

## Lesson 23 Isaiah 41:21-42:17 Consolation of the Gentiles

### Introduction

The consolation of Israel began with the famous introduction of chapter 40, “Comfort O comfort my people.” The section later ended with three images of a weak, downtrodden Israel, rescued, cared for, and restored by God.

| The Consolation of the Gentiles<br>41:21-42:17                                      |   |   |
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| A court scene:<br>The idol-gods exposed;<br>the world’s plight apparent<br>41:21–29 | Remedy:<br>The servant as the answer<br>to the world’s plight<br>42:1–9 | The new song:<br>The world’s joy in the<br>Lord’s victory<br>42:10–17 |

Alec Motyer. *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (InterVarsity Press, 1996).

God’s care might begin with Israel. It does not end with Israel. The purpose of the nation Israel, going all the way back to the call of Abraham, was to bless to the nations. Israel was to be God’s servant, a nation of priests, who displayed the glory of God in their lives and who helped others come to know God.

In this next section we see His consolation extended out to all peoples. There are three divisions to this section. 41:21-29 is a court scene that exposes the plight of the nations. 42:1-9 introduces God’s servant as the solution for humanity’s plight. And 42:10-17 concludes with a song of joy in the Lord.

The initial court scene begins looking more like judgment than comfort. That’s sometimes the problem with good news. It does not sound like good news when it uncovers foundational beliefs as being dark and sinister. When you say to people, “You are clinging to death in order to make sense out of your life,” they may not thank you for that insight. To let go of the life raft only makes sense when you see and accept the truth that the raft is actually carrying you toward certain death. And even then it might not be easy to let go of that security.

Whatever we have chosen as a replacement for the provision, security, and life that God offers, whether it is relationship, position, achievement, or cultural religion those things are idols. Whatever gives us identity, control, or purpose apart from the life God offers, it’s an idol.

If our idols can be exposed as false, if we can acknowledge that we are clinging to death and corruption, then we might be willing to listen to a different message. That’s why this section of consolation starts with the bad news. Isaiah intends to remove false hopes, so that the good message of consolation might be heard and received as good. He does that by putting the gods of the nations on trial, 41:21-29.

### A Court Scene: The idol-gods exposed (41:21–29)

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| <p><sup>21</sup> “Present your case,” the LORD says.</p> <p><sup>22</sup> Let them bring forth and declare to us<br/>As for the former <i>events</i>, declare what they <i>were</i>,</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Or announce to us what is coming;</p> <p><sup>23</sup> Declare the things that are going to come<br/>afterward,<br/>Indeed, do good or evil,</p> <p><sup>24</sup> Behold, you are of no account,<br/>He who chooses you is an abomination.</p> <p><sup>25</sup> “I have aroused one from the north, and<br/>he has come;<br/>And he will come upon rulers as <i>upon</i> mortar,</p> <p><sup>26</sup> Who has declared <i>this</i> from the beginning,</p> | <p>“Bring forward your strong <i>arguments</i>,”<br/>The King of Jacob says.<br/>what is going to take place;<br/>That we may consider them and know their<br/>outcome.</p> <p>That we may know that you are gods;<br/>that we may anxiously look about us and fear<br/>together.<br/>And your work amounts to nothing;<br/>From the rising of the sun he will call on My name;<br/>Even as the potter treads clay.”<br/>Or from former times, that we may say,</p> |
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that we might know?  
Surely there was no one who declared,  
Surely there was no one who heard your words.  
27 “Formerly *I said* to Zion, ‘Behold, here they are.’ And to Jerusalem, ‘I will give a messenger of good news.’  
28 “But when I look, there is no one, And there is no counselor among them  
Who, if I ask, can give an answer.  
29 “Behold, all of them are false; Their works are worthless,  
Their molten images are wind and emptiness.

