



God reveals His plan

First, Isaiah has said that the entire world will find strength and comfort in a coming salvation¹. Now in a second unit, God reveals his plan to release people from bondage² and bring to them the forgiveness of their sins³.

1 40:1-42:17
2 42:18-43:21
3 43:22-44:23

• Release from bondage and forgiveness of sins

But we are still asking the question: who is this 'servant of the Lord' mentioned in 42:1? The Christian knows that it is the Lord Jesus Christ, but we are letting Isaiah tell us in his own way! He cannot be any 'ordinary' godly servant of God that we know about. The task is too great. He cannot be the nation of Israel, for that 'Israel' is the rescued, not the Rescuer. In 42:2 he does not sound like the conqueror from the east (Cyrus, as he proved to be).

• Who is this servant?

Now we have further evidence that the Servant cannot be Israel

Now we have further evidence that the Servant cannot be Israel. Israel is blind and deaf.

18 'Hear, you deaf; look, you blind, and see!'

Who can this be?

19 'Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like my messenger whom I send? Who is blind like the one accepted by me? Who is blind like the servant of Yahweh?'

• Israel is spiritually unperceptive

The people of Israel are meant to be God's messengers to the world. They should indeed be the 'servant of the Lord', but they are in no position to fulfil their calling. Israel is in fact spiritually unperceptive.

20 'You have seen many things, but you do not observe them; his ears are open, but he does not hear.'

• Israel should have been teacher of the world

Israel should have been the teacher of the world.

21 'It pleased Yahweh for the sake of his righteousness, that he [Israel!] should magnify the teaching and make it great.'

• Its destiny is not fulfilled in Isaiah's time

But the destiny of Israel had not been fulfilled in Isaiah's time.

22 '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.'

• Israel were a people plundered, devastated and exiled

Far from being the light of the world, in Isaiah's day and beyond into the time of the fall of Jerusalem, Israel were only a people plundered and devastated by pagan armies, and then sent into exile with no human help to send them back.

Israel are a people chastised, not a people ready to save the world

• Even God's chastening was slow to change Israel – only the coming exile would remove idolatry

Israel are a people chastised, not a people ready to save the world.

²³Which of you will listen to this or pay close attention in time to come?

²⁴Who handed Jacob over to become loot, and Israel to the plunderers? Was it not Yahweh, against whom we have sinned?

It was God himself who had chastised them. But even chastening by God was slow to have any effectiveness. It would require the terrible events of the coming exile before idolatry was removed.

For they would not follow his ways; they did not obey his teaching.

²⁵So 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.

Israel cannot be the servant of the Lord to bring salvation

• But redemption is coming to Israel

So one thing is clear from all of this. Israel cannot be the servant of the Lord to bring salvation. The nation is in need of salvation itself. But now Isaiah brings a word of hope for the nation. They cannot be the saviour, but they can be the people to whom redemption is coming. God has a word for them:

¹Now then, this is what Yahweh says – he who created you, O Jacob,

he who formed you, O Israel:

'Fear not, for I have redeemed you;

I have summoned you by name; you are mine.'

The nation may be greatly encouraged. Isaiah tells them why.

Israel should be greatly encouraged

1. God created the nation, he will not abandon it

1. God created the nation. He has no intention of abandoning it. Redemption took place before (in the days of the passover). Redemption has (in the mind of God) already taken place again. Amidst fire and water God's people will be kept safe. The first reference is to the nation of Israel, but Christians often take the words to themselves. They are right to do so because they are now included in 'Israel' (believing gentiles are grafted into God's people) and the principle of God's faithfulness to his people continues to apply to all of his people.

²When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;

and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.

When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned;

the flames will not set you ablaze.'

2. God is faithful in the present because of what he did in the past

• Passover

• The blood of Christ

2. God is faithful in the present because of what he did in the past

³For I am Yahweh, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour;

I gave Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead.'

God did so much when he redeemed Israel in the first passover. Can he leave them now? The same argument applies to those redeemed by the blood of Christ (as in Romans 5:10; 8:32). If he has done so much in the past he can be trusted to do much in the future to continue his plan.

*⁴“Since you are precious and honoured in my sight,
and because I love you,
I would give the human race in exchange for you,
and whole nations in exchange for your life.’*

• God gave His Son so that the whole world could become His people

In the days of the exodus Egypt and other nations bore God’s anger as God saved his people. If need be, God would be willing to abandon the whole world in exchange for his people. Of course he does not actually do that. Instead he gave his Son that the whole world might be able to become his people.

• Israel will go into exile in Babylon

Isaiah knows Israel will go into Babylonian exile. But there will be a gathering of Israel that is international and global.

*⁵“Do not be afraid, for I am with you;
I will bring your seed from the east
and gather you from the west.
⁶I will say to the north, “Give them up!”
and to the south, “Do not hold them back.”
Bring my sons from afar
and my daughters from the ends of the earth.’*

• But eventually Israel will be gathered from the entire globe

It is natural for us to see the Babylonian exile here, and that is indeed involved in what Isaiah says. Yet there is more. From his eighth-century-BC perspective Isaiah sees a day when an ‘Israel’ will be gathered from the entire globe. It is initially fulfilled in the return from exile. Yet there have been greater fulfilments. People from every tongue and nation and tribe are still coming into this ‘Israel of God’. Who knows how much greater a fulfilment may yet come? When the presently abandoned nation of Israel will again be regathered to God¹, what greater blessings must yet be in store!

1 Romans
11:26

• Isaiah calls all God’s people together

Isaiah in the name of God calls all God’s people together in agreement with what has been promised.

*⁷“Bring everyone who is called by my name,
whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed and made.’*

• God gives His people status with Himself – they shall never perish

Salvation is actually a form of creation. Just as God created the universe, so he created a people for himself. He will never leave them or forsake them – never! He gives them a status with himself for ever. God’s creative power will continue to work. God’s very glory is tied up with their security in him. They shall never perish.