Now civilization has come into existence again, and who knows what great results we will accomplish in it. It is a series that has much of interest, but which has underlying it constantly a denial that there is any God or any force that controls it all.

So God says, "This is what the Lord says, he who created the heavens and stretched them out." "That stretched them out," what does that mean? Ancient man could see the stars glowing through the heavens, he could see them rise and he could see them go across and he could see them set. But what does it mean, "He stretched them out?" No one even knew until the first decade of the 20th century, when it was discovered by astronomers in California, that there was evidence which all astronomers today accept--though they were greatly surprised when it was first presented to them--that all the parts of the universe are moving farther away from each other constantly, they are being "stretched out." They are constantly moving farther and farther away from each other. It

is agreed by practically all astronomers that it began with one little ball perhaps not as large as this room, in which all the matter in the universe was compressed together before it flew out into one great gigantic explosion and it produced all that exists in the universe today. Dr. Sagan does not deny that, he even shows an illustration of it and refers to it. But, of course, he makes no allusion of who had stretched it out; it just stretched out on its own.

But here God says, that he is the one who stretched it out, who spread out the earth and all that comes of it. In verse 5 we read, "Who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it." God says, "You find it hard to believe, that Israel, or any part of Israel, or any part of Israel, can be God's instrument to bring justice to the nation? You find it hard to believe?" But he says, "I am the God who has created all the universe. I can bring to pass what I choose. If I can establish the great universe, I can also bring justice to the nations, and can deal with the question of sin, which creates injustice among the nations and within each nation. I can deal with that. Israel, or some part of Israel, is my instrument with which to perform this."

He goes on in verse 6 and says, "I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness. I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you." Is he here talking to the whole nation? Yes. But he is talking more specifically to whatever part of the nation is going to accomplish this, now or in the future, that is going to accomplish this work of the servant of the Lord. "I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the gentiles." Now, are "the people" and "the Gentiles," parallel, are they synonyms? The word "Gentiles" can simply mean "nations," and it might not be a parallel, and yet it is equally possible that it is. As in any sentence, there is more than one possible meaning in the case of certain words, and here in the case of this word "people," it might just mean "the nations." But in such case, it probably would be plural, "the peoples." But when he says, "the people, a covenant for the people," it suggests that he's talking about Israel. In contrast to the nation, the work of the servant is not only going to accomplish "a light for the gentiles," but is also to be a covenant for the Israelites. Now, that we cannot draw with certainty from the verse, because there are the two possibilities

of the word “people.” It may mean “nation” [Israel] or “gentiles.” But we can say that it leans very definitely to “nation,” meaning Israel. There is just a little, tiny suggestion, that the work of the servant is not only to be a work in relation to the nation Israel, but that it is also to be a work in relation to at least a portion of the gentile world, and perhaps a large portion of it.

"I will make you to be a covenant of the people, and a light to 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 42:6-7). His purpose then in establishing justice is to bring freedom to those who are oppressed. He is to give deliverance from the bonds of sin to those who are suffering under it. The fact that he is going to open the eyes that are blind goes far beyond what any nation could perform.

"I am the Lord that is my name. I will not give my glory to another, or my praise to idols. See the former things have taken place" (Isa 42:8). Isaiah's prediction, that they will go into exile, has been performed. It has taken place; it has taken place in the Northern Kingdom, and the godly in the Southern Kingdom already imagined it as having taken place. People one hundred and fifty years later, as they study Isaiah's words, realize that it has taken place, that the kingdom was exiled just as God said that it would. "The former things have taken place and new things I declare. Before they spring into being I announce them to you" (Isa. 42:9) So there are wonderful blessings ahead that God is going to bring.

Then Isaiah goes on with praise, “Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise to the ends of the earth; you who go down to the sea and all that is in it; you islands and all who live in it. Let the desert and it's towns raise their voices. Let the settlements where Kedar lives rejoice. Let the people of Sela sing for joy; let them shout from the mountain tops. Let them give glory to the Lord and proclaim his praise in the islands. The Lord will march out like a mighty man, like a warrior, he will stir up his zeal with a shout; he will raise the battle cry and will triumph over his enemies” (Isa. 42:10-13). This doesn't sound like the early verses of the chapter where the servant won't shout or cry out or raise his voice in the street. The servant has a work to do, which is to be done with gentle,

firm, strong progress. The servant will be effectively but not with the sudden outburst of force or violence. But God also performs with great violence, as when he brings Cyrus to come, to overcome the nations and to free the Israelites.