This is another clear attack on idolatry. Isaiah’s constant linking of terms and themes between prophetic passages makes it challenging to identify where one prophetic section ends and another begins - and challenging to recognize the new information being communicated in passages with themes we have already touched on. Back in 41:1, the Gentiles had been invited to listen to God. That was followed by a reference to Israel as God’s servant in 41:8. Now, here in 41:21 we start with an invitation for the Gentiles to present a case before God which will be followed in 42:1 with a reference to a servant. The shared terms link the passages together like a puzzle piece. At the same time, the linked pieces are revealing two different invitations and two different kinds of servant. The two images might be side by side in the same puzzle, linked together by connecting pieces, but they are two different images in the larger picture. They really do show us two different kinds of invitation and two different kinds of servant.

This invitation is a summons to court. The pagan gods are on trial. The summons is presented in the name of Yahweh and in the name of the King of Jacob. This is the only time the designation “King of Jacob” appears in the entire Bible. I think Isaiah uses Jacob here, as he has done in other passages, to clarify that we are not talking about a king from the Northern Kingdom Israel. We are talking about the king of God’s Covenant people. Using the name “Jacob” makes that clear. This is all of God’s Covenant people. The right human authority over the unified people of God is calling the nations to trial.

The prosecution makes a challenge to the Gentile nations to bring out their gods and put them to a test.

22 Let them bring forth and declare to us what is going to take place;  
As for the former *events*, declare what they *were*, That we may consider them and know their outcome.  
Or announce to us what is coming;  
23 Declare the things that are going to come That we may know that you are gods;  
afterward,  
Indeed, do good or evil, that we may anxiously look about us and fear together.

The gods are challenged in their interpretation of the past and their knowledge of the future. They are challenged to look back in history at events that have already happened and to explain those events, and explain what the outcome of those events will be; explain history. “As for the former *events*, declare what they *were*, that we may consider them and know their outcome.”

Then they are challenged to look ahead in time and declare events that will be in the future. “Declare the things that are going to come afterward.” The charge ends with a challenge to just do anything. “Indeed, do good or evil,” just do something that might cause us to believe you are real, that we might have some kind of anxiety and fear, some sense that you affect the world.

Isaiah expects no response from the idols. Nothing from Baal of Tyre, or Dagon of Philistia, or Chemosh of Moab, or Marduk of Babylon, or Ashur of Assyria, or Ra of Egypt. He expects no response. Nothing from Anath, Inanna, Ishtar, or Isis. The court of God finds the pagan idol-gods impotent: guilty of deceiving the nations.



period of the Judges, some 1200 years before Jesus. The discovery of Ugarit uncovered hundreds of clay tablets, including several tablets describing a mythology of Baal, a form of which Elijah contended with during his ministry.

In the Baal cycle, the storm god Baal became angry at the sea serpent Leviathan and killed it. This angered Mot the god death. Mot defeated Baal and took him down to his underworld kingdom. Baal's sister and lover Anath, goddess of fertility and motherhood, showed that she was no one to be messed with. She went down to the underworld and cleaved Mot with a sword, winnowed him with a fan, burned him with fire, ground him in a hand-mill, sowed him in the ground, and let birds eat what was left. Thus, she rescued Baal and brought him back up from the kingdom of death.

This cycle recurred every year. Baal was the storm god. His imprisonment by Mot every year explained the dry season. So when Baal was in the underworld, there was no rain, when Anath rescued Baal, the rains came again. And even the imagery of Anath grinding Mot up, it's almost like she seeds him into the ground. She sows him. That is part of this picture of the fertility that is going to come after the release of Baal and the death of Mot.

John Oswalt explains with much greater insight how the view of history presented here by Isaiah challenges the more predominant view of history assumed by the Gentile nations. I'm just going to go ahead and read two paragraphs from Oswalt because I think it is much better to hear this from an expert. This is Oswalt.

"The pagan understanding of existence rests on the concept of continuity. According to this concept, everything that exists is part of everything else. Thus humanity, nature, and deity are all inseparable from one another. In an ultimate sense, the cosmos is eternal. What is always has been, and what has been always will be. In the cycles of existence there is no beginning and no end, and nothing ever changes. Thus, the way to tell the future in such a system is to find the ways in which the present is congruent with the past, for what happened in the past under similar circumstances must happen again. But the gods are absolutely helpless to tell us how the world began or how it will end; the gods are the system personified. By the same token, they are helpless to tell us about something that has never happened before. First, by definition there cannot be such a thing; second, the system cannot know what it has not yet experienced."

