

Dr. Robert Chisholm, Isaiah's Servant Songs, Session 1: The Servant of the Lord: Champion of Justice and Covenant Mediator (A), (Isaiah 42:1-9)

This is Dr. Robert Chisholm in his teaching on Isaiah's Servant Songs. This is session 1, The Servant of the Lord, Champion of Justice and Covenant Mediator, Part A, Isaiah 42:1-9.

Welcome to our study of Isaiah's Servant Songs. We're going to have four lectures on these songs.

The book of Isaiah is often said to be very messianic. There are a lot of messianic texts in Isaiah. We think of Isaiah 7:14, and many others, and the so-called Servant Songs, which occur in Isaiah 42, 49, 50, and then 52, 53, are definitely messianic in my way of looking at things.

But before we dive into these songs, we can't just isolate them from their context and dive into them. We need to orient ourselves to what is going on in this section of Isaiah, and how the first song in particular fits in its context, because that lays the foundation for how to understand the others. And so in the first two songs, we're going to see that the Servant is a Champion of Justice and a Covenant Mediator.

But before we do that, let's talk about Isaiah 40 through 66. You probably have heard that chapters 1 through 39 go with the prophet Isaiah, who lived around 700 BC and the years before that, and then 40 through 66 is not written by the prophet Isaiah, but rather by a so-called Deutero-Isaiah. Actually, a scholar by the name of Bernard Doom came along and said, No, there were three Isaiahs.

There's the original Isaiah, there's second Isaiah, Deutero-Isaiah, who wrote 40 through 55, and then Trito, or third Isaiah, wrote 56 through 66. So 1 through 39, for the most part, comes from the pre-exilic period when Isaiah lived, although, if you look at this carefully, many, many parts of chapters 1 through 39 are attributed to later authors in the higher critical consensus. They don't buy that Isaiah wrote all of that.

And then 40 through 55 comes from the time of the exile, and then 56 through 66, some would say, those who believe in a third Isaiah, that actually that material is post-exilic and comes from the period where some had gone back to the land, some were still in exile. Well, my position is that the prophet Isaiah, the 8th-century prophet Isaiah, wrote the entire book. That's a minority view.

I do make allowances for inspired additions here and there, but not on the mass scale that some do. And so, that's not our topic for today, and I don't want to pursue that much further, but my understanding of Isaiah 40 through 66 is that Isaiah had prophesied the exile. If you go to chapters 36 through 39, we have the Assyrian crisis in 36 and 37, where the Lord miraculously delivers Jerusalem from the Assyrian army that is outside its walls, and in chapter 39, remember the Babylonians come and they visit Hezekiah, who has recovered from an illness.

He's gotten a new lease on life from the Lord. The Lord told him he was going to die, but instead he gets an extension of his life, and that's kind of what's happened to Judah. They've gotten a new lease on life.

The Lord has spared them from the Assyrians, but Hezekiah is kind of whining and dining the Babylonians, the Chaldeans, and showing off his wealth, and the prophet comes to him and says, What are you doing? You're acting like the typical king. Don't you realize that a day will come when these Babylonians will destroy this city, and they'll haul away all of this stuff that you're showing them. And so, the exile is predicted at that point, and so I think what the Lord does with Isaiah, he works in the prophet's mind, and it's very rhetorical, and what he does, he projects himself into the future, and he speaks to the future generation that's going to be in exile as if he's there.

And some scholars would argue that there are still hints and indications of an 8th century setting in chapters 40 through 55, but for the most part, I think in 40 through 55, the assumption is that the exile has already taken place, and what is being promised is deliverance from exile, whereas in 1 through 39, the exile hasn't occurred yet. It's being predicted. It hasn't occurred, but if you extend that into 40 through 55, and extend that into 56 through 66, it's already happened, and so you can see why they would propose that there was an inspired, anonymous prophet who wrote in the spirit of Isaiah, who added this material.

But we won't get into all the arguments pro and con, so I'm going to refer to what Isaiah is saying, because I think Isaiah is speaking to this future generation. It's like a grandfather writing a letter to his little granddaughter. He's very aged, and he knows he's not going to be around when she grows up and gets married.

