

Isaiah Chapter 42, Hebrew Text with Translation and Footnotes

42:1¹ הֵן עַבְדִּי אֲתִמְדָּבֹו

¹Slotki comments on **verses 1-4** that “The prophet in the name of God describes some of the characteristics of His ideal servant. Quiet and unobtrusive, his spiritual influence would spread throughout the world.” (P. 199)

North entitles **verses 1-4** “The Servant of Yahweh: His Endowment and Mission.”

He comments that “Yahweh designates His servant, whom He has chosen and endowed with His Spirit to reveal His law to the nations. The servant will work quietly, patiently, and without wearying, until the mission for which the nations are waiting is accomplished...”

“The speaker is Yahweh. The servant is anonymous.” (P. 106)

Alexander begins his interpretation of this chapter with the insistence that the “servant” in this chapter is none other than the Messiah, Jesus Christ in **verses 1-17**, and then in **verses 18-25**, the servant is the Church, the “body of Christ.” Oswalt follows in this interpretation, claiming that it can be none other than Jesus Christ, the Messiah, and that the “fearful servant” of **chapter 41** cannot be the “ministering servant” of **chapter 42**.

This is like arguing that the weak and fearful disciples of Jesus as depicted in the **Gospels** cannot be the brave proclaimers of the good news as depicted in the **Book of Acts**. The fact is that fearful people can be turned into brave heroes of ministry through the power of YHWH, and that is what this depiction of YHWH’s (ideal) servant Israel is all about—deaf and blind, imprisoned—but still, YHWH’s servant, who will make known YHWH’s justice and teaching to the world!

And the fact is, there is not a mention of the “messiah” in **chapter 42**. The “servant” that has been depicted in **chapter 41** is the nation of Israel—there depicted as fearful, but now depicted as YHWH’s people, ministering to the world. As Slotki says, it is the “ideal Israel,” doing what YHWH has always intended for them to do, ministering, bringing light and justice to the entire earth.

We will not try to deal with all of the arguments made by Alexander and Oswalt as we go through the chapter, but will simply try to interpret its language as best we can, occasionally pointing out our disagreements with their interpretation. For example, on **verse 1**, Alexander states that “the prophets of the old dispensation are invariably represented as the messengers of God to the Jews and not the Gentiles.” (P. 129)

But this is simply not the case, as can be seen in the **Book of Amos, 1:2-2:5**, where the prophetic message is addressed to Syria, the Philistines, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab, before it is addressed to Judah and Israel. The **Book of Isaiah**

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has a large section with the prophetic message to the nations / “Gentiles”: **Isaiah 13:1-27:13**, where prophetic oracles are given to Babylon, Philistia, Moab, the Syria-Israel alliance, and Egypt, followed by oracles addressed to Babylon, Edom, Arabia and Tyre (including an oracle to Jerusalem). In the **Book of Jeremiah**, see chapters **46:1-51:64**, where Egypt, Philistia, Moab, many other nations, and Babylon are addressed. In the **Book of Ezekiel**, see chapters **25:1-32:32**, where Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon and Egypt are addressed.

And we wonder, How can Alexander—the great 19th century Hebraist and excellent **Bible** commentator, make such a claim as this? We agree that the prophets were primarily messengers to the Jews, but they also gave powerful prophetic messages to the non-Jews. We think the reason for this is that Alexander wants to depict Israel and its prophets as having nothing to do with bringing the light of YHWH or justice to the non-Jewish nations, and therefore cannot be the servant of **Isaiah 42:1-9**.

Oswalt summarizes **42:1-9** by stating that “The first four verses present the Servant to the hearers and readers. They describe his relation to God (**verse 1**) and the manner and sure success of his ministry (**verses 2-4**). **Verses 5-9** are an address by God to the servant in which God’s character and nature are used to undergird the majesty and the sweep of the ministry that has been entrusted to the servant. This vision of what God will accomplish through His servant is so exciting that Isaiah breaks into the ecstatic hymn of praise (**verses 10-13**).” (P. 109)

Westermann states concerning the “servant songs”...**42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9** and **52:13-53:12** that “the four of the together form a separate strand different from the rest of the material in the **book [Isaiah 40-55]**.”

“The four servant songs do not have one and the same literary category, and none of them has a form used elsewhere in **Deutero-Isaiah**. The song found in **42:1-4** gives God’s designation of the Servant, a designation similar to that of a king. In **49:1-6** a prophetic report of the Servant about himself is continued with motifs taken from the **psalms**...In structure **50:4-9** resembles a psalm of confidence. The last of these songs (**52:13-53:12**) is a report (**53:11b-13**) preceded and concluded by a Divine utterance (**52:13-15** and **53:11b-13**), and spoken by those for whom the Servant’s fate had spelled change. The songs thus differ completely in kind, their link being a subject in common, God’s Servant. One thing at least is obvious; their language at once reveals and conceals the Servant. He is not described in the terms used elsewhere in the **Old Testament** of a king, a prophet, Israel, or an individual righteous man, although there are reminiscences of each of these...

“The Servant has a task imposed on him by God and it embraces the Gentiles as well as Israel. It is also certain that his function is that of proclaiming God’s word, and to this extent it very closely approximates to a prophet’s. This, however, is not all; for

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the way in which he is designated in **42:1-4** recalls that of a king, while his office as depicted in **50:4-9** and **chapters 52-53** involves him in suffering, which **chapter 53** explains a vicarious, for 'the many'...

"The Servant has a place in the history of the office of mediator, which begins with Moses, who is also designated as servant of God. The terms used of the Servant have direct links with that stage in the history of prophecy which immediately preceded **Deutero-Isaiah**; these are clear echoes of the complaints of Jeremiah, the last prophet before the exile. At the same time, however, both because of the positive value attributed to the Servant's vicarious suffering, and since in his hands the office of mediator was expanded to take in the Gentiles—the Servant is destined to be a light to the nations—the songs point forward to a new era in the history of that office."

Knight comments that "**Deutero-Isaiah** has mentioned before Israel's calling to be Yahweh's Servant (**41:8-9**)...Jeremiah and Ezekiel had both already described Israel by this title (**Jeremiah 30:10; 46:27-28; Ezekiel 28:25; 37:25**). **Deutero-Isaiah** now puts it at the center of his argument (compare **43:10; 44:1-2; 45:4; 49:3-7**)..."

"The title was that held by a royal plenipotentiary [one having full power to act independently] among Israel's neighbors, and so was a title of honor. It implied executive power in the king's name and by his authority, but it also implied total and absolute obedience on the Servant's part...In fact, 'Servant of Yahweh,' seems about the equivalent to 'Son of Yahweh' as it applies to the king in **Psalms 2:7**..."

"Yahweh used many servants. The stars were His servants...Cyrus the king was His servant (**44:28; 45:1** [neither passage calls Cyrus 'servant'; but Cyrus is called YHWH's 'messiah'] whom victory meets at every step (**41:2**). Isaiah had called himself God's servant (**20:3**)..."

"But the Servant Israel is delineated here in total contrast to all other servants of God." (P. 43)

Oswalt states that "As a number of commentators have pointed out, the language here is that of presentation, similar to that used [in]... **1 Samuel 9:17**,

And Samuel saw Saul,
and YHWH answered him,
Look—the man of whom I spoke to you,
This one will put restraint on My people.

"It is also the language applied to God's particular appointees, such as Abraham (**Genesis 26:24** [where YHWH calls Abraham 'My servant']), Moses (**Exodus 14:31** [where Moses is called 'YHWH's servant']), and David (**2 Samuel 3:18** [where David is called 'YHWH's servant']). It is particularly common with reference to kings [yes, but

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בְּחִירִי רְצָתָהּ נִפְשִׁי
 נִתְּתִי רוּחִי עָלָיו
 מִשְׁפָּט לְגוֹיִם יוֹצִיא:

Look—My servant!² I will grasp / support him;³

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neither Abraham or Moses were ‘kings’]. That is significant to this passage because of the common understanding in the ancient Near East that kings were particularly commissioned to establish judicial order...in their realms, as this Servant is expected to do for the whole world (**verse 4**)...

“When these understandings are coupled with the similarities of this passage to **11:1-9**, which describes the Messiah, it seem likely that the Servant here is a messianic figure.” (Pp. 109-10)

But the passage does not use the noun “messiah,” even though in **45:1** it will do so for Cyrus. And we think, If the prophet had intended to introduce the promised messiah in this passage, he would have said so.

We agree that this servant may be seen as “a messianic figure,” since he is assigned a similar task to that of the messiah Cyrus. And we believe that Jesus Messiah fulfilled and embodied what this passage says about YHWH’s servant, just as he embodied what YHWH’s “ideal Israel” was intended to be. But that doesn’t mean that the prophet here drops the figure of Israel as YHWH’s servant, and switches his depiction to a messianic servant coming over half a century later. The passage depicts the ideal Israel—with what YHWH wants His people to be--which was embodied in Jesus Christ. What do you think?

²Where our Hebrew text begins with הִן עַבְדִּי, “Look—My servant!”, **Rahlfs** begins with Ἰακωβ ὁ παῖς μου ἀντιλήμψομαι αὐτοῦ Ἰσραηλ ὁ ἐκλεκτός μου, “Jacob the servant / young man of Mine, I will help him; Israel, the chosen / elect of Mine...” We think this is the earliest interpretation of **Isaiah 42**—and obviously, it understands the “ministering servant” to be none other than Jacob—the nation of Israel, exactly as **Isaiah 41:8** has it!

North comments that “The servant is introduced as if already present but his mission (probably) and its fulfilment (certainly, **verse 4**) lie in the future.” (P. 106)

We understand North to mean that the call to “look, My servant!” means the servant is present, and those who first heard this call would have been able to see

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My chosen one—⁴, ¹ My innermost-being was pleased.⁵

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YHWH's servant—as the Greek translation has it, Israel, or “Jacob.”

³**Rahfs** translates by “I will help him.”

⁴Where our Hebrew text has אֶת־מִן־בּוֹ בְּחִירִי, “I will grasp / take hold of him, My chosen one,” **Rahfs** has “I will help him, Israel, the chosen one of Mine.”

Thus where the Hebrew text leaves the identity of YHWH's servant indefinite and ambiguous, leading some to say Cyrus is meant, and allowing Christian interpreters to say that Jesus the messiah is meant, the Greek text makes the reference definite and unambiguous—it is Jacob, Israel. The translator of the **Septuagint** gets rid of the ambiguity--the servant is Israel!

For all of the occurrences of בְּחִירִי, “chosen one” in the **Hebrew Bible**, see end-note 1, where David and Moses are called YHWH's “chosen one,” but all of the other passages refer to Jacob / Israel, the nation, as YHWH's “chosen.”

North states on p. 107 that “Yahweh calls the servant *My servant...My chosen*, words used of Israel in:

Isaiah 41:8,

And you, Israel, My servant,
Jacob, whom I chose,
seed / descendant of Abraham, My beloved / friend.

Isaiah 44:1-2,

- 1 And now, listen, Jacob My servant,
and Israel—I chose him.
- 2 In this way YHWH spoke—your Maker and your Former—
from (the) womb He will help you!
You shall not be afraid, My servant Jacob,
and Yeshurun / Upright One, whom I chose!

Isaiah 45:4, where YHWH is depicted as speaking to the Persian, Cyrus, whom He has called by name,

for the sake of My servant Jacob, and Israel My chosen;
and I called to you, by your name;
I will give you a title / call you by name, and you did not know Me!

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I placed My Spirit upon him.⁶

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We think that in the light of these passages, which name the servant “Israel” and “Jacob,” it is simply mistaken for Christian interpreters to claim that the servant is Jesus Christ, without acknowledging that for the **Book of Isaiah** the servant is Israel / Jacob, and can only be understood of Jesus in terms of His being the embodiment and fulfillment of this biblical ideal.

North comments that “The words which Jesus heard at His baptism (**Mark 1:11**) are a conflation [merging] of **Psalm 2:7** and this passage (**Isaiah 42:1**).” (P. 107) Yes, Jesus was indeed the fulfillment and embodiment of “YHWH’s servant”—He was the “Ideal Israel”—but this should not be taken to mean that this was the original meaning of these passages, which are clearly spoken to Israel / Jacob, the nation / people whom YHWH calls “His servant,” and “His chosen one.”

⁵This phrase, **רָצָתָהּ נִפְשִׁי**, literally “it was delighted, My innermost-being,” is given varying translations, from “in whom my soul delighteth,” to “in whom I delight,” to “in whom my soul delights,” to “in whom I delight,” to προσεδέξατο αὐτὸν ἡ ψυχὴ μου, literally, “it accepted him, the innermost-being of Mine.” Alexander observes that the verb here, **רָצָה**, “is the verb applied in the Law of Moses to the acceptance of a sacrifice.” (P. 128) This is true, but the verb is also used to mean “be pleased with,” “be favorable to”; and “accept”; and “be pleased,” or “determined”; and “make acceptable,” “satisfy” (by paying off a debt). See **Brown-Driver-Briggs**. **Rahlfs** translates this line by “My innermost-being accepted him.”

This is the phrase that is used in part as God’s saying concerning Jesus at His baptism and transfiguration:

Matthew 3:17,

And look—a voice out of the heavens saying:

This is the Son of Mine, the beloved one,
in Whom I was well pleased! (Compare **Mark 1:11**)

Matthew 17:5b,

And look—a voice out of the cloud, saying:

This is the Son of Mine, the beloved One,
in Whom I was well pleased.

Listen to Him! (Compare **Mark 9:7b**; where the phrase from **Isaiah 42:1** is missing.)

⁶For this phrase, **נָתַתִּי רוּחִי עָלָיו**, “I gave / placed My Spirit upon him (that is, upon My servant),” compare the following passages, which depict YHWH’s placing of
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His Spirit upon the nation of Israel:

Isaiah 59:21,

And I—this is My covenant with them,
said YHWH;
My Spirit which is upon you,
and My words which I placed in your mouth,
shall not depart from your mouth,
and from (the) mouth of your descendant(s),
and from (the) mouth of your descendant(s)' descendant(s),
said YHWH,
from now and until long-lasting-time!

(Obviously, this Divine promise is spoken to a penitent and forgiven Israel. The words which YHWH has given to Israel are to be the lasting basis of YHWH's covenant with His people.)

Ezekiel 37:14, following his vision of the valley of dry bones, symbolizing Israel's "death" in captivity, Ezekiel tells Israel that his prophesying to them will enable them to live again, and return to life in the Land of Israel. He quotes YHWH as promising to Israel:

And I will give / place My Spirit upon you (plural),
and you will live;
and I will cause you to rest upon your ground / land;
and you will know that I (am) YHWH,
I spoke, and I will do (it)--
(it is) a saying of YHWH!

Ezekiel 39:29,

And I will not again hide My face from them,
when I (will have) poured out My Spirit upon Israel's household—
(it is) a saying of my Lord YHWH!

Joel 3:1-2,

- 1 And it will happen afterwards,
I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters will prophesy,
your old men will dream dreams,
your young men will see visions.
- 2 And also upon the servants and upon the female servants,
in those days I will pour out My Spirit.

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(It is a universal pouring out of YHWH's Spirit ("all flesh"), including His people Israel.)

Oswalt comments that "The Messiah [Jesus Christ] was One on Whom God's Spirit visibly rested." (P. 110). Yes—but YHWH's Spirit also rested on Israel, especially on the "Ideal Israel as Servant" as this passage depicts, and as Ezekiel depicts happening upon their release from Babylon.

Oswalt also states that "The quotation of the entire unit [**Isaiah 42:1-4**] in **Matthew 12:18-21** is further indication of the messianic reading that was given to the passage in first-century Judea and Galilee." (P. 110)

We agree that this is a "messianic reading" of the passage in first-century Judea, not that it was the original meaning of the passage—which we take to be "the Ideal Israel as Servant." But Jesus certainly embodied and fulfilled "the Ideal Israel" as depicted in the **Gospels**. See:

Matthew 12:18-21, which says Jesus' ministry of healing was a fulfilment of **Isaiah 42:1-4**:

18 Look—the servant / young man of Mine, whom I chose,
the beloved of Mine, in whom the innermost-being of Mine was well-
pleased.

I will place the Spirit of Mine upon him,
and judgment / justice for the nations he will announce / report.