"Thus, Isaiah's attack betrays a penetrating understanding of the nature of the system he is attacking. He has attacked it precisely at its weak point. His attack also illustrates the breathtaking difference between his (and the Bible's) conception of God and that of Israel's neighbors. What kind of God is he who knows what has not happened? What kind of God is he who can explain the first principles of existence? He is one who is Other than the system, one who has made the system according to certain specifications, one who makes the system operate according to his sovereign will. He is the one who is himself "the first and the last" (cf. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12; and the discussion of "first" and "last" above on 41:22). Isaiah says, in effect, that anything worthy of the term "god" must be more than the system itself. Since these beings are incapable of independent activity, they are not gods. This is philosophical sophistication of a sort found elsewhere only in the logical reductionism of Aristotle's Unmoved Mover. But there it is little more than an abstract formulation that was little more than a philosophical concept. Here it is the fervently held conviction of a whole people, a conviction that was to change the entire Western world. Whence came such a belief, except, as the Hebrews insist, through divine self-revelation?"<sup>1</sup>

That was Oswalt. The challenge made here confronts the idol-gods of the nations directly. And at the same time, undermines the presuppositions Gentiles hold regarding time itself. Their worldview is found wanting and dangerous. The world is broken. People are broken. We need help. The gods are not real. They are part of the broken system. They cannot help. History is not cyclical. There is a beginning. We are moving toward an end. Human beings are not in an unending, inescapable cycle.

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<sup>1</sup> J. N. Oswalt. *NICOT: The Book of Isaiah, Chs 40-66*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998) 106.

Now, having exposed the false help of the gods, Isaiah points next to the true remedy of human sin and need. God's servant will establish justice on earth, 42:1-9. This is the first of four servant songs in the Book of the Servant. The song is actually verses 42:1-4, and then we get a confirmation by God in 5-9.

**The Remedy: The Servant of God will establish justice (42:1-9)**

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| <sup>1</sup> "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold;<br>I have put My Spirit upon Him; | My chosen one <i>in whom</i> My soul delights.<br>He will bring forth justice to the <u>nations</u> . |
| <sup>2</sup> "He will not cry out or raise <i>His voice</i> ,                      | Nor make His voice heard in the street.   |
| <sup>3</sup> "A bruised reed He will not break                                     | And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish;  |
| He will faithfully bring forth justice.  |   |
| <sup>4</sup> "He will not be disheartened or crushed                               | Until He has established justice in the earth;  |
| And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law."                             |   |

Now the confirmation of the Servant from God, 5-9.

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| <sup>5</sup> Thus says God the LORD,                       | Who created the heavens and stretched them out,                  |
| Who spread out the earth and its offspring,                | Who gives breath to the people on it                             |
| And spirit to those who walk in it,                        | <sup>6</sup> "I am the LORD, I have called You in righteousness, |
| I will also hold You by the hand                           | and I will watch over You and I will appoint You                 |
| as a covenant to the people and a light to the             | nations,   |
| <sup>7</sup> To open blind eyes,                           | To bring out prisoners from the dungeon                          |
| And those who dwell in darkness from the prison.           |  |
| <sup>8</sup> "I am the LORD, that is My name;              | I will not give My glory to another,                             |
| Nor My praise to graven images.                            |  |
| <sup>9</sup> "Behold, the former things have come to pass, | Now I declare new things;  |
| Before they spring forth I proclaim <i>them</i> to you."   |  |

All four servant songs have the same pattern. The actual song describes the servant's task. That song is followed with God's confirmation of His Servant. If you want to look ahead to compare, the second Servant song is 49:1-6 with a confirmation in 7-13. The third Servant song is in 50:4-9 with a confirmation in 10-11, and the fourth, most famous Servant song, is in 52:13-53:12 with a confirmation in 54:1-55:13.