He's just not going to make it that far, and so he writes a letter to be opened on your wedding day, filled with all kinds of wisdom, because he's lived life, and he knows the kinds of issues that she may be facing. That's kind of what I see going on in Isaiah, so that's kind of the general orientation that I have, but I think we need to look at the immediate context. The first servant song, so-called servant song, is in chapter 42, verses 1 through 9. We need to look at the context that leads up to this, and we're not going to do that in a lot of detail, but in chapter 40, a very famous verse, because

it's applied to the ministry of John the Baptist, and the Lord announces, comfort, comfort my people.

The Lord brings a message of comfort, and this section of Isaiah is very positive. There are a lot of salvation announcements, oracles, and a very positive section, and so it's a time for comfort, because the city has suffered. The Babylonians destroyed the city.

The people went into exile, and Zion is personified as a woman, and her children have all left her, but they're going to come back, and so the message in chapter 40, verses 1 through 11, is they need to prepare the way for the Lord's return, and that's not just metaphor, build him a nice highway or something like that, like they did for kings sometimes in the ancient Near East. It's moral preparation, and that's why it can be applied to the ministry of John the Baptist, because sadly, the people had not come back. Even by the time of John, hundreds of years later, they had not really come back to the Lord and prepared themselves morally for the kingdom that he's offering, and so their message is one of comfort, prepare the way for the Lord who is returning, and then in verses 12 through 31 of Isaiah 40, the prophet explains, and the Lord is speaking in some of that section, the Lord is making sure they understand that he has not abandoned them, because they're in exile, and so they might be thinking, well, God has given up on us, and the Lord makes it clear, no, I haven't.

I intend to fulfill my promises to the patriarchs, and I am going to restore the land, and as the section progresses, 40 through 55, you realize they've got to come to grips with why they're in exile, which is because of their sin, and they need to repent, but the Lord makes it clear that the Babylonians are not more powerful than I am, and their gods, Marduk, their patron deity, is not more powerful than me. You're in exile because of your sin, but I want to bring you back, and I intend to bring you back, and I'm still around. I'm not limited by time.

I am in Babylon. I am not limited by space. I haven't died.

I'm not weak. I can deliver you, and so that's the message of chapter 40. Then in chapter 41, the Lord begins to talk about one of the instruments that he's going to use in delivering the people from their bondage in Babylon, and you'll remember in history, the fall of Jerusalem came in 586.

There were actually three Babylonian invasions leading up to that, but 586 is when the people were taken into exile. Not too long after that, really, in 540, the Persian king Cyrus, who is mentioned by name in this section, came. That's one of the reasons some want to put it at a late date. He's called Koresh in Hebrew.

That's his name, but he is mentioned in chapters 44 and 45. The Lord is going to raise up Cyrus the Persian, and he is going to conquer Babylon, and he did that. He did

that, and Cyrus was very benevolent, and he decided to allow the exiles from Judah to return to their land, and so he is an agent in deliverance.

The Lord is going to get his people back to the land, but of course, there's still this moral and theological dimension of the restoration, but in 41, too, who stirs up this one from the east? Who officially commissions him for service? He hands nations over to him and enables him to subdue kings. He makes them like dust with his sword, like windblown straw with his bow. He pursues them and passes by unharmed.

He advances with great speed. This is a warrior king, King Cyrus, and the Lord is going to use him to defeat Babylon and allow the people to go back. So that's introduced here early on in this section, and then right after this in verses 8 through 20, the Lord encourages his people, his exiled people, and when he addresses his exiled people in this section, he refers to them as Israel and Jacob.

So he says, You, my servant Israel, Jacob, whom I have chosen. So it's quite clear that the Lord's servant is the nation Israel, but the problem is that the nation Israel has abandoned the Lord, and the Lord is going to speak of them as blind and deaf, and they are in exile, and they're in need of a deliverance. So that's important to remember, and keep that in mind, because when we talk about the identity of the servant in chapter 42, we need to realize that Israel has been identified as the servant.