19 He will not quarrel,
neither will he cry out;
neither will anyone in the streets hear his voice.

20 A broken / crushed reed he will not break in pieces,
and a smoking lamp-wick he will not quench,
until he casts out justice in victory.

(This last line is given varying translations: from "till he send forth judgment unto victory" to "until he brings justice to victory," to "till he has brought justice through to victory," to "until he has made judgement victorious.")

21 And in the name of his,
nations will hope.

(Here, we think, it is obvious that the author of **Matthew** has translated directly from the Hebrew, rather than quoting from the **Septuagint**. The author of **Matthew** is convinced that Jesus is truly the embodiment and fulfilment of **Isaiah 42:1-4**. We think that the Greek translator was convinced Jacob / Israel was the servant being spoken to, and we agree with that—but we also agree with **Matthew** that Jesus is the ultimate fulfilment and embodiment of this ministering servant of YHWH. What do

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Justice⁷ for the nations he will bring forth!⁸

⁶(...continued)
you think?)

⁷Where our Hebrew text reads מִשְׁפָּט, “justice,” 1QIs^a reads וּמִשְׁפָּטוֹ, “and his justice.”

⁸For this matter of “bringing forth מִשְׁפָּט, justice for the nations” in **42:1** see **verses 3** (YHWH’s servant will “by true faithfulness bring forth justice”) and **4** (YHWH’s servant will not grow faint until he has established justice in the earth, for which the coastlands wait). Also see:

Isaiah 51:4, where YHWH is depicted as saying to Zion,

Pay attention to Me, My people!
And My people (synonym), give ear to Me!
Because teaching / *torah* will go forth from Me,
and My מִשְׁפָּט, justice for a light of peoples,
I will cause to rest (upon them)!

Knight comments that “Israel is presently a pariah [‘outcast, non-person’], sweating in a slave-labor camp [we wonder where Knight learned that this was the nature of life in Babylon for the Jewish exiles. Jeremiah envisions the exiles as being able to build houses and plant gardens, as their children married and their families increased, finding their own welfare in the welfare of Babylon—see **Jeremiah 29:4-9**] and therefore totally unlike a royal vizier [high official]. And yet, Deutero-Isaiah wants us to see, Israel *is* a royal vizier. This is not because Israel has any value *per se*, but wholly because God *upholds* him, or better, is grasping him firmly...He has put His *Spirit upon him*...Thus it is clear that Israel is no longer ‘not-My-people’ but is truly ‘my people’ (**40:1** [compare **Hosea 1-2**]), as **Deutero-Isaiah** said at the beginning...

“Other nations were accustomed to the idea of upholding their Gods. Here is something new for Israel to understand, for the verb ‘to uphold, or grasp’ with God the Good Shepherd as the subject, takes on the overtone almost of cuddling in the arms...

“Israel as a whole, the chosen people as a whole...whom **Deutero-Isaiah** regards as the Servant of God...is chosen not merely for her own good but in order to do what a servant is meant to do, to serve. Israel’s service is to bring justice, the true way of life, to the rest of the world.” (P. 44)

And we wonder--Could the ambiguous reference be not to Israel, but to Cyrus, as Oswalt suggests on p. 111? Cyrus brought justice to the nations by allowing the captive peoples to return to their native homes, enabling them to rebuild their sanctuaries—as he did for Israel. If this is the background for the affirmation of Israel’s role as

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servant—it means that Israel is called to minister to the nations as Cyrus the Persian has ministered to them—not by conquering them, but by unashamedly and humbly serving them! And certainly not by withdrawing from them, building a wall of exclusion to keep them out, demanding Jewish men to divorce their foreign-half-breed families, and become righteous by concentrating their attention on the Mosaic 613 commandments—but not serving foreigners or people of the land who are in need!

But, as Oswalt observes, Cyrus used his power to “smash and rebuild,” and the servant of **Isaiah 42** uses no such tactics. This servant “is so far from smashing the mighty that he will not even break off the reed that is bent over and cracked. Rather, he will support it and straighten it...He will not even puff out the most dimly...smoldering wick...God’s answer to the oppressors of the world is not more oppression, nor is His answer to arrogance more arrogance; rather, in quietness, humility, and simplicity, He will take all the evil into himself and return only grace. That is power.” (P. 111)

Alexander holds that “most satisfactory interpretation” of the word מִשְׁפָּט, [our ‘justice’] is “a description of the true religion.” (P. 129) To us, that is a strange definition, one that can quickly smack of religious superiority and bigotry. We think “justice” is something that transcends religions, and belongs to all peoples and nations—meaning what is just, and right, and fair. But if Alexander is right, it is to be noticed that the “true religion” is not one of loud claims, but one that does not break a bruised reed or quench a flickering flame—what Alexander calls “a silent, unostentatious method of proceeding.” (P. 133)

Do you think it is מִשְׁפָּט, “justice” to take what we believe to be “the true religion” to the world, calling upon all peoples and nations to convert to our view of religion, and get rid of theirs? I believe in proclaiming the story of Jesus to the nations, while ministering to all who need us, and allowing that story to have the impact that it can and will have on them, as we listen to, and honestly share in their stories and convictions. But I do not believe in a movement that proclaims its own superiority, while branding all other religions as false—which quickly serves to stir up hatred and competition and leads to religious wars.

I had a dear friend who went as a missionary to Africa, to the country then called “Tanganyika” but now Tanzania. He later returned to America, to raise money for a printing press. I asked him what book he was going to print. He quickly replied it was the book “Why I am a Member of the Church of Christ” by LeRoy Brownlow, which detailed how the Church of Christ is the true Church, while all other denominations are wrong, with a chapter devoted to each of those denominations, detailing why they are mistaken, and why the Church of Christ is one and only true Church.

I asked my friend why he didn’t instead print **Bibles** in the language of the Tanganyikans, and he insisted that Brownlow’s book was more necessary. I do not

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want to belittle what my friend was doing, as he gave his life in seeking to serve the Tanganyikans—which I admire. But I wondered –wouldn't it be better to simply teach them the story of Jesus, as he ministered to those people, and let it have the powerful impact that it could have, without importing American denominationalism wars into Africa? What do you think?

North comments that bringing **מִשְׁפָּט**, justice to the nations means “he shall reveal My law.” (P. 107) Does he seriously think that making know kosher food laws, or Levitical sacrificial laws is what the nations need and are longing for? We think it is a mistake to simply define **מִשְׁפָּט** as “law,” and a much broader definition is needed, i.e., “justice.”

For this key word in biblical teaching, see B. Johnson's article in **Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament IX**, pp. 86-98, where he shows the many different definitions that have been given to **מִשְׁפָּט**, including “judgment,” “a matter under judgment,” “what is determined by judges and law-givers,” “what is right,” “justice,” “a constant certainty of action,” and “a domain and the act of **שָׁפַט**, as an at through which the damaged order of a community (bound by law) is restored.” (P. 87)

He goes on to show that in the **Hebrew Bible** **מִשְׁפָּט** is used to describe the decision that is made by casting lots, leading to the definition “decision,” “answer,” “opinion.” Again, when a judge makes a decision in contested cases, the result is called **מִשְׁפָּט**. And as a result, it “often stands for the entire judicial procedure.” Out of this usage emerges the use of **מִשְׁפָּט** for “the general meaning ‘justice.’” (P. 89)

Johnson shows how this general meaning of “justice” is closely related in the **Hebrew Bible** to “what is right and proper, righteousness.” He states that “Here, **מִשְׁפָּט** stands as an absolute entity, almost ‘world order,’ the God-given norm to ensure a well-ordered society.’ Proper conduct in all spheres is to be done in **מִשְׁפָּט** or in conformity with **מִשְׁפָּט**.’ And in this sense, **מִשְׁפָּט** “takes on overtones of deliverance, emphasized by the parallel use of the root **צָדַק**,” “right,” or “righteousness.” (Pp. 92-93)

North states that the phrase, “He shall cause **מִשְׁפָּט** to go out” “must be the key to the understanding of [42:1-4], since they recur in **verse 3**, and in **verse 4** the servant is to ‘establish’ **מִשְׁפָּט** in the world. **Verse 2** excludes public proclamation, and **verses 3-4** imply that the servant's task will demand unwearied patience with individuals rather

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42:2⁹ לֹא יִצְעַק

וְלֹא יִשָּׂא

וְלֹא-יִשְׁמִיעַ בַּחֲוֵץ קוֹלוֹ:

He will not cry out,

and he will not lift up (his voice),

and he will not cause his voice to be heard in the street.¹⁰

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than dealing with nations in mass...The length of the servant's task and his patience exclude an interpretation that he publishes מִשְׁפָּט as a ruler issues edicts. What then is the מִשְׁפָּט he is to reveal?" (P. 107)

After weighing several alternatives, North concludes that the best definition of מִשְׁפָּט is "the body of commandments which express the will of God with regard to the conduct of His intelligent creatures." (P. 108) But if public proclamation is excluded, as well as the issuing of edicts, what can this mean?

We think it means that the servant embodies God's will by his actions and quiet, patient ministry, demonstrating to the nations by his life of genuine justice and righteousness what the will of God is. That's what YHWH wants from His servant Israel / Jacob. And that's what Jesus of Nazareth did in His life and ministry. He wrote no books, although His disciples remembered His life and His words, and later committed them to writing; He held no public office from which to issue edicts. But He showed by His life and loving ministry to all people what genuine justice and righteousness are—the most powerful form of teaching imaginable—and that all nations of earth both long for and need.

That may be the reason for Mahatma Gandhi's statement that he liked Christ and His teaching, but didn't like Christians and their actions, which he said "are so unlike Christ." What do you think?

⁹North comments on **verse 2** that "The seven negatives in this and the following verses must emphasize the contrast between the servant and others who might compete for the title. The contrast may be with the early [prophets, i.e., Elijah and Elisha], or it may be with denunciatory prophets like Amos. Some think the contrast is with Cyrus and that the servant was intended as a foil to Cyrus." (P. 108) Who do you think the contrast is with?

¹⁰The mission of YHWH's servant will not be fulfilled by noisy claims or loud public announcements. Rather, it will be fulfilled quietly, humbly—quite differently from the

(continued...)

42:3 קנה רצוין לא ישבור

ופשתה כהה לא יכבנה

לאמת יוציא משפט:

A crushed reed he will not break,

and a dim(ly burning) flax-wick, he will not extinguish it.¹¹

¹⁰(...continued)

way in which ordinary political leaders forge their coalitions and gain victories. As Slotki comments, “He will be gentle and undemonstrative in manner.” (P. 199)

Oswalt states that the depiction of YHWH’s servant here in **Isaiah 42:1-9** is “strikingly like that of the description of the expected messiah in **Isaiah 9** and **11**.” But in **11:4b** it is stated concerning the branch (code-word for messiah) from Jesse’s root,

and he will strike (the) earth / land with his mouth’s rod,
and with his lips’ spirit / breath he will put wickedness to death!

That is very different from the description of YHWH’s servant here in this verse—indeed, it is “strikingly unlike” the way in which the servant of YHWH accomplishes his mission—not with the rod of his mouth, but quietly, without lifting up his voice, or causing it to be heard in the street.

We think YHWH’s servant goes about his work quietly, feeding the hungry, healing the sick, clothing the naked, etc. etc. as depicted in **Isaiah 58**, not by making loud claims for himself. Again, what do you think? Do you claim that Jesus Christ is the embodiment and fulfillment of this description of YHWH’s servant? And if you do, do you also claim that Jesus Christ is the only embodiment and fulfillment of this description? Have there not been numerous “saints” among all nations and peoples of the earth who have played just such a role?

¹¹Where our Hebrew text reads the piel imperfect יִכְבֶּנֶה, “he will (not) extinguish it,” 1QIs^a has the qal imperfect, “he will (not) quench.” **Rahlfs** also has “he will not quench.”

North comments that “both figures [crushed reed and dim(ly burning) flax-wick] imply that the servant will never despair of even the most abandoned outcast.” (P. 109) See the opposite action by YHWH in **43:17**—only there, it is not a weak person that is meant, but the powerful army of Pharaoh.

For / by true-faithfulness¹² he will bring forth justice!¹³

42:4 לֹא יִכָּהֵן וְלֹא יִרְוֶן

עַד-יָשִׁים בְּאֶרֶץ מִשְׁפָּט

¹²The phrase here is לְאֵמֶת, literally “to / for / by firmness / faithfulness / truth, which we translate by “for / by true-faithfulness.” North translates by “With faith undimmed and spirit unbroken,” and says the phrase is “referring back to the figure in **verse 3**,” that is, the crushed reed and dim(ly burning) flax-wick. He goes on to say that the Hebrew text means that “the servant will carry through his task to its completion.” (P. 109)

¹³The mission of the servant will be gentle and compassionate towards those he teaches, especially towards the weak and powerless. His mission and his message will be embodied in truth and faithfulness. It is by this means—with no short-cuts—that he will succeed in bringing true justice to the earth. True justice is gentle and compassionate!

Slotki comments that YHWH’s servant “will not hurt even the weakest, yet he will firmly insist on right and truth.” (P. 199)

Translations of the last line of **verse 3** vary:

King James, “he shall bring forth judgment unto truth.”

Tanakh, “He shall bring forth the true way.”

New Revised Standard, “he will faithfully bring forth justice.”

New International, “In faithfulness he will bring forth justice...”

New Jerusalem, “Faithfully he presents fair judgement...”

Rahfs, ἀλλὰ εἰς ἀλήθειαν ἐξοίσει κρίσιν, “but rather for truth he will bring forth justice.”

Alexander, “by the truth will he bring forth judgment.”

Oswalt, “in truth he will bring forth justice.”

Alexander comments on **verse 3** that “The verse continues the description of the mode in which the Messiah [Alexander goes to great lengths to prove **42:1-4** is about Jesus the Messiah, not the nation of Israel, as he admits is the case in the latter part of this chapter as well as in the preceding chapter] and his people were to bring forth judgment to the nations, or in other words, to spread the true religion. It was not by clamor or by violence.” (P. 133)

This is obviously a later Christian reading of **Isaiah**, which fails to take seriously the text’s identification of the servant as Israel and Jacob—not the messiah. Notice Alexander’s definition of מִשְׁפָּט as “judgment,” or “spreading the true religion,” which we think is not at all an adequate definition of מִשְׁפָּט. See our footnote 8.

וְלִתְּוֹרַתוֹ אֵימִם יִחַיְלֹן:

He will not grow dim / faint, and he will not crush,¹⁴

until he places justice in the earth;¹⁵

and for his teaching coastlands wait.¹⁶

¹⁴Where our Hebrew text has וְלֹא יִרְוֶץ, “and he will not crush,” **Rahlf**s has “and he will not be broken in pieces.”

¹⁵YHWH’s servant will not use force or violence as he goes about his mission of placing justice in the earth. But he will quietly and non-violently go about his mission of teaching with dogged commitment and determination, never growing faint, never giving up. His teaching answers the needs felt throughout the earth! The farthest coastlands / regions of the earth are waiting for such instruction, especially as it is demonstrated in loving care for the poorest and sickest people of the land!

Knight comments that “The way the Spirit chooses to operate is the way of self-emptying and not of self-assertion, and...it is by that means and not another that the Servant will reveal to the whole world the revelation for which it is longing...The Servant is meant to sit down alongside the broken-hearted just where they are to be found, in the mire of this human life of ours; and in this way, by his very presence with them, he will become the instrument by which a strength and hope that is not their own will be transferred to them.” (Pp. 46-47)

It is no wonder that Christian readers of **Isaiah 42** identify YHWH’s servant with Jesus and His ministry as depicted in the **Synoptic Gospels**, because Jesus in fact truly embodied the ideal Israel as YHWH’s servant. And modern readers easily think in terms of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. in the twentieth century with their sacrificial lives and teaching of non-violent resistance to injustice, that have had such a profound impact upon the nations of our modern world.