Who is the Servant? We have already encountered Israel as God's servant in 41:8. We will continue to see Israel regularly designated as "God's servant" by Isaiah. We have also already alluded twice to an important figure who will arise in the east and in the north. He will be identified as Cyrus in 44:28 and 45:1, where he will also be called, "God's shepherd," and, "God's anointed." He will not be directly identified as God's servant, but since he is called God's anointed, which is the word, "Messiah," we have to consider him as an option when we read the Servant songs. I am not saying he is THE Messiah. The word "anointed" meant, "king." It indicates God's choice as one he has appointed. Cyrus was *an* "anointed one." He was not *the* "anointed one" described in chapters 1-39, the Book of the King. That anointed one is a son of David, and He is divine. He is our third option for the Servant songs. Is this Israel? Is this Cyrus? Or is this the divine son of David described in the Book of the King?

Let's read verses 1-4 again and see if the text gives away the identity of the Servant?

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| <sup>1</sup> "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold;<br>I have put My Spirit upon Him; | My chosen one <i>in whom</i> My soul delights.<br>He will bring forth justice to the <u>nations</u> . |
| <sup>2</sup> "He will not cry out or raise <i>His voice</i> ,                      | Nor make His voice heard in the street.   |
| <sup>3</sup> "A bruised reed He will not break                                     | And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish;  |
| He will faithfully bring forth justice.  |   |
| <sup>4</sup> "He will not be disheartened or crushed                               | Until He has established justice in the earth;  |
| And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law."                             |   |

Could this servant be Cyrus? No. That would be a very difficult connection to support. Though Cyrus is chosen by God, the language used for Cyrus in chapters 44 and 45 does not support the idea of God delighting in Cyrus. And though Cyrus is called, “the anointed of God,” the phrase, “putting My Spirit upon him,” seems to carry the idea of anointing Cyrus as a victorious king too far. And though Cyrus does execute God’s righteous justice on earth by defeating Israel’s enemies and allowing the return of exiles to Jerusalem, this seems to fall short of “justice to the nations” and establishing “justice on earth,” a justice that leads Gentiles to yearn for God’s law. I will come back to the language of Spirit and justice in a minute.

The clearest objection to this servant being Cyrus has to do with the means by which Cyrus brings about the justice of God. Isaiah 45:2 says that God will go before Cyrus to “shatter the doors of bronze, and cut through their iron bars.” That’s an image of violent military defeat of an enemy. Cyrus will enter into palace and Temple to take spoil. That justice is accomplished through active wrath. But the Servant in this passage accomplishes justice through calm gentleness. He does not cry out in the street. He does not damage an already bruised reed. The initial means by which this Servant establishes justice will be very different from that of a conquering king. This Servant is not Cyrus, though Cyrus might in some ways foreshadow this Servant.

Could the Servant be Israel? That’s a more possible connection to make. Isaiah clearly identifies Israel as God’s servant elsewhere, using the singular to do so. Isaiah writes, “Israel, my servant”, not “Israel my servants”. So, the singular works here for Israel. Israel is God’s chosen people. And God does delight in His people. Moses wrote that God set his affection on them (Deuteronomy 10:15). Has God put His Spirit on Israel? That’s not so clear. But if we are looking ahead, we could read that as a prophecy of the pouring out of God’s Spirit on God’s people, just as we find in Joel 2:28. Also, God could use Israel to “bring forth justice to the nations.” And it could be Israel’s role to do so through calm gentleness, not through war. Finally, Isaiah has already written way back in chapter 2 of Gentiles streaming into Zion to receive the law of the Lord. That fits the conclusion of this Servant song.

So, if we take as our key piece of evidence, the references to Israel as God’s servant here in the Book of the Servant, we could imagine a way for the rest of the imagery to fit Israel as this Servant. That approach would be assuming this is Israel and making the pieces fit. But if we do not assume this is Israel and we consider the language of the song according to how that language has been used in Isaiah, we will find that Israel does not match up the best with what we have here. As God’s servant, Isaiah describes Israel as weak, or blind, or rebellious. Perhaps they were intended, they were meant to draw the nations into the justice and knowledge of God. But we do not see them doing that. We don’t see the Covenant people solving the dilemma of human sin and injustice.