So some will argue you've got to consistently understand the servant of the Lord in this section as Israel, and by that, I think they mean exiled Jacob Israel. No, there are two different servants operating here, and I'll attempt to prove that as we go. Then in chapter 41 verse 21, the Lord talks about this instrument of deliverance again, and I have stirred up one out of the north.

Earlier, it was the east, and here it's the north. Well, if you understand how the Persians would come over, it can be both east and north. So I stirred up one out of the north, and he advances, one from the eastern horizon, who prays in my name.

He steps on rulers as if they were clay, like a potter treading the clay, and then the Lord explains that I announced this from the beginning. One of the themes in this section is the Lord says, I can announce things in the distant future, and I think that's why it's Isaiah the prophet, because if you say, no, it's somebody writing later who's living through this, it undermines that whole argument. I said I wasn't going to get into that too much, but that's a major argument in favor of going with the traditional view that it's Isaiah.

So that brings us to the first servant song, which we will read and go through in detail, and discuss the various themes. We'll show how it is fulfilled in the New

Testament. There are actually several passages that quote from or allude to this particular passage, but I do want to kind of preview where I'm going.

Before we get lost in the trees, I want to see the big picture of the forest. Who is the servant in Isaiah chapter 42? Because it begins with, here is my servant whom I support, my chosen one in whom I take pleasure. I have placed my spirit on him, and then he begins to describe the servant's ministry, and some are going to say there's a lot of language here, and there is, that corresponds to that passage that we saw in chapter 41, where the servant is chosen, it's Jacob Israel, and in fact some will, I think the LXX, the Septuagint, actually puts Jacob Israel in here.

They've interpreted it along those lines, and I can see why they would do that. There's a similarity, and so you might be inclined to say he's talking to the exiled people, but when you read the text carefully, and you correlate it with the second servant song, you realize that's not the case. But if we're just kind of working inductively, and we come to this section, and we read about this servant who's going to be the Lord's agent of deliverance, we might think that it's Cyrus.

It's this Persian king who has not yet been named. He will be in chapters 44 and 45, but he has not been named yet. He's just the one from the east, the one from the north, and he's a conquering king.

So maybe he's the one that's in view here, but quickly we discover in the first verses of this song, this servant is not a conquering king, and he's not being portrayed that way in this song. He's meek, and he's not going to crush people, and so he just doesn't look like a conquering king. And then what really clinches it is when we go ahead to the second servant song, which is in chapter 49, and the Lord identifies the servant, and a lot of the language in the two songs overlaps.

And in the second song, the Lord identifies him as Israel. Israel. So the servant's Israel.

It's not Cyrus. So does that mean it's exiled Israel, Jacob? No, no, no, because right after this first servant song in chapter 42, the Lord talks about this particular exiled servant whom he calls Jacob Israel, and that servant is blind. He has not followed the Lord.

He has rejected the Lord. He's in exile. He's been punished for his sins, and that's not the case with the servant in the servant songs.

And also the clincher again is in the second song, because in the second song in 49, verses 5 and 6, after calling the servant Israel, not Israel Jacob, by the way, Israel, whenever the exiled servant is referred to in these chapters, it's always Jacob Israel, and he's just called Israel. And then guess what one of his main tasks is in 5 and 6? To

deliver to Israel. Whoa, whoa, we got Israel delivering Israel Jacob, and it's Israel Jacob that gets released.

So whoa, how can Israel deliver Israel Jacob? And you ought to see some of the things that the people will do with the syntax of the grammar of those verses to try to sort the problem out. The easiest solution is to go with John Oswalt, who says Israel is being used as a function there. It's not talking about identity.

And so we have an ideal Israel that's functioning in a way that corresponds to God's ideal for Israel, because he intended to impact the nations through Israel, and they failed. They didn't keep the covenant. They did not impact the nations in a positive way, and so they went into exile.

And so, the ideal Israel is going to come and deliver exiled sinful Jacob Israel. That's kind of where I'm going on this, and so I wanted to get the big picture out there, and we'll establish these arguments in a little more detail as we go through each of the songs. So I think we're ready at this point to dive into the first servant song, and I will read through it, and as I do, we'll talk about the ministry of the servant and the various roles that he plays.