Then in verses 14 to 17 he says, "With a shout he will raise the battle cry and will triumph over his enemies. For a long time I've kept silent; I've been quiet and held myself back. But now, like a woman in childbirth, I cry out; I gasp and pant. I will lay waste the mountains and hills and dry up all their vegetation. I will turn rivers into islands and dry the pools. I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make their rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them. But these who trust in idols who say to images, 'You are our gods,' will be turned back in utter shame."

This is dealing with the idolatry of the nations, and it is dealing with the great temptation that Israelites might have to be led astray into idolatry. But, you notice what he says, "Now, hear you deaf! Look you blind, and see! Who is blind but my servant? Who is deaf like the messenger I sent? Who is blind like the one committed to me? Blind, like the servant of the Lord" (Isa. 42:18).

Israel is the servant of the Lord. Israel has the objective given in the beginning of chapter forty-two. Israel has the assurance that this work will be performed as described at the beginning of chapter forty-two. Yet Israel is blind, Israel is deaf. How can they possibly fulfill the duty? "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've become plunder with no one to rescue them, they've been made loot with no one to say, 'Send them back!' Which of you will listen to this, or pay close attention in time to come?" (Isa. 42:22-23)

How can they perform the work of the servant? Look at the condition they're in; they're in captivity; they're in suffering; they're in misery; they're plundered and looted and you can just hear them complain, saying, "What a tremendous idea you've set before

us! What a duty to perform! But how could we ever think it. How could we who are suffering from injustice, we who are one of the smallest of the nations, how could we perform the mighty work that God has assigned to the servant of the Lord. Look what condition we're in; look how we are plundered, look how we are oppressed, and look how we're in bondage."

Then God answers in chapter 42, verses 24 and 25, our first passage of real sharp rebuke in the section. "Who handed Jacob over to become loot, and Israel to the plunderers? Was it not the Lord, against whom we've sinned? For they would not follow his ways; they did not obey his laws. So he poured out on them his burning anger, the violence of war. It enveloped them in flames, yet they did not understand; it consumed them, but they did not take it to heart." Here is Israel the servant of the Lord. Israel can't fulfill the work because they're in suffering; they're in bondage; they're in misery. But why are they there? Because of their sin, because of their turning away from God. It was God who put them there; it wasn't that God couldn't protect them.

When an ancient nation was conquered, ordinarily its gods disappeared; they were unable to protect it. They were shown to be weak, or even non-existent, while their nation is being destroyed. But here God has actually given over his own people to be conquered. He's given them over to this situation; he has permitted it to happen because of their sin. And so we see that the basic problem is the problem of sin. Now, when Israel has this sin, when Israel like all human beings is to such a large extent affected by it, how will Israel ever perform the work of the servant?

Will it be one from Israel who represents Israel? Who truly can be said to do the work of Israel because he is truly an Israelite, and yet one who is far more than a human being. One who has a power, who has an ability, who has an understanding that far transcends that of any human being; who will fulfill the wonderful promise of chapter forty two, verses 1 to 7, and carry out that work.

Of course, we could go to the New Testament; we get certain ideas from the New Testament, and we just read them back into everything in the Old Testament. And there is a certain validity in that, because the Old Testament often implies much that is not yet

clearly stated that the New Testament can help us understand. There is such a thing as “progressive revelation.” There is a suggestion of an idea, and then it is gradually developed and further developed, until it is brought out clearly. Nevertheless, I think we get more understanding of the Old Testament when we take just what is there and try to see how the thought develops there and see how the Lord brings new thought and new interpretations and new ideas within the Old Testament before going onto the New Testament.

For your assignment next time express exactly the significance of Isa. 42:1-7. What is the real theme and purpose of it? This will help summarize some of what we covered today in class.

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