¹⁶Oswalt asks concerning the last line of **verse 4**, וְלִתְּוֹרַתוֹ אֵימִם יִחַיְלֹן, “and for his **torah** / teaching coastlands wait,” “Whose **torah** / teaching / law is it? The servant’s. By what right does this servant usurp the place of Moses and even of God?” (P. 112)

But this question reflects a misunderstanding, to think that giving **torah** means usurping the place of Moses or God, as if only Moses or God could give teaching / law. The fact is that all of Israel’s leaders following Moses also gave **torah**, for example Joshua as stated in **Joshua 24:25-26**. Joshua was followed in giving teaching / law to Israel by Judges, such as Deborah and Samuel, and then by Israel’s Kings, such as David and Solomon, with their many psalms and proverbs, and the priests and prophets and wise leaders of Israel through the centuries. They all, as Jesus said of the leaders of Israel in His day, “sat in Moses’ seat” (**Matthew 23:2**), just as He would do in His

(continued...)

¹⁶(...continued)

teaching. That is the task of religious leaders, still today. And it is not “usurping the place of Moses or God.” It is to act as God’s spokespersons, giving religious instruction to the people of God. What do you think?

North comments that “It is worth noting that the windows of the **Old Testament** were more open to the west than to the impenetrable further east. There is something prophetic in this.” (P. 109)

Compare **Acts 16:9-10**,

- 9 And a vision appeared to the Paul throughout [the] night,
a Macedonian man was standing and urging him, and saying,
come over into Macedonia [i.e., in Europe], help us!
- 10 So then, as he saw the vision,
immediately we sought to go out into Macedonia,
concluding that the God had called us to announce good news to them.

But to call the east part of the world “impenetrable,” on the basis of Paul’s mission which was primarily to the west, is to overlook the fact of Jesus’ disciple Thomas’ going all the way to southwestern India in the first century, where he founded the Mar Thoma Syrian Church.

North concludes his discussion of **verses 1-4** by stating that “On the whole, the servant looks more like prophet than king, but it is probable that he should not be placed in either category to the exclusion of the other. The dominant impression is that of a peripatetic [traveling from place to place, working in various locations for short periods of time] missionary...The passage is a strikingly accurate forecast of his teaching ministry.” (P. 110)

But we ask, is the passage a “forecast”? We think not. YHWH is depicted as calling the listener / reader to behold or see His servant, as if the servant is present to be observed. Or can this be an “ideal portrait” of what YHWH’s servant looks like and does? We certainly agree that Jesus’ life and ministry is an embodiment and fulfillment of this description of YHWH’s servant.

¹⁷Slotki comments on **verses 5-9** that they contain “The Divine promise to His servant of full and constant support in the accomplishment of the mission entrusted to him.” (P. 200)

Oswalt entitles these verses “Commission,” and comments that “After the description of the servant and his ministry in **verses 1-4**, these verses come as an address to the servant with a more specific charge to him (**verses 6-7**). This charge is contained within statements that link it to all that has gone before in **chapters 40-41**. They identify the servant’s Lord as the Creator (**verse 5**) and remind both the servant

(continued...)

בּוֹרָא הַשָּׁמַיִם וְנוֹטִיָּהֶם
 רִקַּע הָאָרֶץ וְצִאֲצֵאֶיהָ
 נָתַן נִשְׁמָה לָעַם עֲלֶיהָ
 וְרוּחַ לַהֲלֻכִים בָּהּ:

In this way the El / Supreme God YHWH¹⁸ spoke--¹⁹

¹⁷(...continued)

and the hearer that his ministry will provide further confirmation that God is incomparable (**verses 8-9**)." (P. 116)

North entitles **verses 5-9** "The Calling of the Servant," and comments that "Yahweh, the true God and Creator, addresses one ('thee') whom He has called and appointed to be a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind and to deliver those in captivity. He will not surrender to idols the praise due to Him alone. What he formerly announced has come to pass and He will announce new happenings before they unfold...North concludes that the "thee" refers to the servant (Pp. 110-11)

Oswalt comments on **verse 5** that "The One Who calls the Servant to establish God's loving order [this is what Oswalt thinks the Hebrew מִשְׁפָּט, **mishpot**, our 'justice,' means] on the earth is in fact the Creator of the earth...Thus the Servant's ministry will not constitute an imposition of some new regimen, but will be, in fact, the renewal of creative design." (Pp. 116-17)

North calls **verse 5** the "hymnic introduction with...participial clauses" to **verses 5-9**." (P. 111)

¹⁸Where our Hebrew text has הָאֱלֹהִים יְהוָה, "the (Supreme) God YHWH," 1QIs^a has הָאֱלֹהִים, "the God," perhaps in a desire to eliminate the "Canaanite" tones of calling YHWH אֵל, "Supreme God," reminiscent of the Canaanite pantheon of Gods.

¹⁹This description of the Servant of YHWH is not something the prophet has dreamed up on his own—it is YHWH God's, Who is El—the Supreme God—Who is the Author of this description! And He knows what it take to truly be His servant, doing the work He desires.

Lines 2, 3 and 4 of **verse 5** all begin with qal present participles, בּוֹרָא, "creating," רִקַּע, "stamping out," and נָתַן, "giving"—all describing the Creator God as

(continued...)

One creating the heavens and stretching them out,²⁰
One stamping out the earth and its offspring / produce,²¹
One giving breath to the people²² upon it,²³

¹⁹(...continued)
continually doing His creative works in the present.

What do you think? Do you conceive of creation as something that happened in the beginning, but not as continually happening in the present? Who or what do you think is causing the birth of new stars and galaxies in outer space? Who do you think enables the new-born infant to breathe and to talk?

Oswalt states that “The language, notably the exclusive use of participles, is identical to the descriptions of God in **Isaiah 40:12-26**.” (P. 117) However, there is no exclusive use of participles in referring to God the Creator in **Isaiah 40**, where there is a mixture of past, present and future verbs used.

²⁰The Hebrew phrase is בּוֹרֵא הַשָּׁמַיִם וְנֹטִיָּהֶם, “One creating the heavens and stretching them out.” Knight comments very appropriately that “We know more today about an expanding universe that **Deutero-Isaiah** could ever have guessed.” (P. 47) Yes, ever since the Hubble telescope and its marvelous pictures of star-galaxies constantly rushing into outer space from an initial “big bang,” we can only fall in awe and wonder at the infinite greatness of creation.

²¹The Hebrew phrase is רָקַע הָאָרֶץ וְצִאֲצֵאֶיהָ, “stamping out the earth and its offspring / produce.” Translations of the qal participle vary from “spread forth” to “spread out,” to “hammered into shape,” to ὁ στερεώσας, “Who made firm, strengthened.”

Alexander comments that “This clause is not a scientific, but a poetical description. To the eye, the heavens have the appearance of a canopy or curtain, and the verdant surface of the earth that of a carpet.” (P. 135) Indeed!

Knight explains that the prophet “can only speak of God beating out the earth in the way that a silversmith makes a lump of silver expand until it is large enough to bend and so to evolve into the shape of a bowl.” (P.47) Slotki states that the participle means “‘beats out,’ implying extension as well as firmness.” (P. 200)

But it is more than just the earth itself—it is the earth and its offspring / produce, meaning, we think, all its inhabitants, including human beings and all other forms of life, both animal and vegetation—this is the world which God has made.

²²North translates by “the peoples,” but states that the Hebrew phrase לְעַם, literally “to the people,” while “strictly a singular collective, ‘people’...the context requires (continued...)

and Spirit / spirit²⁴ to the ones walking in it.²⁵

²²(...continued)

the plural collective sense of ‘peoples.’” (P. 111)

²³The Hebrew phrase is **נָתַן נְשָׁמָה לְעַם עֲלֵיָהּ**, YHWH is the One “giving breath to the people upon it.” It is a present active participle, describing what the Creator God is doing in the present, giving breath to the people upon His stamped-out earth.” This is the universal God, the Creator of the universe, and of every living creature. It is not some Divine activity confined to a select group of people. God imparts breath to all the peoples upon planet earth!

Dogmatic theologians have emphasized **2 Timothy 3:16**'s opening phrase, *πᾶσα γραφὴ θεόπνευστος*, “every writing (is) God-breathed,” interpreting it to mean everything written, even every word in the canonical **Bible** [there was no such thing as a “canon” of the **Bible** at the time of **2 Timothy**] is breathed out by God.

But they have not emphasized the **Bible's** teaching that every human life is likewise God-breathed, not wanting to claim that every human being is “inspired” by God.

As Oswalt puts it, “But of greater significance than those creative acts [creation of the heavens and the earth] is that of giving life (*breath, spirit*) to human beings. His concern for humans, as expressed in **verses 6-7**, is the concern of the One Who brought us into being and sustains us with every breath we draw.” (P. 117) Yes, we say, that is the truth of the **Bible**—God's Spirit is not confined to Jews, or Christians, but is a Divine gift to every human that breathes!

²⁴North translates by “life,” though stating that the Hebrew **רוּחַ** is literally ‘spirit.’ He comments that “For this use of ‘spirit’ = ‘breath’ (of life), compare **Psalms 104:29-30**,

29 You hide Your face; they are terrified;

You gather their (ocean's creatures') spirit (**רוּחַ**)—they perish,
and to their dust they return.

30 You send forth Your Spirit (**רוּחַ**), they are created—
and You renew (the) face of (the) ground.

Compare also **Genesis 7:22**, with its phrase **נְשָׁמַת־רוּחַ חַיִּים**, “breath of spirit / Spirit of life,” used with reference to all living creatures on the earth.

²⁵The Hebrew phrase is **וְרוּחַ לְהַלְכִים בָּהּ**, “and (giving) Spirit / spirit to the ones walking in it (that is, in the earth).” That is, not a person walking upon planet earth can do so apart from the Divine gift of God's Spirit / spirit. Sectarian claims that only

(continued...)

42:6 אָנִי יְהוָה קָרָאתִיךָ בְצַדִּיק

וְאַחֲזִיק בְּיַדְךָ וְאַצְרִיךָ

וְאַתְּנֶנְךָ לְבְרִית עִם

לְאוֹר גּוֹיִם:

I YHWH, I called you²⁶ (singular) in righteousness,²⁷

²⁵(...continued)

certain segments of humanity have been given or possess the Spirit are rejected.
Compare with this statement:

Genesis 2:7,

And YHWH God formed [like a Divine Potter] the human being,
dust from the ground,
and breathed / blew into his nostrils a breath of life,
and the human being became a living innermost-being!
(a universalistic claim concerning all humanity)

Job 32:8, where the young man Elihu states:

Surely it (is) Spirit / spirit in a man / mankind,
and breath of Shaddai—it gives them understanding!
(This is also a universalistic claim—all understanding comes from the Divine Spirit
/ breath!)

Acts 17:25b, where the apostle Paul preaches at Athens, stating that God

Himself gives to everyone life and breath
and all things.

2 Timothy 3:16a,

All writing (is) God-breathed.
(Again, a universalistic claim, concerning all writing as being given by God's
breath, saying nothing about "all canonical writings"! See the preceding
footnote.)

²⁶The verb here is qal perfect, קָרָאתִיךָ, **qera)thiyka**, "I called you." It is
something that has happened in the past, with YHWH's calling both Israel and the
Persian worshiper of Marduk, Cyrus, to be His servant / messiah. Notice the three

(continued...)

²⁶(...continued)

additional qal imperfect verbs in this verse, וְאֶחָזַק וְאֶצְרֶךָ וְאֶתַּנֶּךָ, “and I will take strong hold...and I will guard you, and I will give you...” The question in our mind is whether these three verbs are meant as qal perfects, being preceded by the waw-conversive, and therefore to be translated as perfects, “and I took strong hold...and I guarded you, and I gave you,” as we have translated. At any rate, the first of the four verbs is qal perfect, and refers to past action, and therefore we translate the last three verbs as conversive-perfect.

See **Isaiah 41:8-9, 42:6** (here), **43:1** and **45:3-4**, in which Israel / Jacob, the servant, and Cyrus are all said to be “called” by YHWH.

²⁷The noun is צֶדֶק, **tsedheq**, which Knight defines as YHWH’s “plan of love.” The noun is given many definitions, including “rightness, righteousness, what is right, just, normal, justness, of weights and measures” (**Brown-Driver-Briggs**). Thus it is very similar to the noun מִשְׁפָּט, with its many nuances, but which we take to mean “justice.”

B. Johnson, in his article on the root צֶדֶק in **Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament**, pp. 239-64, states that the noun צֶדֶק, **tsedheq** “occurs 119 times [in the **Hebrew Bible**] and refers to the ordered, Divine principle, though it can also evoke the notion of active intervention, an activity evident in many passages. God’s righteousness (also in the sense of ‘deliverance’ or ‘vindication’) is near (**Isaiah 51:5**); it both precedes and follows Him (**Psalms 85:14 / 13**) [with many examples evoking] the notion of dynamic activity...Even the foundation of God’s throne is made of צֶדֶק, **tsedheq** and מִשְׁפָּט, **mishpot**, ‘judgment / justice.’

“The king and judge should love צֶדֶק, **tsedheq** and judge with צֶדֶק, **tsedheq** ...When **Psalm 119** repeatedly describes God’s commandments and ordinances as צֶדֶק, **tsedheq**, it is probably referring first of all to Yahweh’s established order...

“The oppression of the poor and the violation of their צֶדֶק, **tsedheq** and מִשְׁפָּט, **mishpot** (**Ecclesiastes 5:7 / 8**) simultaneously disrupts God’s order, obstructs salvation, and pushes aside the legitimate claims of the poor. **Psalm 85:11 / 10** describes the antithetical, harmonious situation in which צֶדֶק נִפְגְּשׁוּ חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת וְשָׁלוֹם נִשְׁקָו: [steadfast-love and true-faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other].” (Pp. 250-51)

(continued...)

and I took strong hold by your hand,²⁸ and I guarded you,²⁹
and I gave you for a covenant of a people,³⁰

²⁷(...continued)

Here, in **Isaiah 42:6**, YHWH is quoted as saying אֲנִי יְהוָה קָרָאתִיךָ בְצִדְקָה
“I, YHWH, called you (His servant) in righteousness.” North states that this means “for
a saving purpose,” and notes that a similar phrase is used concerning Cyrus in **45:3**,
אֲנִי הָעִירְתִּיךָ בְצִדְקָה, “I, I stirred him up in righteousness.” (P. 111)

We take this to mean that YHWH’s servant is called to be the instrument of
righteousness in the earth, among all the nations, to whom the servant (and Cyrus) is
sent. Israel, as the ideal servant of YHWH will lead the world into righteousness, serv-
ing the people in all nations in compassionate, self-giving love (see **Isaiah 58**). To fol-
low YHWH’s servant is to walk in the “right way.” And, as the prophet will teach us, that
right way is the way of suffering on behalf of others, bearing their sins (see **Isaiah 52:**
13-53:12), and lovingly serving them (again, see **Isaiah 58**).

It is not the way of dogmatically affirming the 613 commandments as the way,
excluding all others who do not agree, but it is the way Jesus of Nazareth walked, the
way on which He leads His followers still today, summing up the 613 commandments
by “Love God and neighbor,” and “Do to others as you would have them do to you,” or
as the ancient prophet Micah, a contemporary of the historical Isaiah put it (**Micah 6:8**),
the way of “doing justice, loving steadfast-love, and walking humbly with God.”

What do you think? Do you agree with this interpretation? How would you
improve on it? Do you agree that **Isaiah 58** is important for defining “righteousness”?
And what do you think is the relationship of **Isaiah 58** to the teaching attributed to Jesus
in **Matthew 25:31-46**?

²⁸North notes that a similar statement concerning YHWH’s “taking by the hand” is
made with reference to Israel (**41:9, 13**) and of Cyrus (**45:1**). (P. 112)

²⁹The phrase here is וְאֶצְרֶךָ, “and I kept you,” from the root נָצַר. Slotki points
out that it can also be translated “and I formed you,” from the root יָצַר.

Oswalt comments that “The Servant is not expected to carry out the task on his
own after being called. God holds him tightly by the hand and will not let go (see **41:10**
[the same promise made to the fearful servant]).” (P. 117)

³⁰Compare **Isaiah 49:8**, words spoken to the servant Israel (**49:3**), and to an
individual who will bring Jacob / Israel back to Him (**49:5**):

49:8 In this way YHWH spoke:

At a time of goodwill / acceptance / favor I answered you (singular),

(continued...)

for a light of nations--³¹

³⁰(...continued)

and in a day of deliverance / salvation I helped you.