So the Lord says, here is my servant whom I support, my chosen one in whom I take pleasure. I have placed my spirit on him. Just to give a little bit of a preview, this is really going to come into play when the Spirit comes upon Jesus at his baptism, and this passage is quoted along with Psalm 2, but more on that later.

He will make just decrees for the nations. In other words, his job is going to be a champion of justice. He's going to bring justice to the nations, because they're certainly characterized by injustice and oppression, and his job is going to bring justice to the nations.

He will not cry out or shout. He will not publicize himself in the streets. A crushed reed he will not break.

A dim wick he will not extinguish. In Isaiah 43, this idea of an extinguished wick is a metaphor for death. This isn't an extinguished wick; it's a dim wick, but he's talking about people who are almost at the end.

They're growing dim, they're needy, they're poor, and they need help, and he's not going to come along and crush these people. He's going to minister to them. He will not extinguish.

He will faithfully make just decrees that will benefit such people throughout the nations. He will not grow dim or be crushed before establishing justice on the earth. The coastlands will wait in anticipation for his decrees.

All right, now let's think about this a little bit. First of all, there's a hint of suffering. If you're familiar with the servant songs, people think of Isaiah 53.

That song actually starts at the end of 52, as we'll see, but in 53, he's the suffering servant. By the time we get to the third song, he's suffering, and in the fourth song, especially in Isaiah 53, we read about his suffering in detail. What about the first two songs? The suffering dimension is not as obvious, but it is present, and did you pick up on in chapter 42, verse 2, when he said he will not cry out, will not lift his voice, but this verb for cry out that's used here, *tza'ak*, it's normally used when someone is crying out in pain, and they're a victim, and they're oppressed, and so this servant will not cry out in that way, and some commentators have suggested, and I agree with them, that this is a hint that the servant is going to be opposed, and it's foreshadowing in a very subtle way the fact that he's going to be opposed to the point where he's going to be brutally and horribly beaten and mistreated to the point of death, and so I think when you read the servant songs through a second time, and you understand where they're heading, and you've already read about his suffering, when you pick up on this the second time, when you know what's coming, you might miss it the first time, but if you look at the usage of that word, it's hinting at opposition.

In verse 4, it says, he will not grow dim or be crushed before establishing justice on the earth. Why would he grow dim? Why would he be crushed? Why would there be a threat of that? If there's opposition that brings him to the place where he suffers, then this could be a hint of that as well, so Hebrew will often do this. They'll introduce themes in very subtle ways, and those themes get developed further as you go along in the literature, but the main thing we see here, even though, yes, there are hints of opposition, he's going to be a champion of justice.

He's going to bring justice to the nations, and we have royal psalms, psalms that are about the king, often referring in their original context to David, but they're often understood as messianic because there is an ideal, there's an ideal of the royal office that's presented in these psalms that the historical kings didn't fully live up to, and so we understand that it's the ultimate son of David, the Messiah, capital M. David was a Messiah, he was an anointed one. The ultimate anointed one, capital A, is going to fulfill this ideal. It's going to become reality in his kingdom when he rules, and the Davidic promises are fully realized.

So I'm going to take you to a couple of these royal psalms and just read a few verses to show you that there is a correlation between these royal psalms and this passage, because I'm going to argue that the first and second servant psalms clearly picture the coming servant as a king. These kings are responsible for justice in the ancient Near East. So let's go to Psalm 45, which is one of these royal psalms, and let me punch it in here on my computer.

I've got a switch over, and in Psalm 45, verse 4, appears in your majesty. Whoever's writing the psalm is speaking to the king. Appear in your majesty and be victorious.

Ride forth for the sake of what is right on behalf of justice. Then your right hand will accomplish mighty acts. And then it talks about the king as a mighty warrior, and it addresses, I think, the king as if he were God.

That's not because the psalmist is deifying the king, although we could say it's kind of foreshadowing the god man, but not here. This is poetry, and the king is God's representative on earth. He is carrying out God's will.

Psalm 18 talks about God empowering the king, teaching him how to use weapons, giving him his spirit, and giving him the strength to carry out his task of establishing justice. Your throne, O God, is permanent. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of justice.