Another figure already described in Isaiah does match the language of this song. We need to look back to the ideal king in the Book of the King, particularly at chapters 9 and 11. Here in 42:1, God says He put His Spirit on His chosen Servant. Back in 11:2, Isaiah said about the Messianic son of David, “the Spirit of the Lord will rest on him.” We were told in 11:10 that the nations will resort to this root of Jesse, matching the claim here that the Servant will bring forth justice to the nations. We are also told in 11:9 that the earth will be full of His knowledge and here in 42:4 that He will “establish justice in the earth” and “the coastlands will wait expectantly for his law.”

The idea in 42:4 that the Servant will continue on “until he has established justice in the earth” connects us back to chapter 9. The Divine son of David in 9:6-7 “whose name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace” is also the One who will rule over David’s kingdom to “establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore.”

Let me summarize all that. The Messianic King of Isaiah 9 and 11 has the Spirit of the Lord on Him, blesses the nations, brings the nations to the knowledge of God, and establishes justice on earth. The

Servant of Isaiah 42:1-4 has the Spirit of the Lord on Him, blesses the nations, brings the nations to the knowledge of God's law, and establishes justice on earth.

The Book of the King points to our need for a new kind of King. Israel's kings are to aspire to the qualities of the ideal king, but they cannot attain that ideal. So too, all of God's people should aspire to the qualities of the ideal servant, even though they cannot attain to that ideal. Just as the Book of the King points to our need for a new kind of king, so too, the Book of the Servant points us to our need for a new kind of servant. Israel cannot attain justice for herself, much less for the world.

Are the Messianic King and the Servant the same person? Jewish interpretation varied. Some interpreters before Christ identified the Servant as Israel. Even so, Craig Blomberg notes in his commentary on Matthew that 200 years before the birth of Jesus, Targum Jonathan, a translation from Hebrew to Aramaic, identifies the servant of Isaiah 42:1 with the Messiah, the individual person, the son of David. It was a definite option considered by Jewish scholars who tried to interpret Isaiah.

Early Christians had no doubt about the identification of the Servant. Matthew quotes this whole Servant song in Matthew 12:18-21 as a description of Jesus. It is the longest direct quote of the Old Testament in Matthew, and Matthew likes to quote the Old Testament. He had just written about Jesus doing a healing on the Sabbath that angered people in the synagogue. Pharisees go out from Jesus and plot how to destroy Him, while even bigger crowds come to Jesus for more healing. Jesus heals them and warns them not to tell who He was.

Matthew seems to be making two connections with this particular Servant song. Jesus responded to those who challenged Him, but He did not engage in shouting matches. We have no record of Him delivering the ranting speeches of a zealot. He even cautioned people from speaking about Him. As Isaiah 42:2 says, "He will not cry out or raise his voice, nor make his voice heard in the street." That picture does not prevent Jesus from teaching as He stands in a boat, or as He sits on a mountainside, or as He walks in the street. He does speak with a voice loud enough to hear. But He is not crying out as a conquering general or a zealot leader. He conducts His ministry with calm, confident persistence.

What's more, "a bruised reed he will not break, a dimly burning wick he will not extinguish." That's not a picture of force or violence. It is true that Jesus will return as the lion of Judah. He is also king and conqueror. But the cross must come before the crown; the lamb before the lion.