And I guarded you, and I gave you for a covenant of a people,
to raise up a land / earth,
to cause to possess devastated possessions.

What does this phrase, וְאֶתְנַתְּנֶה לְבְרִית עִם, “and I gave you for a covenant of a people” mean? Translations vary, from “for a covenant of the people” (**King James**), to “a covenant people” (**Tanakh**), to “as a covenant to the people” (**New Revised Standard**), to “to be a covenant for the people” (**New International**), to “to be the covenant for a people” (**New Jerusalem**), to εἰς διαθήκην γένους, “for a testament / covenant of a race / people” (**Rahlfs**).

North states that there are three possible meanings:

1. Covenant people, meaning Israel;
2. (The mediator of My) covenant with the people Israel;
3. (The mediator of My) covenant with the peoples.

He notes that “a covenant with mankind, or even with all creation, has an analogy in the rainbow-covenant of **Genesis 9:8-17**. Even if it had not, Deutero-Isaiah’s attitude to the nations does not preclude but rather supports (**45:22; 49:5-6**) such an idea.” (P. 112)

Isaiah 45:22,

Turn to Me and be saved / delivered, all ends of earth / land!
Because I (am) El / Supreme God, and there is no other!

Isaiah 49:5-6,

- 5 And now, said YHWH, (the) One forming me from (the) womb for His servant,
to return Jacob to Him, and Israel will not / will be gathered to Him;
and I will be honored in YHWH’s eyes,
and my God was my strength.
- 6 And He said, It is a light / trifling thing, your being My servant
to cause Jacob’s tribes to stand,
and to cause (the) preserved ones of Israel to return.
And I will give / make you for a light of nations,
to be / become My salvation / deliverance as far as the earth’s end!

³¹Here are two parallel phrases, stating that YHWH has called His servant for two purposes,

(continued...)

³¹(...continued)

first, לְבֵרִית עַם, “for a covenant of a people”;
second, לְאֹר גּוֹיִם, “for a light of nations.”

We take the two phrases to mean that instead of the covenant of Noah or Moses, or the covenant with David, YHWH’s servant himself, by his actions and teachings, becomes the covenant God wants to make with all peoples of the earth. Not only is the servant a “covenant”; he is also, in and of himself “a light of nations.” When the nations see this servant, and follow his example and teaching, they will enter into covenant with God, and the light of God’s truth will shine upon them, enabling them to escape the darkness, and walk in that light.

Others hold that this means:

“A people with whom God has made covenant for the good of the nations” (Knight);

“Through you the nations are to experience light, illumination and salvation” (Westermann);

“The servant will be a covenant, i.e. the means through whom people will come into a covenant relation with the Lord...Within the all-embracing concept of covenant there is the light of truth...” (Motyer);

“‘A covenant of the people’ means ‘a negotiator between God and the people’; as light of the nations must mean a source or dispenser of light to them, so covenant of people, in the very same sentence, may naturally mean the dispenser or mediator of a covenant with them” (Alexander);

“By means of this Servant God will deliver the people of earth from that theological darkness in which they are bound by their own self-idolatry...Above everything else, that light comes by means of the covenant, a covenant first made with that particular people called to be His servants, and then expanded to the entire world.” (Oswalt).

Slotki comments that “The communication of the ideals entrusted to Israel will lead to a bond of unity or a covenant of peace among the peoples of the earth. The phrase may signify ‘a covenant-people,’ related to God by a covenant.” He adds that the servant will be God’s “moral and religious counselor and guide” to the nations.” (P. 200)

One thing is certain. God wants the entire world to enter into covenant with Himself, and to walk in His light. His chosen servant is called to enable that to happen.

(continued...)

42:7 לִפְקַח עֵינַיִם עֲוֵרוֹת

לְהוֹצִיא מִמְסַגְרֵי אֲסִיר

מִבַּיִת כָּלֵא יוֹשְׁבֵי חֹשֶׁךְ:

to open both eyes³² of blind people,

to bring forth prisoner(s) from dungeon(s),

from a house of imprisonment those dwelling (in) darkness!³³

³¹(...continued)

Jesus gave His entire life and ministry to just such a purpose. Following His death and resurrection, the risen Jesus sent His followers out on a world-wide task—that of calling all peoples and nations into covenant relationship with God—a task still unfinished, but a task which the nation of Israel has hardly begun, and which orthodox Judaism refuses to share in.

Alexander states that “Not only the messiah but the Israel of God was sent to be a mediator or connecting link between [YHWH] and the nations...[This is] perfectly consistent with the teachings of the **Old Testament** respecting the mission and vocation of Israel, the ancient Church, as a covenant-race or middle-people between God and the apostate nations.” (P. 137)

What do you think the phrase “for a covenant people” means?

³²The Hebrew word is עֵינַיִם, a dual noun meaning “two eyes,” or as we translate, “both eyes.”

³³The statements in **verse 7** would certainly apply to the Jewish exiles imprisoned in Babylon, but they can have a much broader application, that is, they may mean all who are blind, and all who are prisoners, throughout the world. God wants His servant to be the means of bringing the light of hope, and release from imprisonment to all the earth’s peoples.

With this statement, we are reminded of:

Isaiah 35:5, which says, when YHWH comes to save His people,

Then (the) eyes of blind people will be opened,
and ears of deaf people will be unstopped.

Isaiah 49:9, where YHWH says, when His servant comes, he will be saying to the prisoners, Go forth!;

(continued...)

³³(...continued)

to the ones in the darkness, Be uncovered!
Upon (the) ways they will pasture;
and in all bare heights (will be) their pasture.

Isaiah 61:1,

Spirit of my Lord YHWH (is) upon me--
because YHWH anointed me,
to bring good news to poor people;
He sent me forth to bind up (the) broken-hearted,
to proclaim to captives freedom,
and to prisoners certain opening (of locked doors);

Knight comments that “This recreative, or saving purpose, is actually meant to become flesh in and through Israel’s obedience in mission. The illustrations used are typical of the whole biblical revelation, in that the poor and the depressed classes among [humanity] are to be the special object of God’s continuing concern. So the poverty stricken exiles must have felt comforted indeed to discover that in their *dungeon* and in their *prison* God was concerned for them still...Out of darkness Isaiah (9:1-2) had expected that light would shine as it had done in the beginning [**Genesis 1:3**]. Through the hands and mouths of the chosen Servant people, light is to shine once again, recreatively, into the dark places of a stricken world.” (Pp. 48-49)

Alexander, differently, states that “The fashionable explanation of these words, which refers them to the restoration of the Jews from exile, is encumbered with various and complex difficulties... How is it that the prophet did not use expressions more exactly descriptive of the state of Israel in Babylon? A whole nation carried captive by its enemies could hardly be described as prisoners in dark dungeons.” (P. 137)

We agree, and remember **Jeremiah 29:4-9**, where the prophet tells the Jews in Babylon to build houses, plant gardens, and raise their families, praying for the welfare of Babylon, which would mean their own welfare—a far cry from being imprisoned in dark dungeons! In fact, when Cyrus gave the Jewish exiles permission to leave Babylon and return to their homeland, only a small minority of them did so—apparently thinking that their living conditions in Babylon were better than what they were apt to find in a Jerusalem and Judea that had been destroyed by the Babylonians.

Alexander goes on to say this description would no more apply to the Babylonian exile than “to a hundred other seasons of calamity [for the Jews].” He adds that “The only natural interpretation of the verse before us is that which makes it figurative like the one preceding it, and the only natural interpretation of the figures is the one which understands them as descriptive of spiritual blindness and spiritual bondage, both of which are metaphors of constant application to the natural condition of mankind in the **Old** as well as the **New Testament**.” (Pp. 137-38) We are inclined to agree with Alexander at this point.

(continued...)

42:8 אֲנִי יְהוָה הוּא שְׁמִי

וְכַבוֹדִי לֹא אֶתֶן

וְתַהֲלִתִּי לַפְּסִילִים:

I (am) YHWH!³⁴ That (is) My name!

And My glory³⁵ I will not give to another,

³³(...continued)

North also states that “It is more natural to take the ‘you’ of **verse 6** as the subject of [**verse 7**]. To open the eyes that are blind, to bring the captives out of the dungeon, etc. refers most naturally to the physical privations of the exiles (compare **47:6** [where YHWH is depicted as saying Babylon showed no mercy to the aged], but it may refer to the spiritual darkness (com-are **Isaiah 9:1/2**), of Israel (**42:18-20**) or even of the nations and their rulers (**52:15**). It is difficult to restrict the universalism of Deutero-Isaiah or to limit his *dungeon* and *prison* to ‘iron bars’ and ‘cages.’ The release of the captives from prison is not to be taken as liberation from exile but rather in a spiritual sense, a liberation of all the peoples from bondage. [As Muilenburg says], ‘All of **verse 7** is a development of light to the nations.’” (Pp. 112-13) What do you think?

³⁴This phrase, אֲנִי יְהוָה, “I (am) YHWH,” occurs some 213 times in the **Hebrew Bible**. It is His “Self-identification.”

Slotki claims that “The Hebrew for *the Lord* (the *Tetragrammaton* [Four-letter-word]) signifies the attribute of mercy and power of realization. He faithfully carries out His promises.” (P. 201)

We have often heard such statements made by Jews—but we doubt that the name YHWH has such significance. We think the name has the form of the imperfect verb “to be,” and it means “He will be,” or “He will cause to be.” He is the God of the future, Who causes new life, “becoming,” but we see no indications of mercy, or power of realization, or carrying out of promises in the name.

The phrase “I (am) YHWH” occurs 23 times in the **Book of Isaiah**, at **27:3; 41:4, 13, 17; 42:6 (here), 8; 43:3, 15; 45:3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 18, 19, 21; 48:17; 49:18, 23, 26; 60:16, 22 and 61:8**. Nineteen of these occurrences are in **chapters 40-55**.

³⁵Knight comments that human beings “can neither see nor know God as He is in Himself. But God graciously allows [human beings] to behold His glory as He passes [human beings] by, even while remaining beyond the range of human understanding (**Exodus 33:22**) [taking the story of Moses as intended to mean all humanity...

(continued...)

and My praise to the idols!³⁶

³⁵(...continued)

“In the parable of the last judgment (**Matthew 25:31-46**), we read how Israel is asked if she has remembered her calling, which is to open blind eyes and bring light to those who sit in the darkness of the prison house. That is what Israel is elected for, as **Deutero-Isaiah** has said. Only in Israel therefore can God’s glory be made plain, and His name be revealed.” (Pp. 49-50)

But we wonder, is Moses indeed symbolic of all humanity, or all Israel? Is not his experience in seeing the Divine glory exceptional, and unique? And we also wonder, Is **Matthew 25:31-47** addressed to Israel? We think Jesus is depicted as addressing all the nations of earth in this “parable”—and in fact, there is no mention of Israel at all in the **Matthew** passage. And there is nothing in this text in **Isaiah** saying that God’s glory can only be made plain in Israel, or that only Israel can reveal God’s name.

We say that the **Matthew** passage is better understood as meaning that whenever any person or nation on earth—Jewish or non-Jewish--lovingly cares for the needy in its midst, God will use and approve of that person or nation as His servant, even if that person or nation doesn’t realize Who exactly it is that it is serving. That is just the opposite of Knight’s claim that God’s glory can only be seen through Israel! But why introduce all of this into a commentary on this passage in **Isaiah 42**?

³⁶We think this passage has nothing to do with the ideas read into it by Knight (Israel as the recreated image of God), but rather has YHWH identifying Himself by name, and claiming exclu-sive rights to that name—denying the claims of idols, or any other so-called Divine being.

Alexander states that “The general doctrine of the verse is that true and false religion cannot co-exist; because, however tolerant idolatry may be, it is essential to the worship of [YHWH] to be perfectly exclusive of all other Gods.” (P. 138)

This is of course, a teaching found many times in the **Bible**—we call it “radical monothe-ism” --the belief in one God, YHWH, and only one God. But according to this passage, **Isaiah 42**, the servant of YHWH is not to proclaim this belief in loud, combative ways. Rather, the servant is called to hold consistently to his belief, but not argue and shout it aloud in the streets. Rather, he is to go about his business quietly and humbly—a business of loving service to others.

We say, the servant of YHWH is not to follow the example of Elijah, in murdering the advocates of other Gods (see **1 King 18**), leading to religious war, acting as if he alone was YHWH’s servant--but rather, as Elijah himself learned, to listen for the still, small whisper of a voice—we say, appealing to reason and truth, not dogmatically, but humbly, believing that the Divine Spirit can accomplish far more than the sword and the thunder and lightning bolt.

(continued...)

42:9 הַרְאֲשֹׁנוֹת הַנִּהְ-בָאוּ

וַחֲדָשֹׁת אֲנִי מִגִּיד

בְּטָרֵם תִּצְמַחְנָה

אֲשִׁמִּיעַ אֶתְכֶם:

The first things,^{37, 2} look—they came / happened.

³⁶(...continued)

What do you think? Can we truly hold to the belief in one God, only one God, and not enter into holy war against those who differ from us? Can we humbly and quietly hold to our belief, while entering into patient ministry to and dialogue with those who differ from us? Do you think Elijah was wise to murder the 400 prophets of Baal after he had publicly won in the contest with them? Did it further his cause? Or did it lead him to depression and longing for his own death?

And we ask, Did Jesus enter into holy war with idolaters? Did He send out His followers to begin holy war against all who differed from them, like Muslim jihadists today? Or did He not, while constantly standing for the truth of God, quietly minister to those suffering around him, demonstrating what real love is, regardless of their religion or nationality? Did He teach His follow-ers that they should take up swords to further and defend their ministry? And when the Emperor Constantine put the sword in the hands of bishops in the Christian world, did that cause divisions to cease, and promote true religion? Absolutely not! It only succeeded in turning the Christians into intolerance of others who differed from them, and using the sword to murder them!

³⁷The adjective הַרְאֲשֹׁן, “first,” occurs some nineteen times in the **Book of Isaiah**, at: **1:26; 8:23; 41:4, 22, 27; 42:9; 43:9, 18, 27; 44:6, 9; 48:3, 12; 52:4; 60:9; 61:4; 65:7, 16** and **17**. Of these nineteen occurrences, twelve are in **chapters 40–55**. The plural form of the adjective occurs nine times at: **41:22; 42:9** (here); **43:9, 18; 46:9; 48:3; 61:4; 65:16** and **17**. For all of these passages, see our end-note 2.

Here the plural הַרְאֲשֹׁנוֹת, **hari)shonoth**, “the first things,” can be understood as referring to the biblical account of humanity’s and the universes’ origins as depicted in **Genesis 1-11**. They happened, just as YHWH’s spokespersons declared, and those declarations have held true across the centuries, with their proclamation of a Divinely created universe, with all humanity made in the Divine image and likeness, and with their depiction of the consequences of human sinfulness. Those teachings have held true.

It can also be understood as referring to the messages of YHWH’s prophets prior to the exile, who predicted “doom” upon YHWH’s Own people, first of northern Israel

(continued...)

And the new things³⁸ I am declaring--
before they sprout forth³⁹

³⁷(...continued)

and then Judah; and who, when that doom happened, turned from a message of doom to a message of salvation and hope. The message of doom proved to be true; and so would the message of hope, announced by Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and now, Second Isaiah –as the Persian Cyrus conquered Babylon and set the exiles free to return to their homelands.

Slotki holds that the phrase refers to “the successes of Cyrus which were duly predicted by the prophet in His [YHWH’s] name.” (P. 201)

Alexander thinks the phrase refers to “former prophecies already verified, as grounds of confidence in those yet unfulfilled...as former prophecies (not of Isaiah but of older prophets) had come to pass, so those now uttered should be likewise verified.” (P. 138)

What do you think “the first things” means?

North comments that “Yahweh is not only ‘up to date’ with news, but will pronounce authoritatively upon it. That is a difference between Him and the idols...to whom He will not surrender the honor due to Him alone.” (P. 113)

³⁸What does the prophet mean by “the new things” which he is declaring?