You love justice and hate evil. For this reason, God, your God, sees the king being addressed. God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of joy, elevating you above your companions.

And so this is the royal ideal. No one in ancient Israel fulfilled this ideal perfectly, but this is the royal ideal which Jesus will fulfill. But the point here is, notice how justice is clearly associated with the king, because the king is responsible for bringing justice.

And we can go to Psalm 72 as well, which was either written by or for Solomon, we are told in the heading, David's successor. O God, grant the king the ability to make just decisions. Solomon himself prayed for this.

Grant the king's son the ability to make fair decisions, then he will judge your people fairly and your oppressed ones equitably. The mountains will bring news of peace to the people, and the hills will announce justice. He will defend the oppressed from the people.

He will deliver the children of the poor and crush the oppressor. This is what the king's supposed to do. By the way, it's not limited to Israel.

You see it throughout the ancient Near East. In a Phoenician text, in a Ugaritic text from the ancient Near East, kings will sometimes refer to their rule, their reign, as justice. It's like they're interchangeable words.

They don't mean the same thing, but they can be used interchangeably because the king's rule is ideal; the king's rule is supposed to be characterized by justice, so he can refer to his reign as my justice. And they'll even report to their gods, hey, I

established justice, because the god expects them to do that. Especially in Mesopotamia, Shamash, the sun god, 's responsible for justice.

For he will rescue the needy when they cry out for help and the oppressed who have no defender. He will take pity on the poor and needy. The lives of the needy he will save.

From harm and violence, he will defend them. He will value their lives. So I hope I've convinced you that establishing justice is a royal responsibility.

And we even see, to a degree, David doing this. Of course, David was guilty of some pretty unjust acts in his life involving Uriah. But in 2 Samuel 8, verse 15, before all that happened, David reigned over all Israel.

He guaranteed justice for all his people. And the Hebrew text actually says justice and righteousness for all his people. So at this point in time, David was very concerned about justice.

Remember when Absalom decides to rebel against his father. Absalom feels David has not taken care of justice, because Absalom's sister was raped by Amnon, their half-brother, and David did nothing. He was upset with Amnon, but he really didn't do anything about it.

And so Absalom took matters into his own hands and murdered his half-brother for the sake of his sister Tamar. Later, when he's been brought back from exile, David allows him to come back, and he's courting Israelite favor. And he's standing outside the city and saying, If I were king, I would give you justice.

So the point is, when you read about justice being established on the scale that we're reading about it here in this first servant song, I think a lot of people want to say the servant is just a prophet. Prophets were concerned about justice, and they promoted and endorsed justice, and they challenged kings to establish justice. But prophets didn't make the nation just.

They promoted it. The king's responsibility was to do that. And so what we have here is a king.

The servant is a king. Now, he's going to be more than that. The servant is going to wear many hats, and what I see in the literature is that sometimes they'll pit one role against another.

No, the servant's a prophet. No, he's a king. The servant is a new Moses.

He's a prophet. He surely is, and we're going to see that in chapter 49, but that doesn't exhaust it. Why can't he be both king and prophet, maybe even a little priest, when we get into Isaiah 53? So perhaps the most important text, because it's within Isaiah, is in chapter 11, where we have a picture of the future ideal Davidic king, and I'm just going to read through it real quick, and I think you'll see that whoever this is, he could very well be the servant in the first servant song, and within the book of Isaiah, I think you're supposed to connect the dots in that fashion.

A shoot will grow out of Jesse's rootstock. Jesse, David's father. We've got a new David on the way.

A bud will sprout from his roots. The Lord's spirit will rest on him. The Lord's spirit in the first servant song will come upon him.

A spirit that gives extraordinary wisdom. A spirit that provides the ability to execute plans. A spirit that produces absolute loyalty to the Lord.

I'm reading, by the way, from the Net Bible, and the reason I chose the Net Bible is because the translation I'm reading is my own, so I'm kind of comfortable with my own translation, but as you'll see, as we go through, that was done a while back, and there are places where I would change it now. I've changed my position on a few little things. Anyway, let's keep going.