We are probably so used to Isaiah's poetic imagery of a bruised reed that we hardly think about it, but it is original to Isaiah. And it's a wonderful image that wonderfully expresses fragility. How easy to break a reed, even more an already bruised reed! How easy it is to snuff out a wick of a lamp, and how much more one that hardly has any oil, that is barely flickering? It's dim. You just touch it with your fingers and it's gone. But we look at Jesus and we see His joy of children scrambling up on His lap; His healing of the man with the withered hand who happened to come to him on a Sabbath; His invitation to a woman facing her seventh husband (not even her husband!); His acceptance of another woman caught in prostitution; His respect towards a diminutive tax collector hanging from a tree – all people He could easily bruise or snuff out. Jesus expressed the gentle compassion Isaiah describes here. With you and with me, Jesus did not come to break; He comes to heal. He did not come to extinguish; He comes to ignite. Jesus conducts His entire ministry with a strong meekness, so much so, that we are rightly surprised at the exceptional times when He does speak harshly in tough love, or when He judges the hypocrisy of religious leadership that imprison people in the name of salvation. And we are surprised because it's not at all the Jesus we're used to. But it's there. We are reminded of how strong and righteous Jesus is. Jesus stared down the false idols of traditional, legalistic religion and gave Himself up to save humankind. He is a new kind of servant. A king who comes to serve, and by serving even unto death He established justice for all the peoples of the earth. He is the fulfillment of this passage. We do not see in this particular song that the Servant is going to suffer. That is coming in the following songs. But Matthew knew that when he identified Jesus with this first song.

Back to Isaiah, God confirms this Servant in the next 5 verses. Verse 5 establishes that it is now God speaking. It also establishes clearly what God we are talking about.

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| <sup>5</sup> Thus says [Elohim Yahweh],<br>Who gives breath to the people on it | Who created the heavens and stretched them out,<br>Who spread out the earth and its offspring,<br>And spirit to those who walk in it, |
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The Lord God who is Creator of all things and all people, the source of life, He says of His servant in verses 6-7.

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| <sup>6</sup> "I am the LORD, I have called You in righteousness,<br>and I will watch over You and I will appoint You | I will also hold You by the hand<br>as a covenant to the people and a light to the nations, |
| <sup>7</sup> To open blind eyes,<br>And those who dwell in darkness from the prison.                                 | To bring out prisoners from the dungeon   |

Through whom does God establish a new kind of covenant that applies to the people of all nations? Through Jesus. Who opens blind eyes and brings prisoners out of their darkness? Jesus. Jesus is God's solution to a world imprisoned in the darkness of false hopes, false gods, and false solutions. God will not yield to imposters. He is the center of reality. He is the definition of all that is good, and beautiful, and true. He is the source and He will not deny who He is. Verse 8.

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| <sup>8</sup> "I am the LORD, that is My name; | I will not give My glory to another,<br>Nor My praise to graven images. |
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For God, to call good and glorious that which is not Him would be wickedness. It is right for us to give God all glory and to proclaim Him as truth. It is right for God to give Himself all glory and to proclaim Himself beautiful and true. God will not leave us to our vain redefinitions of reality. We give glory to that which is not glorious. We are the ones who call what is ugly, "beautiful," what is false, "true," and what is wicked. "good." God will not give up His glory. For His sake, He will not, and for our sakes He will not. In this proclamation of a new kind of Servant who will come to establish justice for all peoples, God meets the challenge He set for the idols. Verse 9,

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| <sup>9</sup> "Behold, the former things have come to pass,<br>Before they spring forth I proclaim <i>them</i> to you." | Now I declare new things; |
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He proclaimed to Israel that one would come from the north to rescue them from exile. They would dwell in Jerusalem again. More importantly, He declares the coming of a Servant who will establish justice. Something new is coming. Someone new. Through him we will see the glory of God.

Now, the right response to the good news of the Servant song is to turn from the things that we worship instead of God back to God, who is the right object of our worship. The right response is to sing. Isaiah gives us a new song in 42:10-17. This is the conclusion of God's consolation to the Gentiles. The plight of idolatrous rebellion was followed by the solution of a Servant who would establish justice in compassion. That solution is followed by a new song. This song is divided into two parts. The first is a call to sing. The second is the basis for singing. The call to sing is in 10-12.