Slotki thinks he means “the present predictions, such as those concerning the servant of the Lord, the redemption and prosperity of Israel and the confusion of the heathens.” (P. 201)

Oswalt evidently takes the “former / first things” to be referring to the prophet’s earlier prediction of the coming of Cyrus. “It is as though God is reminding His people that not only is the predicted coming of Cyrus evidence of God’s sole Lordship, so is the predicted coming of the Servant. The full flowering of each of them, according to Isaiah, has been predicted even before the first shoot has broken through the ground.” (P. 120)

Alexander thinks the “new things” is referring to the prophecies now being uttered by the prophet... “events about to be predicted...beyond the reach of human foresight.”

What do you think is being referred to by this phrase? And if the text does not make it explicit, do you think the interpreter should do so?

³⁹Knight comments that “Now, *before they spring forth*—a botanical metaphor, with emphasis upon the development of the plant out of the seed that first has to

(continued...)

I will cause them to be heard⁴⁰ by you people!

42:10⁴¹ שִׁירוּ לַיהוָה שִׁיר חָדָשׁ

³⁹(...continued)

die—God will do new things, for He is about to reveal His glory in a new way. Yet these things **Deutero-Isaiah** does not yet dare disclose.” (P. 50)

We agree that this is a botanical metaphor, but there is not a mention of, certainly no emphasis on, the seed’s first having to die by the prophet. The emphasis is on YHWH declaring truth to His people, whether with reference to things in the past, or to things that are to come in the future.

Alexander states that “The strong and beautiful expression in the last clause can only mean that the events about to be predicted were beyond the reach of human foresight, and is therefore destructive of the modern notion, that these prophecies were written after Cyrus had appeared, and at a time when the further events of his history could be foreseen by an observer of unusual sagacity.” (P. 138)

Those who believe **Isaiah 40-55** is the work of a two-centuries later disciple of Isaiah, called for convenience “Deutero-Isaiah,” do not think that he was any less inspired than was his predecessor, the historical Isaiah. But rather, loyal to the teaching of his forerunner, and filled with the Spirit of YHWH, was a genuine prophet who rose up in the midst of the exiles in Babylon, proclaiming these truths, still some time before the rise of Cyrus, perhaps around 560 B.C.E., no less an evidence of prophetic foresight than if written by the historical Isaiah.

⁴⁰Where **Codex Leningradensis** spells אֲשַׁמִּיעַ, many Hebrew manuscripts and editions of the **Hebrew Bible** spell אֲשַׁמִּיעַ, that is, instead of)ashmi(, (ashmia(, “I will cause to be heard.”

⁴¹North entitles **verses 10-17** “The New Song,” and comments that “The whole earth is bidden to sing a new song of praise to Yahweh. He is going out as a Warrior. Then, speaking in His Own person, Yahweh declares that He has long imposed silence on Himself. Now He will cast off all restraint, make havoc of all obstacles, and order a way in which even the blind cannot get lost.

“The passage invites comparison with a group of **Psalms**...especially **Psalm 33:3-22, 96, 98, 149**, which similarly begin with the summons to ‘Sing to Yahweh a new song’...Whether the pattern was created by Deutero-Isaiah and adopted by the psalmists, or vice versa, has been much discussed, but the general opinion now is that Deutero-Isaiah was making use of a well-established Psalm type.

“To judge from the **Psalms, Isaiah 42:10-17** is a single poem...It consists of

(1) the summons to praise (**verses 10-12**),

(continued...)

⁴¹(...continued)

- (2) descriptions of Yahweh under the figures of a Warrior and a Woman in labor (**verses 13-15**), leading up to
- (3) the now familiar theme of the exodus from Babylon (**verses 16-17**)...A new world will be born of the Divine travail." (Pp. 113-14)

The exiles in Babylon had lost their temple and their rituals of animal sacrifice in that temple. But they had not lost their **Book of Psalms**, or the ability to sing those **Psalms** in their worship, whether in groups or as individuals, whether with written texts or simply from memory. There are numerous places in **Second Isaiah** and **Third Isaiah** where the influence of the **Psalms** is easily felt.

Slotki comments on **verses 10-12** that "The marvels of the *new things* of which he spoke in the preceding verse suggest to the prophet the *new song* in which he invites all nature to join. It is 'new' in the sense that the idol-worshippers who are to participate in it have never before paid such homage to God." (P. 201)

Oswalt entitles **verses 10-17** "God's victory." He comments on **verses 10-12** that "This sudden outburst of lyrical praise fairly begs to be asked what prompted it. It is particularly note-worthy that the entire earth with all its inhabitants is enjoined to give this praise in a *new song*. It is surely prompted by what immediately precedes it, the announcement of the servant who will bring God's justice to the earth (**42:1-3**), who will manifest God's grace (**42:6-7**) and glory (**42:8**) in a way previously unheard-of (**42:9**). It is because God's servant will make God's salvation available to the whole earth that the prophet is caught up in a whirlwind of joy and praise and calls on earth's inhabitants to join him." (P. 123)

He adds, "*a new song* must correspond to the new work that God is about to do. At the least, this phrase refers to the promised return from exile. Never in recorded history had any people returned to their homeland from an Assyrian or a Babylonian exile...But surely more than merely return from exile is in view here...If [YHWH] has shown Himself faithful and gracious to Israel, He will be faithful and gracious to the whole world." (Pp. 123-24)

For many of the captive Israelites their return from exile was no "mere" happening—it was an exciting, joyous fulfilment of their fondest hopes and dreams. Oswalt is at pains to make the message of **Isaiah 40-55** point beyond that return to the work of God in Jesus Christ, and in so doing is in danger of overlooking the immediate context out of which this entire passage comes. But we agree with him and with Alexander, that embodied within the passage are numerous statements that go beyond that immediate context, pointing to a greater, universal reality to come out of it.

Alexander states, "To sing a new song, according to **Old Testament usage**, is to praise God for some new manifestations of His power and goodness...It is a prediction

(continued...)

תְּהַלְּלוּ מִקְצֵה הָאָרֶץ
יֹרְדֵי הַיָּם וּמְלֵאוֹ
אֲיִים וְיֹשְׁבֵיהֶם:

Sing to the YHWH a new song,
His praise from the earth's end--⁴²
those going down to the sea⁴³ and its fullness,⁴⁴
coastlands and their inhabitants!⁴⁵

⁴¹(...continued)

that changes are to take place joyfully affecting the condition of the whole world...The obvious meaning of the phrase is, that the sound of praise should be heard coming from the remotest quarters.” (P. 139)

⁴²North comments that “The new song is to be sung by the whole earth (הָאָרֶץ מִקְצֵה), literally ‘from the end of the earth.’ This does not mean from a point at the farthest distance, but ‘from one end of the earth to another.’” (P. 114)

⁴³For this phrase, יֹרְדֵי הַיָּם, “ones going down (to) the sea,” see **Psalm 107:23**, where some of those exhorted to sing to YHWH with joy are:

those going down (to) the sea in the boats / ships,
doing work in many waters.

⁴⁴Not only those going down to the sea as sailors and travelers, but also every creature that fills the sea is called to join in the chorus of praise to YHWH!

North comments that “All nature is to praise Yahweh (compare **Isaiah 43:20**; **Psalm 97: 11-12**, **Psalm 98:7-8**). The passage anticipates the doctrine of the redemption of all creation (**Romans 8:19-21**).” (P. 115)

⁴⁵It is a universal call to worship that continues through **verse 12**. There is reason for the universe to worship when it hears the good news of what YHWH is doing in human history!

Knight comments that “The mention of the word ‘new’ is sufficient for **Deutero-Isaiah** to invite all flesh to sing to the Lord a new song. No old song is good enough to match the marvelous new things God is about to do (compare **Psalms 33:3**; **40:3**; **95**, **96** and **98**). Miriam had sung a great song in praise of Yahweh when the exodus and the crossing of the Red Sea had taken place (**Exodus 15:21**). The Babylonians were

(continued...)

42:11 יִשְׂאוּ מִדְּבַר וְעָרָיו

חֲצָרִים תֵּשֵׁב קֶדָר

יִרְנוּ יֹשְׁבֵי סֵלַע

מִרֵּאשׁ הָרִים יִצְוּחוּ:

Let the desert and its cities lift up (their voice);

villages⁴⁶ (in which) Qedar lives!⁴⁷

Let the inhabitants of Sela cry aloud--⁴⁸

⁴⁵(...continued)

accustomed to singing enthronement songs as each New Year came round—and **Deutero-Isaiah** must surely have heard these sung. How can the ‘ends of the earth’ refuse to sing when God does new things greater by far than just bringing in a New Year? Even inanimate nature is to join in the song.” (Pp. 50-51) We take this statement concerning “inanimate nature” to mean the sea and its fulness, that is, all the sea creatures.

⁴⁶Alexander notes that “The translation of חֲצָרִים, by *villages* is too restricted, since the Hebrew word is applicable also to collections of tents or nomadic encampments, which appears to be the prominent idea here. Qedar / Kedar was the second son of Ishmael (**Genesis 25:13**). Here, as in **Isaiah 21:16**, the name is put for his descendants, by a natural metonymy [something that is not called by its own name, but by something associated with it] for the Arabians in general.” (Pp. 139-40)

⁴⁷Knight comments that “*Qedar* was the home of those marauding Arabs who were Israel’s ancestral enemies.” (P. 51)

Slotki speaks more kindly about Qedar, identifying it as “a pastoral tribe of the Syrian desert.” (P. 202)

North states that “The geographical horizons are the shorelands to the west, and, to the east, the wilderness and its cities...the settlements where Kedar dwells... Kedar...is typical of the Bedouin nomads and in **Jeremiah 2:20** is parallel with ‘the isles,’ to denote east and west as here. The name is from a root ‘be dark,’ probably with reference to their goat-hair tents (**Song of Solomon 1:5**).” (P. 115)

⁴⁸Knight comments that “*Sela* or Petra was the capital city of Edom, Israel’s brother nation, but also her ancestral enemy. Negative becoming positive indeed!” (P. 51)

from (the) top of mountains let them cry aloud (synonym)!⁴⁹

42:12 יְשִׁימוּ לַיהוָה כְּבוֹד

וּתְהַלְלוּ בְּאֵימֹתָיו

Let them give glory to the YHWH,

and His praise in the coast-lands let them declare!⁵⁰

42:13⁵¹ יְהוָה כְּבוֹד יֵצֵא

⁴⁹Where our Hebrew text has יְצַוּהוּ, “let them cry aloud,” 1QIs^a spells יְצַרְיָחוּ, which we think is a mis-spelling.

Alexander comments that “The reference of this **verse [11]** to the course of the returning exiles through the intervening desert is forbidden by the mention of the sea and its fulness, the isles, and the ends of the earth, in the preceding and following verses...The only consistent supposition is, that sea, islands, deserts, mountains, towns, and camps, are put together as poetical ingredients of the general conception, that the earth in all its parts shall have occasion to rejoice.” (P. 139) We agree. There is something universal in importance in this act of returning His people to their homeland!

⁵⁰Oswalt comments on **verse 12** that “The call to praise reaches a summarizing climax here. All the world to its farthest extent, the coastlands, is to join in the song that Isaiah first heard from the lips of the seraphim (**Isaiah 6:3**).” (P. 124)

But we are not sure that “coastlands” mean “the farthest extent” of the world, such as could have easily expressed in other phrases such as “all the earth,” or “as far as Tarshish and Cush.”

⁵¹Oswalt comments on **verses 13-16** that “The immediate cause of the praise is the recognition that although God may often appear to be silent and inactive, He is not truly so. At the right time and in the right circumstances, God will burst forth on behalf of His Own, and no difficulty, neither the power of His foes (**verse 13**) nor the weakness of His people (**verse 16**), will present the slightest hindrance to His action...

“While the situation could certainly be applied to the period of the exile (586-539 B.C.E.), when many must have felt that God had abandoned them, that is hardly the only time when the Israelites felt this way. Even after the return from exile, these feelings of God’s inactivity would persist, as **Isaiah 64:1-12** attests...

“But even more, the period between 400 B.C.E. and the birth of Christ, was the great period of Divine silence. To all of this, the prophet insists that it is not always the case, and that the world may praise God in prospect for His breaking in to end His silence once and for all, as He would do in the promised Servant.” (P. 124)

(continued...)

כְּאִישׁ מִלְחָמוֹת יַעֲרֵר קְנֵאָה
יִרְעֵ אֶף-יִצְרֵיחַ
עַל-אִיְבֹיֹו יִתְגַּבֵּר:

YHWH, like the mighty man goes forth,

⁵¹(...continued)

We think this view of the period from 400 B.C.E. to the birth of Christ as “the great period of Divine silence,” that is, when YHWH was no longer speaking, can only be made by someone who thinks the Protestant Canon of Scripture is the final judge on whether or not God is speaking, and that apart from scripture God is silent.

But for those who accept the Catholic Canon of Scripture with its Apocrypha, that period is filled with writers of scripture, including such important works as **1 and 2 Maccabees**, the **Wisdom of Solomon**, and the **Wisdom of Ben Sirach**.

Additionally, it seems absurd to conclude that because the living voice of prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah were no longer heard, that God was silent, no longer speaking. Was He not still speaking through the written words of the Prophets? Was His voice no longer being heard in nature? Had God ceased to speak in the hearts and consciences of humans, especially of those worshipping Him?

And following the argument from the standpoint of the Protestant Canon of Scripture, should we not say that since the end of the first century C.E., God has been silent?

We say, God is neither dead nor silent, and His voice is still today being heard, through the beauty and design of nature, through the **Bible**, and through the living voice of the Spirit in the hearts of His people, as He continues to raise up people of faith to speak His message. What do you think? Why do some want to “put God in a canonical box”?

Slotki comments that **verse 13** “gives the reason why even the idol-worshippers, the enemies of God, must now recognize His greatness and join His people in the *new song*.” (P. 202)

Alexander comments that “The universal joy before described is to arise from [YHWH’s] triumph over His enemies... *To go forth* is the common Hebrew phrase for going out to war or battle.” (P. 140) Yes, but “going forth” has a much broader connotation than only going out to war—for example, it is used oftentimes for Israel’s going forth from Egyptian bondage.

like a man of wars he rouses zeal.⁵²
He raises a shout, also roars;⁵³
against His enemies He shows Himself a mighty One.⁵⁴

⁵²North translates **verse 13** by “The Lord is marching out like a warrior, like the hero of many battles He will rouse Himself to fury.”

He comments that “Yahweh is a solitary figure, without allies (compare **59:16-17, 63:1-6**); it is His Own fury that He rouses.” (P. 115) But while this is true of these depictions, Second Isaiah still uses the name YHWH of Armies in **44:6; 45:13; 47:4; 48:2 51:15** and **54:5**, hardly a depiction of YHWH being “alone in battle.”

Alexander notes that קִנְיָהּ, may either have its general sense of ardor, strong and violent affection of whatever kind, or its more specific sense of jealousy, or sensitive regard for His Own honor and for the welfare of His people...The idea is that of an ancient warrior exciting his own courage by a shout or war-cry.” (Pp. 140-41)

⁵³Knight comments that “Israel is not alone in her odd behavior. Yahweh too shouts aloud a battle-cry as He rejoices in rescuing His people from the powers of evil. His fury or zeal is His burning purpose of love...So the Gentle Shepherd of **40:11** is also the Man of War, the heart of Whose ‘zeal’ or ‘fury’ is able to destroy His foes. This is similar to the language of **Isaiah 63: 1ff.**, a passage which is paraphrased in Julia Ward Howe’s famous hymn:

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored.
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword...
Our God is marching on.

God the Warrior then is marching on. Cyrus the warrior is marching on (**41:1-3**). But Israel also is marching on (**40:31**); yet only in the strength of Him, Who, while marching in Cyrus (**41:4**), also grants all needed strength--or Spirit--to this same weary and exhausted army, viz., His chosen people and servant Israel.” (Pp. 51-52)

⁵⁴Oswalt comments on **verse 13** that “The comparison of the Lord to a warrior is one of the oldest in the **Bible**. In such poems as **Exodus 15** and **Judges 5**, which virtually all scholars agree to be very early, God is so described. He fights on behalf of His people. Thus it is not surprising that Isaiah should identify Him in this way both here and elsewhere in the **Book of Isaiah (28:21; 30:30-31; 31:4; 59:16-18; 63:3-4)**...It is not the Persian, Cyrus, who will deliver Israel by his mighty arm, but the Lord...