He will delight in obeying the Lord. He will not judge by mere appearances or make decisions on the basis of hearsay. He will treat the poor fairly and make right decisions for the downtrodden of the earth.

He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth and order the wicked to be executed. So here is a king who is going to establish justice. Justice will be like a belt around his waist.

Integrity will be like a belt around his hips, and then we get into this next section, verses 6 through 8. This is where all the predators are going to be at peace with the animals that they normally kill and eat. So we got the wolf residing with the lamb, the leopard and the young goat, the ox and the young lion, and a small child out there leading them. The cow and the bear are going to graze together.

Their young will lie down together. The lion, like an ox, will eat straw, if you were wondering what the lion would eat. Radical transformation.

And a baby is going to play with a poisonous snake. He's going to have a pet snake that was, I guess, once poisonous and hostile. And so they will no longer injure or destroy on my entire royal mountain, for there will be universal submission to the Lord's sovereignty just as the waters completely cover the sea.

And I would argue that the thing with the animals is the animal kingdom, the transformation of the animal kingdom. I used to think it was just metaphorical. I don't anymore. I think it's going to be a literal transformation that mirrors what is happening in human society.

The king is going to bring justice, fairness, and peace. There's not going to be the conflict that characterizes the fallen world. And it's going to be mirrored in the animal kingdom.

And the reason that I take that view now is in Job 38 and 39, the Lord is teaching Job lessons from the animal kingdom, because the animal kingdom mirrors a larger spiritual conflict between the Lord and the adversary, who was introduced earlier in the book. So, when I read Isaiah 42, verses one through four, I correlate it with these other texts, especially the one within Isaiah. If I'm asking, okay, who would be establishing justice? First thing I would say, it's got to be a king.

This is the ancient Near East. It's got to be a king. And now in Isaiah, is there anything that Isaiah could be kind of alluding to in this passage? Yeah, chapter 11.

So he's going to be a champion of justice, which means he's going to be a king. Now, granted, in this section, it doesn't talk about him, it doesn't say he's a king. But what we've learned from studying language, and this is something we call relevance theory, is that there are lots of times when we talk, there are things that are implied when we speak.

And we don't need to specifically mention those. And this is why it's so important to be familiar with the culture of the ancient world when we're reading the Bible. We can't do that perfectly.

We have our limitations. But fortunately, through archaeology, we do have access to a lot of material that helps us understand what's going on. And so I would argue that if someone asked, well, how come it doesn't mention David specifically in the First Servant Song? And how come it doesn't say he's a king? I would say the ancient audience doesn't need that.

They would understand just from the way their culture works. And also from what Isaiah said earlier, they're going to connect the dots. It doesn't need to be said.

And Isaiah is also going to cast the servant in a broader role than just champion of justice as king. He's going to be a new Moses. He's going to be a prophetic figure as well.

So if you get too specific, you might make the portrayal a little lopsided, and you might miss some of the other aspects of the portrait. But I would argue he is a king, and more specifically, he is that Davidic king. And so when Jesus comes along, he fulfills Isaiah 11 and also Isaiah 42, because he is the ideal Davidic king to come.

Well, let's read on in this Servant Song. In verse 5, this is what the true God, the Lord, says. The one who created the sky and stretched it out.

The one who fashioned the earth and everything that lives on it. The one who gives breath to the people on it, and life to those who live on it. So the Lord is emphasizing, again, as he's speaking to his exiled people, who are thinking in ancient Near Eastern terms, that gods are limited to a location, that sort of thing.

The Lord is reminding them, no, no, I expect you to be monotheists. I am the true God. The article is put on the word for God there, ha'el, the God.

And I think it's designed to be specific in that case, setting him apart from others. And he created the world. He fashioned the earth, and he is the one who gives life to all people.

And so when we talk about the Lord through his servant establishing justice among all the nations, he has the authority to do it, because he created all the nations, and he created the world, and he has the authority to do it, and he's reminding them of that fact. And then he says to the servant, I, the Lord, officially commission you. Literally, I call you in righteousness, which I think is indicating I call you for the purpose of righteousness and justice.