**A New Song: The World Rejoices in the Lord (42:10-17)**

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| <sup>10</sup> Sing to the LORD a new song,<br>You who go down to the sea, and all that is in it.                         | <i>Sing</i> His praise from the end of the earth!<br>You islands, and those who dwell on them.  |
| <sup>11</sup> Let the wilderness and its cities lift up <i>their voices</i> ,<br>Let the inhabitants of Sela sing aloud, | The settlements where Kedar inhabits.<br>Let them shout for joy from the tops of the mountains. |
| <sup>12</sup> Let them give glory to the LORD  | And declare His praise in the coastlands.   |

The invitation to sing goes out from Israel to the end of the earth, to the sea, to the islands, to the wilderness, to the mountains, including Kedar of the Arabian peninsula and Sela of Edom. The enemies of Israel are invited to sing. And not just to sing; to sing, to praise, to lift up, to shout for joy, to glory in Yahweh, and declare His praise. Turn to God.



The basis for singing that we are getting ready to look at brings up the tension of God working through a conqueror who will demolish, and God working through a Servant who will not break the bruised reed. That tension exists throughout the book of Isaiah. It's one of the major themes. It is represented in our title for this series, King, Servant, Conqueror - our three divisions for Isaiah. The Book of the King established the Messiah as king. We understand the image of king as also conqueror. We are beginning to get a glimpse that this king is also a servant. The Messiah will be both. He will be lion and lamb. That tension is not explained here. It will come into greater focus as we encounter the other Servant songs. For now, it is enough to recognize the tension. The new song follows revelation about a compassionate Servant and is grounded in God's active destruction of evil. That basis for the new song comes in our final verses, 42:13-17. We start in verse 13 by speaking of God in third person. We end in verse 17 by speaking of idols in third person. In between, we hear from God Himself in first person as He declares the deliverance He will provide.

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| <p><sup>13</sup> The LORD will go forth like a warrior,<br/>He will utter a shout, yes, He will raise a war cry.</p> <p><sup>14</sup> "I have kept silent for a long time,<br/>Now like a woman in labor I will groan,</p> <p><sup>15</sup> "I will lay waste the mountains and hills<br/>I will make the rivers into coastlands</p> <p><sup>16</sup> "I will lead the blind by a way they do not know,<br/>I will make darkness into light before them</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><small>These are the things I will do and I</small></p> <p><sup>17</sup> They will be turned back <i>and</i> be utterly put<br/>to shame,<br/>Who say to molten images,</p> | <p>He will arouse <i>His</i> zeal like a man of war.<br/>He will prevail against His enemies.</p> <p>I have kept still and restrained Myself.<br/>I will both gasp and pant.</p> <p>And wither all their vegetation;<br/>And dry up the ponds.</p> <p>In paths they do not know I will guide them.<br/>And rugged places into plains.</p> <p>Who trust in idols,<br/>"You are our gods."</p> |
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The Servant may not cry out, but God will shout. He will shout like a woman about to give labor. There will be silence in the pain, and then suddenly we will hear the cry. God comparing Himself to a woman in labor is certainly a surprising analogy. Let's just except this as the revealed Word of God. So this is Isaiah speaking the image God has given him, and God has given Isaiah an image of Himself as a woman in labor. Jesus will use the same analogy in slightly different way. I know it occurs in different places, but John 16 is one. It is an illustration that everybody can get. Births have happened at home in most places for most of the time. Everybody is familiar with the silent activity that is suddenly punctuated by loud cries, and then followed by new life.

God's cries will precede His wrath against those who have enslaved His people. He will then lead His people; not a strong, good, seeing people, but a blind people who do not know and cannot see. God will lead them to the light. He had challenged idols earlier just to do something, good or evil, do something. They could not. God assures us that He will accomplish His salvation. There may be a long silence leading up to the time of deliverance. But when it is time to come, it will come. God promises. "These are the things I will do and I will not leave them undone." He is not like the idols, who do nothing. He promises He will act.

It may that we are supposed to understand a linear sequence through this passage, that nations are judged for turning from God to false idols. The Servant steps in to accomplish justice in a manner that is faithful and gentle. After the Servant establishes justice for the world, covering God's people, inviting, drawing God's people in, God will finally conquer all evil.

The song concludes by bringing us back to where we started; the hopeless shamefulness of turning from God to false idols that cannot cover our sin, cannot protect us from harm, and cannot fill our hearts.

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