“But when this mighty, delivering Warrior appears to destroy the enemies of God, whose blood is it that stains His garments? It is His Own. The servant take on himself the sins of God’s enemies, and in his own death destroys those sins (the fourth servant song, **52:13-53:12**).” (Pp. 124-25)

(continued...)

⁵⁴(...continued)

Such a picture fits Oswalt's theology, but is simply not true to the **Book of Isaiah**. The Divine Warrior of **63:3-4** has the life-blood of His enemies spattered on His garments (**63:3**), not His Own; and the servant of the fourth servant song is not YHWH, but an individual in Israel who bears the sins of Israel and who is crushed by the will of YHWH!

Oswalt goes on to say, "The picture of the Warrior preparing for battle is a universal one. He stirs up anger, putting Himself in the right frame of mind by thinking of the wrongs that the enemy has done to Him and those He loves. Then at the moment of attack He lets out a blood-curdling scream, both to fortify Himself and to cow the defenders." (P. 125)

And we ask, Is this a picture of the God embodied in Jesus? Or again, is this a picture of the God of **Isaiah 2:2-4**, Who causes the nations to beat their swords into plows, and their spears into pruning hooks, teaching them to not lift up sword against nation, and not to any longer learn war?

Of course, those desiring to believe in both depictions will say that God the Warrior fights against evil-doers, in order to stop the evil; and then as the God of peace, as soon as evil is conquered, leads the nations to destroy their weapons and no longer learn war.

What do you think? Is the real way to peace through war against evil-doers? Can you refuse to go to war, and make peace with Hitler, or Stalin, or with ISIS?

How long do you think Martin Luther King Jr. would have lasted if he had attempted to lead non-violent demonstrations against Hitler in Nazi-Germany, or Stalin in Soviet Russia? What do you think Jesus himself would have done if he lived in Nazi-Germany in the 1930's? Would he not have joined with those being put to death in the concentration camps? Would he have shared in an attempt to murder Hitler, as did Dietrich Bonhoeffer?

⁵⁵Slotki states that in **verses 14-17**, "the speaker is God and the expressions are obviously anthropomorphisms." (P. 202) Alexander notes that "this whole verse is universally regarded as the words of God Himself, although He is not expressly introduced as the Speaker." (P. 141)

An "anthropomorphism" is the attribution of human characteristics or behavior to a God, animal, or some other object. For example, YHWH is depicted in **verse 14** as a woman in labor, crying out in pain!

As North states, in **verse 14** "the figure changes [from that of a warrior] to that of a woman in labor. Yahweh Himself is the Speaker." (P. 115)

(continued...)

⁵⁵(...continued)

Oswalt comments on **verses 14-17** that “With a change to the first person God Himself speaks of His battle for His people...Here the figure of a woman in labor is added to the picture of the warrior. The common factor in each is the outcry at the climactic moment. All the apparent inactivity in lengthy preparation for battle, and in the nine months of gestation, comes to a crashing end in the cry of attack and of birth. So it is with God. We may feel that nothing is happening, that He has forgotten all about our situation. But never fear, says Isaiah; wait patiently, and God, Who alone can save us, will act (**Isaiah 30:15-18; 40:27-31**).” (P. 125) As is heard commonly from the pulpits in black churches in the deep south, “Delay is not denial!”

Oswalt adds that there are those who “see this imagery as supporting the view that it is appropriate to refer to God as ‘Mother.’ But there is no indication that the writer intends for the reader to think of God as bringing something to birth. The point of the comparison is not the labor but the cry.” (P. 126)

Those who are wary of speaking of God in feminine terms, quickly take up the description of God as Warrior, but like Oswalt, don’t want to use the description of God as a Woman in travail, stating that it has nothing to with bringing anything to birth—which we think is ridiculous.

What do you think? We might as well say that all the writer intends by the image of God as “Warrior” is the loud out-cry against enemies, but no intention to think of God as actually entering into battle. We think that such a response to this imagery is mistaken. Two images of God are given—God as Warrior, and God as Mother in labor. Both, we think, are intended seriously. God fights against evil when evil threatens those whom He loves, His children. And God gives birth to new life and hope through labor-pains.

Both images are anthropomorphisms, of course--and neither is to be taken literally; but both are to be taken seriously!

Compare **Psalm 90:1**,

My Lord, you were a dwelling-place for us, in generation and generation!

Before mountains were given birth,

or with labor-pains you gave birth to earth and world,

even from long-lasting time to long-lasting time, you (are) God!

Oswalt obviously doesn’t want God to be depicted as a Woman in labor. But in fact, these two Hebrew writers unashamedly do just that, and in this passage, **Isaiah 42:14**, attributing the language and the figure of speech to YHWH Himself. What do you think?

כִּי־לִדְרָה אֶפְעֶה

אֲשֶׁם וְאֲשָׂאָף יַחַד:

I kept silent from long-distant time;

I would keep silent, I would restrain myself;

like a woman giving birth I would groan,

I would pant and I would gasp (all) at once!⁵⁶

42:15⁵⁷ אַחֲרֵיב הַרִים וְגִבְעוֹת

⁵⁶Knight comments on **verse 14** that here, YHWH Himself is depicted as saying “The exodus events were but the conception in the womb of My mighty plan. Now the time of delivery has come. Through the whole long period of gestation I uttered never a word, even when Israel was going constantly astray. I could well have burst out with zeal, but instead I continually held Myself in.’

“What a daring simile this is, to have God declare that He can be compared with an expectant mother. The three verbs in the sentence describing the pains of childbirth represent those pains as they climax at the time of delivery. At **Isaiah 66:7** this figure is used of Israel. Here it is used of God. With such language **Deutero-Isaiah** shocks his readers into recognizing that God is not beyond the pain which His people is even then suffering, but must be one with them as they meet the judgment which He Himself has caused...

“**Deutero-Isaiah** teaches Israel here that his people can be grateful even for pain, for pain puts them in touch with the living God. God Himself has chosen that it is to be out of pain that new life is to spring just like the birth of a baby...What then may not the ghastly pains of the exile bring forth in the providence of God?” (P. 52)

Slotki comments that God is crying out “against the injustice done to Israel. God will no longer tolerate the sufferings of His people and the continued ruin of their country.” (P. 202)

Alexander states that “the true sense of the **verse [14]** is, “My wrath, long restrained, I will now let break forth.” (P. 142)

North comments on these two images of YHWH as shouting Warrior, and expectant Mother groaning with labor pains, that “the Hebrews firmly believed that God is personal; they could never think of Him as indifferent to the fate of the world. He would *act*—that is the permanent significance of the violent similes in this paragraph. He did act, but in a very different way from what was expected of Him.” (P. 116)

⁵⁷North comments that **verse 15** “describes the effect of these seemingly incongruous rages [that is, the battle cry / shout of the Divine Warrior, and the Divine Mother

(continued...)

וְכָל-עֵשְׂבָם אֹבִישׁ
 וְשִׁמְתִי נְהָרוֹת לְאֵיִם
 וְאֲנַמִּים אֹבִישׁ:

I will make mountains and hills desolate,
 and all their vegetation I will dry up;
 and I will place / transform rivers into the coast-lands,
 and I will dry up swamps.⁵⁸

42:16⁵⁹ וְהוֹלַכְתִּי עוֹרִים בְּדַרְדָּר לֹא יִדְעוּ

⁵⁷(...continued)

gasping with labor pains]: mountains and hills will be devastated, rivers turned to desert wastes, and standing pools dried up. This is the opposite of the desert transformed to oasis of **41:18-19**.” (P. 115)

⁵⁸Oswalt comments on **verse 15** that “there is no need to allegorize *mountains* and *hills*. They do not represent human institutions or nations; they are images of all that is solid and secure in the earth...What is being exalted here is the Lord’s absolute power over creation. He can make the gardens of the mighty into deserts, and He can make the deserts of the helpless into gardens (**31:25; chapters 34-35**).” (P. 126)

“Some commentators find the imagery of turning rivers into islands [the translation of the third line by many] strange. In the broad, relatively shallow rivers of the Near East, however, their receding is marked by the appearance of previously submerged islands, especially in flood times.” (P. 126)

Alexander comments that “Having described the effect and the cause of the great future change, he now describes the change itself, under the common form of a complete revolution in the face of nature.” With regards to the phrase concerning turning rivers into islands, he states that “There is more probability in the opinion that the verse contains an allusion to the ancient cultivation of the hills of Palestine, by means of terraces, many of which are still in existence.” (P. 142)

⁵⁹Slotki entitles **verse 16** “The return of the exiles.” (P. 202)

Oswalt comments on **verse 16** that “Just as God will do unheard-of-things in judgment on the wicked of the earth in order to set His people free, so He will do unheard-of things in deliverance. As Alexander points out correctly, the metaphorical thrust continues from **verse 15**. These are not the literally *blind*, but blindness is symbolic of helplessness. Blind people can be amazingly self-sufficient when they are on familiar territory, but in unfamiliar surroundings—a way *they do not know*—they can do

(continued...)

בְּנִתִּיבוֹת לֹא־יָדְעוּ אֲדָרְיָכֶם
אֲשִׁים מִחֶשֶׁךְ לְפָנֵיהֶם לְאוֹר
וּמִעֲקָשִׁים לְמִישׁוֹר
אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים עָשִׂיתֶם
וְלֹא עֲזַבְתִּים:

And I will cause blind people⁶⁰ to walk in a way they did not know,
in pathways they did not know I will cause them to walk (synonym).
I will turn a dark place before them to the light,
and rough places to a level place!
These (are) the things I did,
and I did not forsake them!⁶¹

⁵⁹(...continued)

nothing without a guide...In this regard, it is important to recall **Isaiah 42:7**, which states that the Servant will deliver the blind...These are a people who cannot reveal God's light to the world because they cannot see it themselves. Nevertheless, God will work miracles both for them and in them that will indeed make them bearers of light for the nations." (Pp. 126-27)

⁶⁰North comments that here the word "blind" is "best understood figuratively rather than literally. The returning exiles were not physically but spiritually blind and deaf (compare **verses 18-19; 43:8**). Words like 'way' and 'path' often refer, especially in parallelism, to moral direction and course of life...

"To draw fast distinctions between the literal and figurative uses of such words is often impossible. This is a major difficulty in the interpretation of **Deutero-Isaiah**. That he looked for the physical rehabilitation of Israel seems certain, but he was equally concerned with moral regeneration." (Pp. 115-16)

⁶¹We take **verse 16** to be YHWH's description of the work that He has done and does in human history—He enables the blind to walk in ways they have not known before, transforming the darkness into light, and the rough paths into smooth ones. He has done it in the past, and He will continue to do it in the future.

Knight thinks the reference to the past means in the days of Moses, but the text says nothing about Moses.

(continued...)

42:17 נִסְגּוּ אַחֲזָר

יִבְשׁוּ בִשְׁת

הַבְּטָחִים בַּפֶּסֶל

הַאֲמָרִים לְמִסְכָּה

אַתֶּם אֱלֹהֵינוּ:

They were turned away backward;

they are ashamed--shame--⁶²

those trusting in the idol(s),

the ones saying to a molten image,⁶³

⁶¹(...continued)

Slotki thinks that all of this has to do with the return of the exiles from Babylon, but this is not clear from the text, with its mixture of past and future tenses.

Alexander states that “The combination of these two antitheses (light and dark, crooked and straight) shows clearly that they are both metaphorical expressions for the same thing that is represented under other figures in the preceding verse, that is, total change...And yet some writers understand the first clause as specifically meaning that the exiles in Babylon should be delivered at a time and in a manner which they had not expected; while [others] apply the words exclusively to spiritual exercise or religious experience. To both these objects the description admits of an easy application; but neither of them is to be considered its specific subject. It is impossible, without the utmost violence, to separate this one link from the chain of which it forms a part, that is to say, from the series of strong and varied metaphors, by which the Prophet is expressing the idea of abrupt and total change.” (Pp. 147-48) What do you think?

⁶²One Hebrew manuscript omits the word בִּשְׁת, “shame.” Alexander holds that the phrase יִבְשׁוּ בִּשְׁת, which he translates by “they shall be ashamed with shame” [interpolating the preposition “with”], means “they shall be utterly ashamed.” He states that “This verse describes the effect to be produced by the expected changes on the enemies of God and the worshipers of idols.” (P. 143)

⁶³Where our Hebrew text reads the singular לְמִסְכָּה, “to a molten image,” both **Rahlf**s and the Syriac translation read a plural noun, “to the molten images.”

you (plural) (are) our Gods.⁶⁴

42:18⁶⁵ תַּחֲרִשִׁים שְׁמַעוּ

⁶⁴Knight comments “After hearing that Yahweh is really like that, how utterly foolish it is to trust in handmade divinities.” (P. 53)

The prophet’s implied question is, Can the idols open blind eyes, and guide the blind correctly? That is exactly what YHWH has done and will do—what about the idols?

Oswalt asks, “Is there any idol who could or would do such stupendous things for his people? Of course not...Thus the theme of God’s superiority over the Gods is continued, but now with special emphasis on God’s Own ability to intervene in the world.” (P. 127)

⁶⁵North entitles **verses 18-25** “The Blind and Deaf Servant.” He comments that “Yahweh’s blind and deaf servant is bidden to see and hear. It is not as if he were deprived of the organs of sight and hearing. His present plight is due to his stubborn disobedience in the past.

“The passage contains a number of grammatical solecisms [mistakes], quick changes of person (**verses 20, 24**), infinitives absolute (**verses 20, 22**), and ‘the servant of Yahweh’ (**verse 19**) occurs in a context in which Yahweh Himself is the speaker. It reads more like a poet’s notes than a finished poem...

“The blind and deaf servant is obviously Israel and the verses may owe their place here to the catchword *blind*, which relates them to the preceding paragraph. The Prophet was perfectly frank about the moral and spiritual blindness of his people (compare **43:22-28**). The main emphasis is that it was Yahweh Who brought upon His people the disaster of the exile, in order to discipline them to obedience, and not, as some of them might be only too ready to argue, the Babylonians...

“The prophets insisted that their fall was a Divine judgment on their disobedience, not simply a political misfortune due to the fact that they were weak and their enemies strong. This lesson was burned into the consciousness of the post-exilic community: compare **Nehemiah 1:5-11; 9:6-38; Daniel 9:4-19; Psalm 106.**” (Pp. 116-18)

Slotki comments on **verses 18-25** that “the pitiable plight of Israel, the servant of God, is due to his shortsightedness and disobedience [to] the Divine will. His sufferings are a discipline imposed by God to fit him for his great moral work for the benefit of mankind.” (P. 203)

Oswalt comments that “Coming after the opening statement of God’s intention to deliver His people (**42:10-17**), **42:18-25** addresses the people’s present condition [in a disputation between God and His people]...Why has God been so blind to the difficulties and troubles of His people? Why is He so deaf to their cries? It is good that He is finally rousing Himself to action, but why has it taken so long in view of the manifest

(continued...)

וְהַעֲרִים הַבִּיטוּ לְרֵאוֹת:

The deaf ones, listen!

And the blind ones, look to see!⁶⁶

⁶⁵(...continued)

injustice of their sufferings? To all of this the prophet responds explosively: it is not God Who has been blind and deaf, it is the people! God in His grace gave the **Torah**, but they would not obey it. Then when punishment for that disobedience came, they refused to learn the lessons that the punishment taught. What all this meant was that salvation, when it came, would not be because a lethargic Deity finally awoke to His obligation, but because One Who had been gracious in the past would be so again.” (P. 130)

Alexander comments on **verse 18** that “From the connection, this would seem to be a call upon the worshipers of idols, to open their eyes and ears, and become conscious of their own delusions.” (P. 143)

⁶⁶It sounds like a universal invitation to all who are blind and cannot see, to see; and likewise an invitation to all who are deaf and cannot hear, to hear in **verse 18**. YHWH wants the blind and the deaf to be healed of their infirmities.