I take hold of your hand. I protect you and make you, I've translated it, a covenant mediator for people and a light to the nations. Literally, it's just a covenant.

I will make you a covenant for the people. Well, how can a person be a covenant? A covenant's a treaty or agreement. Well, we have metonymy at work, and metonymy, we often have cause-effect relationships.

And so this servant is going to mediate a covenant. He's going between God and the people, and he's going to be a covenant mediator. And so the covenant mediator is just mentioned as the covenant, because the covenant is the product of his work as a mediator.

And this is not unique to me. There are other scholars who argue this way. Golden Gay, in his recent commentary, argues this way.

So I'll make you a covenant mediator for people. So this servant, as he establishes justice, is going to mediate a covenant between God and people and be a light to the nations. Light is used here as salvation.

When we get to chapter 49, we'll see the same language being used, and it's associated with God's deliverance and his salvation. If you go to Isaiah 51:3 and 4, yeah, light is associated with salvation. So the big question here is, who are the people? Who are the people? And I changed my position on this.

And if you read the commentaries, you'll see that there's a division. So if we just look at the immediate context of this psalm, people is om, a breed om, covenant of the people, which I think means covenant with the people, covenant mediator for the people, covenant with the people. That word was just used in verse 5, and it was used for all humanity.

The focus has been on the nations in the earlier verses. We're going to establish justice among the nations, and the Lord is the one who gives breath to all people. So my first inclination is to say, well, if it gets repeated here in verse 6, it could well be all the people in the nations.

And then in the parallel line, light to the nations. It doesn't have to be tightly synonymous, but it certainly could be roughly synonymous. We've got people and nations.

And that's the view I hold now. The other position that I used to hold, when you look at this song in light of chapter 49, and there are a lot of parallels in chapter 49 when it talks about the covenant mediator for the people, the context is a little different. He's still going to be a light to the nations.

The context is a little bit different, and it's clearly Israel. It's exiled Israel Jacob that God is going to make his covenant with. And as you know, elsewhere in Isaiah, it talks about this future covenant, and it's always with Israel.

It's not the nations. So there are good arguments for both sides, but I have decided that what we're talking about here is an actual covenant that God's going to make with humankind. It's going to be broader than just Israel, and in chapter 49, having talked about that and still referring to the light to the nations, he zeroes in a little more on Jacob Israel, and he says, by the way, I'm going to renew my covenant with you, the new covenant that replaces the Mosaic covenant.

So there's a shift, a move. So I'm not going to impose 49 on 42, when I think the immediate context in 42 favors the more nationwide covenant. He continues to open blind eyes and to release prisoners from dungeons, those who live in darkness from prisons, and realizes he's not letting murderers loose and all that.

In the ancient eras, those kinds of people would probably not be imprisoned. They would be executed. So what we're talking here is probably oppressed people, you know, debtors, people like that, oppressed people that deserve to be released because they've been improperly imprisoned.

They're blind because they've been in these dark dungeons, and, you know, when you're in a dark place for a long time, it's as if you're blind. And so that's a metaphor for deliverance that we see elsewhere. And then he concludes, I am the Lord, that is my name.

I will not share my glory with anyone else, or the praise do me with idols. Look, my earlier predictive oracles have come to pass, the former things. Now I announce new events.

And I think in this section of Isaiah, with maybe one exception, when he talks about earlier predictive oracles, he's talking about the exodus. The Lord announced the exodus in advance and then brought it to pass. And now he is coming, and actually a new exodus is going to be part of what he announces, and he is announcing new events, and they're going to occur.

He's got a track record. And sometimes in these speeches in this section, he'll challenge the pagan gods, Where's your track record? Give me some proof that you can announce things far in advance and bring them to pass. Before they begin to occur, I will reveal them to you.

So the Lord is very concerned in this section that he gets his proper due, and this is what he's going to do through the servant, which actually contributes to the realization that he's the one true God who controls history. And I didn't include the next verses. They are sometimes included in the song.

I'll read them because I think they're significant. Sing to the Lord a brand new song. Praise him from the horizon of the earth.

You who go down to the sea and everything that lives in it, you coastlands and those who live there, let the wilderness and its cities shout out the towns where the nomads of Kadar live. Let the residents of Selah shout joyfully. Let them shout loudly from the mountaintops.

Let them give the Lord the honor he deserves. Let them praise his deeds in the coastlands. See, the emphasis is on the nations.

It's on all people. And this is the proper response to what the Lord is going to do for them through the servant. He's going to bring justice to them.

So the servant is a covenant mediator for the people, and I think here it's the people of the earth. It's going to get narrowed in chapter 49. He's a light to the nations who is going to bring salvation to them.

He's going to open blind eyes. There are other passages in the Old Testament where opening blind eyes means to give someone just treatment and deliver them and free them. Many, many psalms talk about this.

It's in some ways not unique, this light to the nations idea. We actually see it with Mesopotamian kings. It's royal imagery in the culture.

For example, Tiglath-Pileser III was called the light of all humankind, the light of all people. Esarhaddon was the light of the world. The Assyrian kings thought of themselves in this way.

They were champions of justice, so they thought. They were champions of justice, and they tried to help the down-and-out, and so they were a light in that way. Of course, it may just be verbosity and royal hyperbole, but it's something that's out there in the culture.

Now the question then becomes, how does the servant bring deliverance to the nations? Well, he's going to establish justice, and that is certainly going to be a positive thing for at least the oppressed in the nations, but I think we've got to look at this in light of what has come along in Isaiah already, and so I've explained it this way. Earlier in this section of Isaiah, the prophet depicts the nations as idol worshipers. Though the Lord God has created all people, they fail to give him the honor he deserves and demands, and that's what's happening here in 42.

He's created them all, but they're not giving him their proper due. Well, once they see what he accomplishes through the servant, they'll be ready to worship him as the one true God. You know, in many ways, Jesus leads us back to the one true God and to true worship.

He doesn't just save us from hell. He's really restoring God's ideal for his people, and so all nations are in a covenant relationship with the Lord, whether they know it or not. God established a covenant with Noah and his sons in Genesis 9. He commissioned them to be fruitful, fill the earth, warned them to respect the image of God residing in their fellow human beings, and promised that he would again destroy all life, would not destroy all life as he had done through the flood.

But the nations of the earth have broken this perpetual covenant, this burrito lamb with God, by polluting the earth with human bloodshed. That's Isaiah 24 and Isaiah

26. See there? So, there's already been a broken covenant in Isaiah before we get to this first song.

For this reason, the nations are destined for destruction, according to Isaiah 24 and 26. But God warns them to turn to him for deliverance. That happens in Isaiah 45:22.

The Lord calls upon the nations to return to him, to look to him for deliverance before the day of judgment, when all of God's enemies will bow before him in defeat. That's in chapter 45. Those who humbly accept God's mercy will participate in his kingdom of peace and justice, and that is depicted in Isaiah 2. The nations will beat their swords into plowshares, their spears into pruning hooks, and there will be peace.

They will come to Jerusalem and ask the king to mediate their differences. They will recognize him as their covenant lord, as their king. We also see that envisioned in Isaiah 19, a passage that's not as well known, but that's a text where someday Assyria and Egypt, the mega powers in Judah's experience, who are enemies, are going to get along.

There's going to be a highway going from one nation to the other, and they are going to, along with God's people, covenant people, Israel, worship the Lord hand in hand, and the Lord says, they're all going to be my people. So he's going to establish a renewed covenant relationship with them. As the first servant song makes clear, it's the servant who's God's agent in mediating a renewed covenant relationship between God and humankind, and in bringing the light of salvation to the repentant among the nations.

And the fourth servant song is going to explain how God is able to do that, how he is able to reconcile with sinners, but we'll save that for a little bit later. So that's where the first servant song is going. I want to talk about the messianic dimension of this, but this is kind of a good break point right here.

And so I think we'll do that in our next lecture.

This is Dr. Robert Chisholm in his teaching on Isaiah's Servant Songs. This is session 1, The Servant of the Lord, Champion of Justice and Covenant Mediator, Part A, Isaiah 42:1-9.