Oswalt comments on **verse 18** that “**Verse 42:7** said that the servant of the Lord would lead the blind and imprisoned out into the light. In the comments there I argued that this servant could not be the nation Israel, even though in other places (**41:8; 43:10**; etc.) the nation is clearly identified as the servant of the Lord. That conclusion is fortified by this verse and the following ones. The servant here is blind and deaf. Can the blind lead the blind? Can the imprisoned (**verse 22**) deliver the imprisoned? No, there are two servants being described: one who delivers the people of God and the world, and one who be being delivered becomes the evidence of God’s Lordship. See also **61:1-3** where the nation is certainly not speaking.” (P. 130)

This is all very confusing, and we are reminded of the “Messianic Secret” in the **Gospel of Mark**. We suspect that the text means that YHWH can and will use His blind and deaf servant Israel to lead the blind and deaf people—both of the nation of Israel themselves, and of the world.

What do you think? Who is the “servant of YHWH”? And Is the servant of YHWH “blind”? In our opinion, this description could well apply to Jacob /Israel as the servant of YHWH, but not to Jesus.

We are reminded of dogmatists who claim that the **Bible** is simple and clear, that all anyone needs is simply to read it and obey it. This was the claim of beloved ministers of mine in the church in which I grew up, and by it they meant the **King James Bible**, a leather-bound copy of which my father Dewey Darnell gave me when I felt the call of God to become a minister of the word of God to the people.

(continued...)

⁶⁶(...continued)

I started off with determination, but soon realized the many difficulties that I confronted in reading the **King James Bible**, and trying my best to interpret it, and attempting to preach its message. Especially as I listened to the many debates between religious leaders of different denominations, and as I saw my teachers struggling to make sense of biblical teachings, I became convinced that the **King James Bible** was anything but simple and clear.

Because of this, I resolved to learn Greek and Hebrew and Aramaic in order to find clarity and convincing answers to the many arguments I heard. Plunging into Greek and Hebrew at Christian Colleges (in Abilene, Texas, and Tampa, Florida) and then at the University of Toronto, and at Brite Divinity School, and at Duke University, where I was privileged to study Aramaic and Syriac with John Strugnell, I learned how difficult it is to translate many parts of the **Bible**, and how uncertain many passages in the **Bible** are—as well as how limited in knowledge and understanding I was and am.

The **Bible** as a whole, whatever the translation, and when read in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, is anything but “simple and clear”—and all of us are in need of Divine guidance and wisdom, and much more humility than we often display, especially with regards to the way we treat people of differing religious beliefs (John Strugnell could only speak of Judaism with sarcastic contempt; see his life story in **Wikipedia**).

Still, I am amazed at the breadth and power of the biblical writings, and their ability to speak to the deep need for ethical teaching and guidance, and their constant offer of hope to the weakest and neediest. At the age of 84 I still find the biblical teachings wonderfully meaningful and instructive, in spite of their difficulties—none more so than the **Book of Isaiah**.

What do you think? What is your experience in this regard? Do you claim the **Bible** is simple and clear? How much of the **Bible** have you really studied in depth? And if you haven't studied the **Bible** in depth, why is that? Is it because you are afraid of what you might learn? Are you fearful that your dogmatic house of cards might come tumbling down? Are you willing to admit your blindness, and your deafness—and willing to ask God to use you as His servant to help lead others who are blind and deaf as well?

⁶⁷Slotki comments on **verses 19-20** that “God’s *servant* and *messenger*, who might well be expected to have open eyes to see the wonders of God as revealed in nature and history and open ears to hear His message, is just the reverse. He is both blind and deaf.” (P. 203)

Alexander likewise comments that “The very people whose mission and vocation it was to make the Gentiles see and hear, seemed to emulate [imitate, mirror] their insensibility...Here, where the language implies censure and reproach, the terms must

(continued...)

וְחָרַשׁ כְּמִלְאֲכֵי אֱשֵׁלַח

מִי עֵוֶר כְּמִשְׁלָם

וְעֵוֶר כְּעֶבֶד יְהוָה:

Who (is) blind but My servant?

And deaf like My messenger (whom) I will send forth?⁶⁸

Who (is) blind⁶⁹ like one at peace,⁷⁰

and blind like YHWH's servant?⁷¹

⁶⁷(...continued)

be referred exclusively to Israel, the messenger whom God had sent to open the eyes of the other nations, but who had himself become willfully blind." (P. 144)

⁶⁸Oswalt comments on **verse 19** that "If there was any question about who was being called 'blind' and 'deaf' in **verse 18**, that uncertainty is dispelled here. With biting irony Isaiah identifies him as the covenanted servant of the Lord, the one entrusted with the message of God... There is no one as blind as this servant...The person most in need of these gifts [of keen eyesight and sharp hearing] has the least of them." (Pp. 130-31)

⁶⁹Where our Hebrew text reads וְעֵוֶר, "and blind," two Hebrew manuscripts read וְחָרַשׁ, "and deaf."

⁷⁰Translations of the Hebrew pual participle מִשְׁלָם, vary, from "he that is perfect," to "the chosen one," to "My dedicated one," to "the one committed to Me," to "the friend I have taken to Myself," to "the ones ruling them," to "whole-hearted," to "covenanted one," to our "one at peace."

The participle is with reference to YHWH's servant—this is sure—but we are unsure as to exactly what the participle means.

⁷¹In **verse 19**, YHWH's servant is also His messenger, sent forth by YHWH; as we understand the pual participle, the servant is depicted as being "at peace" with YHWH. But still, YHWH's servant / messenger is blind and deaf, evidently oblivious to what YHWH is doing in and through him, neither hearing the message, or seeing the direction in which he is headed. Others indeed may be blind and deaf, but none more so than YHWH's servant!

Knight understands the verse to be speaking of exiled Israel. He states that "Although Israel had been chosen of God to become His *messenger*, Israel had never rea-

(continued...)

42:20 רְאִיתָ [רְאוֹת] רַבּוֹת וְלֹא תִשְׁמַר

פְּקוּחַ אָזְנוֹיִם וְלֹא יִשְׁמַע:

Seeing many things,⁷² and you (singular) will not watch / observe,⁷³
opening ears, and he will not hear.⁷⁴

⁷¹(...continued)

lized what the years of exile in Babylon could mean in relation to God's plan." (P. 53)

⁷²The Masoretes offer two readings: first, the *kethibh*, "what is written," רְאִיתָ, "you (singular) saw," and second, the *qere*, "to be read," רְאוֹת, the infinitive absolute, "seeing."

⁷³Where our Hebrew text reads the second person singular תִּשְׁמַר, "you will (not) keep / observe," or possibly "she will (not) keep / observe," two Hebrew manuscripts read the third person singular יִשְׁמַר, "he will (not) keep / observe."

⁷⁴In **verse 20**, YHWH's servant is first spoken to directly, in the second person: seeing many things, you will not keep / watch; and then spoken of, in the third person: his ears are open, but he will not hear.

Oswalt comments that "The change from second person to third person in the middle of the verse has been troublesome to translators since the time of the **Septuagint**, which solves the problem by putting the whole verse in the second person...Some of the older commentators tried to resolve the problem by positing that the first clause was directed to the Servant, while the second was directed to bystanders. But none of these stratagems seems necessary given the well-documented tendencies for this kind of shift in Hebrew writing. The entire verse is referring to the servant in the servant's hearing." (P. 132)

YHWH's servant, though seeing and hearing, is still blind and deaf; he doesn't recognize what he is seeing; he doesn't listen to the sounds coming in his ears. Even though witnessing and hearing, he still doesn't understand or make sense out of those experiences.

Knight comments that "Israel's blindness consists in 'having seen many of My [YHWH's] deeds, yet recognizing no significance in them'; and her deafness in that her ears have been opened, yet she has not understood what God has been doing through historical movements." (P. 54) We would say, YHWH's servant has not understood the message which he is supposed to be taking to the nations.

(continued...)

42:21⁷⁵ יְהוָה חָפֵץ לְמַעַן צְדָקוֹ:

יַגְדִּיל תּוֹרָה וַיֵּאדָּיר:

YHWH was pleased for the sake of His righteousness.⁷⁶

He makes teaching great,⁷⁷ and He will make (it)⁷⁸ glorious.⁷⁹

⁷⁴(...continued)

Alexander comments that “In the first clause [the prophet] turns to Israel and addresses him directly; in the last he turns away from him again, and, as it were, expresses his surprise and indignation to the bystanders. The sense of the whole...is the same as in the foregoing verse, namely, that Israel had eyes but saw not, and instead of opening the ears of others was himself incapable of hearing.” (P. 144)

And if the servant is Israel, or as Alexander insists, the church, this has certainly been the case with both Israel and the Christian Churches—where all too often religious pride has blinded the eyes of adherents to their prejudices and exclusionary policies, denying in action their call to worldwide mission!

⁷⁵Oswalt comments on **verses 21-25** that “In these verses, the prophet explains what it is that the people have seen and yet not seen. They have not understood the meaning of their own history. They have failed to recognize what God was about in calling them, and they have failed to learn the lessons that their experiences with God should have taught them.” (P. 132)

⁷⁶North states concerning the phrase “*for His righteousness sake*,” that here, “Righteousness” is “almost meaningless to the present-day reader but there is no substitute for it in this context, unless it be ‘saving purpose’...In **Second-Isaiah** the word *tsedeq-tsedaqah* (‘righteousness’) has come to mean ‘salvation.’ The righteousness of God shows itself in His saving work...in the [writing] **Prophets** and in the **Psalms** the salvation motif steadily becomes supreme (quoting N. H. Snaith).” (P. 118)

We do not share this pessimism concerning the word “righteousness.” As **chapter 58** shows, “righteousness” means practicing love for neighbor, especially the neighbor who is suffering and in need. Righteousness means reaching out to all such persons, regardless of their nationality or religion, to care for them, to meet their needs—it feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, frees those under the yoke, etc. It is what YHWH has done for the exiles, freeing them from their captivity, enabling them to return to their homeland. Now YHWH wants them to show this same kind of righteousness to all their fellow human-beings. We think the present-day reader can easily understand this. What do you think?

⁷⁷Slotki comments that “The **Torah**, embracing Divine revelation and moral and religious instruction to Israel, who is to be the appointed messenger for propagating its truth to all mankind and thus render the **Torah** great and glorious.” (P. 204)

(continued...)

⁷⁷(...continued)

This is a confusing sentence, perhaps a publisher's mistake, as if the **Torah** was a person--we suspect that Slotki means YHWH intends to magnify the **Torah**, with its Divine revelation of moral and religious instruction, by His servant Israel's propagating its truth to all mankind, thereby causing the **Torah** to be great and glorious." And we also suspect that Slotki means by this the **Five Books of Moses**, with their 613 commandments, as taught and expanded upon in both the **Mishnah** and the **Talmuds** (Jerusalem and Babylonian).

Oswalt comments on **verse 21** that "God's purpose in the world, and particularly with Israel, says Isaiah, was to show the greatness and the glory of His **Torah**. While we may certainly understand that the Sinai covenant and the books of the **Torah** are included here [that is, the 'Five Books of Moses'] there is no reason to believe that it is limited to these. As it is used in the **Book of Isaiah** as a whole, **Torah** speaks of God's revelation of the nature and meaning of life." (P. 132)

In a footnote, Oswalt refers to **Isaiah 1:10; 2:3; 5:24; 8:16, 20; 24:5; 30:9; 42:4, 21, 24; 51:4, and 7**. But none of these passages mentions "the nature and meaning of life." The difference between the Jewish interpreter and the Christian interpreter is their definition of the noun **Torah**—Slotki, the Jew, understands it to mean the "Five Books of Moses," while Oswalt, the Christian, understands it to include the **Five Books of Moses**, but as being a much broader term than just that, meaning "God's revelation of the nature and meaning of life."

We think that the Hebrew word תּוֹרָה, without the article, most probably means "teaching," "instruction" in general, and does not have the specific connotation of either the "Five Books of Moses" or "God's revelation of the nature and meaning of life."

In addition, the text does not speak of Israel or of the servant as making **Torah** great and glorious—the text holds that this is what YHWH Himself will do

We think it is very important to emphasize that YHWH's **Torah** did not begin and end with Moses. Rather, the teaching of Israel done by Moses was continued by Joshua (see **Joshua 24:25-26**) and then by Israel's leaders throughout the following centuries, including judges such as Deborah and Samuel, kings such as David and Solomon, and the many men and women called by God to speak for Him to Israel. **Torah**—teaching, instruction, laws, legal decisions—was constantly on-going in Israel. All of this was God's work, through those He called and enabled to speak for Him to His people.

When YHWH's teaching / instruction is limited to the **Five Books of Moses**, it effectually eliminates Israel from being able to be relevant to the modern world—meaning that their teaching of the nations is a matter of calling for kosher food laws, and the out-dated legal decisions concerning sacrifices, etc., in a temple that no longer exists in Jerusalem, and a host of laws that are no longer relevant or applicable in modern life

(continued...)

⁷⁷(...continued)

(such as the death sentence for adultery, for homosexuality, and for rebellious children). How can this be the teaching the nations are waiting for?

But that teaching, as it develops and is transformed by Israel's prophets, and then fulfilled in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, with its requirement boiled down to loving God and neighbor—not 613 outdated, irrelevant regulations (such as “not boiling kid-goats in their mother's milk”) that **Torah** becomes something that the whole world longs for and needs. What do you think?

⁷⁸1QIs^a adds the feminine suffix to this verb.

⁷⁹The Greek translation of **verse 21** is quite different: “(The) Lord, the God wished / determined so that He / it might be justified, and He might multiply praise.”

We understand the Hebrew text of **verse 21** to mean that in order to have a right-relationship with humanity, YHWH multiplies or expands His teaching, making it glorious. We take this to mean that through His servants, the prophets of Israel, YHWH's teaching has been deepened and explained, for example in the teaching throughout **Isaiah 40-55** concerning YHWH's servant Jacob / Israel as suffering for the sake of the nations, bringing light to all the world. That is certainly glorious in nature—far surpassing the teaching of the **Five Books of Moses**—and it is a teaching that is embodied and fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

If you were an orthodox Jew, believing that the **Five Books of Moses** are in fact “the **Torah**,” to which nothing can be added, what would you think this means that YHWH intends to make His **Torah** great and glorious? Orthodox Jews whom I have known think in terms of the **Mishnah** and the **Talmuds**, both Jerusalem and Babylonian.

Alexander thinks **verse 21** means YHWH “will still put honor on the chosen people [i.e., the Jews] and the system under which they lived.” (P. 145) What do you personally think **verse 21** means?

⁸⁰Slotki comments that **verses 22-25** depict “The present tragic condition of Israel and an exhortation to contemplate its cause.” (P. 204)

Oswalt comments on **verse 22** that “In contrast to the purpose for which God raised up Israel, as stated in **verse 21** [but does **verse 21** mention the purpose for which God raised up Israel? We think not.] the Israelites are in an utterly helpless state. Far from being the ones who can lead out the blind and imprisoned through the publication of God's **Torah**, they are themselves in need of deliverance.” (P. 133)

הִפְתָּ בַּחֹרִים כָּלֵם
 וּבְבֵתֵי כָּלֵאִים הַחֲבֹאוֹ
 הָיוּ לְבוֹ וְאֵין מַצִּיל
 מִשָּׁסָה וְאֵין־אֹמֵר הַשָּׁב:

But he (Israel is) a people plundered and looted,
 having been ensnared in the holes / hiding places,⁸¹ all of them,
 and in houses of imprisonment they were hidden.

They were for plunder--and there is no one delivering;
 (for)⁸² spoil (synonym)--and there is no one saying Restore!⁸³

⁸¹Alexander notes that “בַּחֹרִים” is explained in the ancient versions, and by many modern writers, to mean *youths* or *chosen men* as it does at **40:30**...Most of the modern writers follow Luther in explaining בַּחֹרִים to mean ‘in holes’...corresponding to [the parallel phrase] בְּבֵתֵי כָּלֵאִים [‘in houses of confinement’].” (P. 145)

Oswalt mentions that the phrase הִפְתָּ בַּחֹרִים, which he translates by *trapped in holes*, “if it is the correct reading, is much more appropriate to an Israelite setting for the prophecy than it is to a Babylonian one.” (P. 133) But if the word has a larger connotation of “hiding places,” such as wells or cisterns, or caves, it would be appropriate as well to Babylon.

⁸²Where our Hebrew text reads מִשָּׁסָה, “a plundering,” 1QIs^a plus a few Hebrew manuscripts, as well as the Syriac, Aramaic and Latin Vulgate translations interpolate the prefix לְ, “to / for a plundering.”

⁸³Alexander comments on **verse 22** that “The terms are no doubt metaphorical, and therefore not exclusively descriptive of literal captivity. At the same time it may be admitted that the sufferings of Israel in exile furnished one of the most memorable instances of what is here described in general.” (P. 145)

It is an incredible situation—YHWH has chosen a people to be His servant, bringing light to the nations—but the people is plundered and looted, ensnared in hiding places and imprisoned, with no one acting for their deliverance. How can such a people possibly be YHWH’s servant sent to bring light to the nations?

(continued...)

42:23 מִי בְכֶם יִאֲזִין זֹאת

יִקְשֹׁב וְיִשְׁמַע לְאַחֲוֹר:

Who among you people will hear / give ear to this,
give attention and listen to the things / past / coming?⁸⁴

⁸³(...continued)

Oswalt states that “The prophet calls on the people to consider why the servant nation, entrusted with God’s *Torah* for the world, is in fact utterly helpless to carry out that task.” (P. 133) But there is nothing in the text stating that Israel is helpless to carry out the task of bringing justice and light to the nations. All it says is that the nation called to do this work is blind and imprisoned.

And we ask, Can it be that it is only those who are blind, and have experienced imprisonment, who are able to experience deliverance, and see truths that those without the experience are blind to? Is it only the blind and imprisoned who can be qualified to act as messengers of YHWH? And does the ability to see, and the lack of having ever suffered imprisonment, disqualify one from being YHWH’s servant?

⁸⁴The last phrase in **verse 22** is לְאַחֲוֹר, literally, “to the back part,” is translated by the Greek as τὰ ἐπερχόμενα, “the things coming / appearing.” Translations vary from “the time to come,” to “from now on,” to “in future.” But we wonder, how can “the back part” be referring to the future? Wouldn’t the future be “in front of us,” which the past is “in back of us”?

Alexander notes how the phrase “is explained to mean behind or backwards by Vitranga ...and Ewald...who seem to understand it as denoting reflection on the past, or the act of meditating on what they heard.” (P. 146)

We can certainly understand why they thought this. And in this light, the verse means that YHWH is asking who among the blind and deafened people will be willing to look again, to reconsider what they should and could have seen and heard, and take it seriously.

Or, understanding the phrase as pointing to the future, the verse means that YHWH’s chosen servant who had failed to listen to YHWH’s word in the past, and as a result, had become deaf and blind, and had suffered imprisonment, is now asked by the prophet, Who among the servant people, so long deafened and blinded and imprisoned, will concentrate attention on what the prophet is now saying, and will continue to say? There is a great mission for servant Jacob / Israel to fulfill; but without its paying attention, listening for YHWH’s word through the prophet, how can that mission ever be fulfilled?

⁸⁵Slotki comments on **verses 24-25** that they show “the cause of Israel’s plight.” (P. 204)

Alexander comments on **verse 24** that “This was what they were to bear in mind, that is, that what they suffered was ordained of God and on account of their iniquities. The errors of which this verse is the negation are those of supposing that they suffered without fault, and that they suffered, as it were, in spite of God’s protection, or because H was unable to prevent it.” (P. 146)

Oswalt comments on **verse 24** that “Here Isaiah tries to get his hearers to face the facts regarding the calamities that have befallen them...Any number of wrong answers had undoubtedly been proposed in Isaiah’s own day and would be proposed in the years to come: God was not strong enough to defend His beloved against predators; God did not care for them; the worlds of religion and of political events are separate from each other; God is capricious and unjust; and so on. Isaiah rejects all of these with an answer that may trouble some as simplistic...He says that the calamities were permitted by God [No—the calamities were caused by God, as punishment for Israel’s disobedience!...]They were not the result of chance or Divine weakness or apathy. Neither were they the result of injustice on God’s part...

“This verse introduces a critical problem that any promised return from exile must address: the cause of the exile. That cause is justified as sin and disobedience. Is the people’s problem simply captivity? Hardly. Unless some means can be found whereby that sin which produce the captivity is atoned for, and more than that, overcome, restoration in itself will accomplish very little toward God’s stated goal of bringing His **Torah** and His justice to the ends of the earth.” (Pp. 133-34)

But Oswalt is forgetting, or overlooking, the opening statement of **Isaiah 40:1-2**:

- 1 Comfort! Comfort My people,
says your (plural) God!
- 2 Speak to Jerusalem’s heart,
and cry out to her, that her warfare is complete,
that her iniquity / guilt was accepted / forgiven,
that she received from YHWH’s hand double (punishment) for all her sins!

No, the means of atonement for Israel’s sins does not need to be found. Her iniquity has already been forgiven by God’s prevenient grace—a grace that comes before anything human beings do or can do!

Whereas Oswalt interprets **Isaiah 40-55** as meaning that sinful Israel cannot be forgiven until the great servant messiah Jesus Christ comes to atone for her sins hundreds of years in the future, **Isaiah 40-55** begins with the great affirmation that YHWH’s grace has already accomplished that task, while deaf and blind Israel suffered in Babylonian exile! What do you think?

וְיִשְׂרָאֵל לְבַזְזִים
 הֲלוֹא יְהוָה זֶו חָטְאוּנוּ לֹו
 וְלֹא-אֲבוֹ בְּדַרְכָּיו הֲלוֹךְ
 וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ בְּתוֹרָתוֹ:

Who gave Jacob for plunder,
 and Israel to plunderers?
 Was it not YHWH against Whom we missed-the-mark?
 And they were not willing to walk in His ways,⁸⁶
 and they did not listen to His teaching?⁸⁷

42:25⁸⁸ וַיִּשְׁפֹּךְ עָלָיו חֲמָה אֲפֹו

⁸⁶Slotki comments on the “we” in the third line, and the “they” in the fourth line, that “the first person refers to the present generation; the third person to its ancestors.” (P. 204)

Alexander states that “This verse is strictly applicable to the sufferings of the Jews in Babylon, and it was no doubt so applied by them; but in itself it is a general declaration of a fact which has been often verified and was especially exemplified in ancient Israel, that is, that the sufferings even of God’s people are the consequence of sin.” (P. 146)

⁸⁷**Verse 24** affirms that Israel the servant’s captivity in Babylon was YHWH’s doing—and was caused by Israel’s refusing to walk in YHWH’s ways and listen to His teaching.

Knight comments, “Had Israel not realized that [their] present plight was God’s doing? God had been compelled to act through His servant Nebuchadrezzar to destroy His Own temple and city, to give His elect people over *to the spoiler*.” (P. 56)

⁸⁸Oswalt comments on **verse 25** that “The prophet now returns to the opening theme of the segment and explains the nature of the servant’s blindness. The Servant is blind because he will not draw the correct implications from the experiences he has had with God. If Israel persists in saying that it has not deserved the punishments God has sent to it, that it is upright and deserves God’s blessing, that God is unfair, then it can never understand God’s **Torah** and represent that **Torah** to the world.” (Pp. 133-34)

But does **verse 25** really say that? Is it explaining the nature of the servant’s blindness? And does it say that blind Israel cannot represent God’s **Torah** to the

(continued...)

וְעִזּוֹ מִלַּחְמָה
וַתִּלְהַטְהוּ מִסָּבִיב וְלֹא יָדָע
וַתִּבְעַר-בּוֹ וְלֹא-יֵשִׁים עַל-לֵב:

And He poured out upon him (the) heat⁸⁹ of His anger,
and (the) strength / fierceness of battle.

And it set him on fire all around,
and he didn't know (it);

and it burned him,
and he did not take (it) to heart.⁹⁰

⁸⁸(...continued)

world? We say, No. All this verse says is that YHWH's burning anger was poured out on Israel, setting him on fire—and Israel didn't realize, or "take to heart" what was happening. Oswalt is reading far too much into the verse!

Alexander's comment on this verse is simple: it "continues and concludes the description of God's judgments and of Israel's insensibility." (P. 146)

⁸⁹Where our Hebrew text reads חֲמָה, **chemah**, "heat," "rage," 1QIs^a reads חַמַּת, "heat of," "rage of," which we understand as a correction of the Hebrew text.

⁹⁰Knight comments that "When God acted in the end, the burning heat of His zeal for Israel's good had burned His Own beloved people, through the flames of the torches of Nebuch-adrezzar's soldiers as they set fire to the homes and temple...of Jerusalem (compare **2 Kings 25:9**)." (P. 56)

1. **Occurrences of בְּחִירָה, Bachir, “Chosen One” in the Hebrew Bible**

2 Samuel 21:6, where Saul is identified as בְּחִירָה יְהוָה, “chosen one of YHWH”;

Isaiah 42:1,

Look—My servant! I will grasp / support him;
My chosen one—My innermost-being was pleased.
I placed My Spirit upon him.
Justice for the nations he will bring forth!

Isaiah 43:20,

They will honor Me, wild animal(s) of the field;
jackals and young ostriches.
Because I placed in the desert water(s),
rivers in a wilderness,
to give drink (to) My people, My chosen one—

Isaiah 45:4, where YHWH is depicted as having called His messiah Cyrus:

For the sake of My servant Jacob,
and Israel, My chosen one.
And I called to you by your name—
I will give you a title, and you did not know Me.

Isaiah 65:9,

And I will bring forth a descendant from Jacob,
and from Judah one inheriting My mountains.
And My chosen ones will inherit it,
and My slaves will dwell there.

Isaiah 65:15, where YHWH says to the nation that would not call on His name:

And you people will leave your name
for a curse for My chosen ones.
And my Lord YHWH will put you (singular) to death.
And for the slaves of Mine, He will call (by) another name.
(Here “My chosen ones” refers to those in Israel who called on YHWH’s name.)

Isaiah 65:22

They will not build, and another inhabit (their buildings);
they will not plant, and another eat (their fruit)
Because like the tree’s days—My people’s days,
and the work of their hands, My chosen ones will use to the full.

Psalm 89:4^{Heb} / 3^{Eng}

I cut a covenant for My chosen one;
I swore to David My servant:

Psalm 105:6,

descendant(s) of Abraham His servant,
children of Jacob, His chosen ones!

Psalm 105:43

And He brought forth His people with rejoicing,
with a ringing-cry, His chosen ones.

Psalm 106:5,

to see / look on (the) goodness / prosperity of Your chosen ones,
to rejoice in Your nation's joy,
to glory / give praise with Your inheritance!

Psalm 106:23, where Moses is identified as YHWH's chosen one:

And He said (He was going) to exterminate them--
unless Moses, His chosen one, stood in the breach before Him,
to turn back His wrath from destroying.

1 Chronicles 16:13,

Seed / descendant of Israel His servant,
children of Jacob, His chosen ones.

There can no doubt that while David and Moses are identified as "chosen," all of the other passages have reference to Jacob / Israel, YHWH's "chosen" nation.

2. **The Adjective ראשון, “First” in Isaiah**

In the singular, the adjective occurs ten times at:

Isaiah 1:26,

And I will cause your judges to return, like at the first;
and your counselors like in the beginning;
afterwards, it will called to you, the city of right-relationship,
faithful city.

(This apparently means at the first / in the beginning of Israel’s existence as a people.)

Isaiah 8.23^{Heb} / 9:1^{Eng}

Because (there is) no gloom
for her who had distress.

As at the first,
He brought dishonor to Zebulun’s land,
and to Naphtali’s land.

And (at) the last, He brought honor—
(to) the Highway (to) the Sea,
beside the Jordan, Circuit / Galilee of the nations.

(Here “the first” is an earlier time in Israel’s history, while “the last” is a later time in Israel’s history.)

Isaiah 41:4,

Who did and made—
calling the generations from (the) start?

I, YHWH,
first, and with (those) afterwards—

I (am) He!

(Here it is the “first generation,” alongside later generations—whether of humanity or of Israel.)

Isaiah 41:27,

First to Zion: Look! Look at them!
And to Jerusalem, one announcing good news I will give.
(YHWH was the first One speaking to Zion from its first—see **verse 26.**)

Isaiah 43:27,

Your father, the first one, missed-the-mark;
and your mediators transgressed against Me.
(Here the “first one” apparently means Jacob / Israel, the nation’s father.)

Isaiah 44:6,

In this way YHWH, King of Israel, spoke,
and his Redeemer / Next-of-Kin, YHWH of Armies:
I (am) first,
and I am last;
and beside Me there is no God!
(In this "Self-identification," YHWH proclaims Who He is, including "first" and "last.")

Isaiah 48:12,

Hear / listen to Me, Jaob,
and Israel, My called one!
I (am) He;
I (am) first,
also I (am) One (coming) afterwards / last!
(It is another of YHWH's "Self-identifications," as both "first" and "afterwards.")

Isaiah 52:4,

Because in this way my Lord YHWH spoke:
(To) Egypt My people descended at the first,
to be a temporary resident there;
and Assyria, at ceasing, oppressed him.
(Here, "at the first" refers to Israel's descent into Egypt at an earlier, "first" time in her history, contrasted with here "ceasing" when overrun by Assyria.)

Isaiah 60:9,

Because for Me coast-lands wait,
and the ships of Tarshish at the first,
to bring your children from afar,
their silver and their gold with them,
for YHWH your God's name,
and for Israel's Set-apart One,
because He beautified you!
(Here "the first" means the first of the ships returning Israelites from afar.)

Isaiah 65:7,

your iniquities, and your fathers' iniquities together--
YHWH said--
(you) who made sacrifices upon the mountains,
and upon the hills reproached Me,
and I will measure their first repayment into their lap.
(Here "first" is referring to the beginning of YHWH's repayment of Israel's iniquities.)

The plural form of the adjective occurs nine times at:

Isaiah 41:22,

Let them bring near, and let them declare to us that which will happen;
the first things, what they (are),
declare, and we will place (them to) our heart;
and we will know their end / outcome;
or, the coming thing, cause us to hear!
(YHWH challenges the so-called Gods to declare “the first things”—meaning, we take it, the origins of the universe and of humanity.)

Isaiah 42:9,

The first things, look—they came / happened.
And the new things I am declaring--
before they sprout forth
I will cause them to be heard by you people!
(Here we take “the first things” to mean the story of humanity’s and the universe’s origins.)

Isaiah 43:9,

All the nations were gathered together,
and peoples were assembled.
Who among them will declare this,
and cause first / former things to be heard?
Let them give witnesses, and let them be justified;
and they will hear, and they will speak true-faithfulness!
(Here it seems obvious that “first / former things” refers to the origins of the universe and all the nations and peoples. YHWH alone can give a coherent depiction of such origins!)

Isaiah 43:18,

You people shall not remember former / first things,
and you shall not meditate on / consider diligently ancient things!
(Here, “former / first things” clearly means “ancient things,” whether origins of the universe, or Israel’s origins.)

Isaiah 46:9,

Remember first things from long-lasting time (past)!
Because I (am) El / God,
and there is not again a God,
and a ceasing like Me!
(This is another “Self-identification” of YHWH, in Whom Israel can know “first things” concerning humanity’s and the universe’s origins and their cessation.)

Isaiah 48:3,

The former / first things from that time I declared,
and from My mouth they went forth,
and I caused them to be heard.

Suddenly I acted / did (it),
and they came (to pass)!

(YHWH has declared “the first things” to Israel from its earliest existence; His declarations have been confirmed in history by their occurrence.)

Isaiah 61:4,

And they will build long-time ruins;
former / first desolations they will raise up;
and they will renew cities of desolation (synonym),
ruins of generation and generation.

(In Israel’s blessed future, her “former / first desolations” which have existed for many generations will be rebuilt.)

Isaiah 65:16,

Because the one who blesses himself in the earth
will bless himself by God of Amen;
and the one who swears in the earth
will swear by God of Amen.

For the former / first troubles will be forgotten,
and because they are hidden from My eyes.

(Here, “the first / former troubles” refer to the sufferings that Israel has experienced in her past, but which will be forgotten in the “good days coming.”)

Isaiah 65:17,

Because look at Me—
creating new heavens and a new earth;
and the first / former things will not be remembered,
and they will not come up on heart(s).

(“The first / former things” means those things that occurred before YHWH’s creation of new heavens and new earth.)

