

Isaiah's Book of Consolation (Isaiah 40-55)
(#8) Israel, the Blind and Deaf Servant of God (42:18-25)

Outline of Isaiah 40-66
SECTION THREE: ORACLES OF REDEMPTION AND CONSUMMATION

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In our study of Isaiah's prophecy of this "Book of Consolation" (chs. 40-55), we have read of God's purpose to bring salvation to a people that He had judged severely for their sin. The people of Judah could not deliver themselves from the misery into which their sin had brought them. God had judged them through His instrument of Babylon. God had destroyed the land and its cities, had captured Jerusalem, and had destroyed and burned Solomon's temple. The Babylonians took the relatively few survivors captive to far off Babylon. But from there God Himself would save them. He purposed to deliver them from bondage in Babylon to which they had been taken captive. But how could this be? Babylon was the world power of the day? God would raise up a deliverer, a servant, the king of the Persians (Media-Persia), who would conquer Babylon, and would release the remnant of Judah. He would see to it that these people would return to their land and be established there. But this deliverance (salvation) from Babylon that God would effect through His servant portrayed in history a greater deliverance that a greater Servant would bring to the people of God. Isaiah gives forth a prophecy of the Servant of the Lord, foretelling the coming of Jesus Christ, who would deliver His people from their sins. This coming Servant, the faithful Servant, would do what Israel had failed to do. Israel had been an unfaithful servant to God, failing in its calling to bring the glory of God to the nations. In the passage before us today we read of the nation of Israel as the unfaithful servant of the Lord.

G. Israel, the Blind and Deaf Servant of God (42:18-25)

Here God addressed the people of Israel, who had failed in its role as the servant of its God. The people are described as ignorant and insensitive of the will of God. The immediate context would be the Jewish people in exile in Babylon. God had brought them to this place in His judgment upon them. They were undeserving of the least of God's blessings. They deserved the judgment that they had received from His hand. We read in **verses 18** through **20**:

- ¹⁸*"Hear, you deaf;
And look, you blind, that you may see.*
- ¹⁹*Who is blind but My servant,*

*Or deaf as My messenger whom I send?
Who is blind as he who is perfect,
And blind as the LORD's servant?*

*²⁰Seeing many things, but you do not observe;
Opening the ears, but he does not hear."*

God had called the nation of Israel to be His servant to display His glory to the world. But they were blind and deaf to the mission to which God had called them. Our Lord Jesus spoke in similar ways of the Jewish people of His generation. We read in Matthew 13 of our Lord's pronouncement of His judgment.

¹⁰And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?"

¹¹He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ¹²For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.

¹³Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. ¹⁴And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says:

'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand,
And seeing you will see and not perceive;

¹⁵For the hearts of this people have grown dull.

Their ears are hard of hearing,

And their eyes they have closed,

Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,

Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,

So that I should heal them.'

¹⁶"But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; ¹⁷for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it." (Matt. 13:10-15)

This condition of ignorance and insensitivity is true of all people everywhere, not just the people of Israel. This is the condition that sin has rendered us. Fallen man is depicted as spiritually blind to his condition as well as to his remedy. He is absolutely blind to his terrible condition. If he were but to get a glimpse of what he would one day face when he stands before an angry God, he would go mad, faint from the fear. But further, fallen man is spiritually ignorant. He is spiritually stupid. He is a spiritual ignoramus. He is ignorant of who God is and of what God expects of him. He is ignorant of the ways in which God governs His world. He is ignorant of God's presence beholding every deed, considering every thought, and recording every infraction against His holy law. But fallen man is also sinfully proud. If through the means of common grace, he is given a measure of understanding, he is too proud to acknowledge his shortcomings. And even if he were somewhat aware of his failings, he is too stubborn to seek counsel as to how his condition might be remedied. Fallen man is rebellious/self-willed. He wants to be the master of his own life, not submitting to any man or God Himself. Yes, he may attempt to change this or that, but it is only because he wants to do so, not because God may have commanded Him to do so.

Fallen man is also incapable of bring remedy to himself. He is "without strength" to lift himself from his condition. He is lost, unable to find his way. He is lost, alienated, and unable to find his way to God. God must find him, for he is lost and he cannot and will not find his way to the true God. Ultimately fallen man is "dead" in that he is unable to recover on his own. There is the absence of spiritual life that would move him to desire deliverance from his sin and be restored to God.

But God is to be contrasted with His wayward people. **Verse 21** records,

*²¹The LORD is well pleased for His righteousness' sake;
He will exalt the law and make it honorable.*

Where Israel as God's servant failed in making God's law known to the Gentile world, the Lord will be faithful to Himself and will cause His law, His will, to be regarded and valued by those who formerly saw no value in His law.

And so, due to Israel's failure and due to its ignorance and inability to restore itself unto God, we read of God's judicial dealing with this people. We read in **verse 22**:

***²²But this is a people robbed and plundered;
All of them are snared in holes,
And they are hidden in prison houses;
They are for prey, and no one delivers;
For plunder, and no one says, "Restore!"***

They had reaped the consequences of their sin. God had caused them to fall, to be defeated. God had caused Babylon to overwhelm the nation of Judah, destroy its cities as well as Jerusalem and its temple. God caused this people to be taken in captivity to Babylon. God then appealed to the people to awaken to their condition and desire the salvation which He has purposed to bring to them.

***²³Who among you will give ear to this?
Who will listen and hear for the time to come?***

God then declared that He was the one who had brought calamity upon His people in His righteous judgment due to their sin.

***²⁴Who gave Jacob for plunder, and Israel to the robbers?
Was it not the LORD,
He against whom we have sinned?
For they would not walk in His ways,
Nor were they obedient to His law.***

God had judged His people. They had been stubborn, insisting on ordering their lives according to their own will rather than the will of God. They would not submit and obey the law of God. God had justly poured out His wrath upon Israel for its sin; nevertheless, God's judgment upon them for their sin brought no recovery to them.

We read here of the sovereignty of God in history to bring judgment upon a sinful people. Although God is not the author of sin, He uses the actions of sinful men to accomplish His judgment in history. But it is first through His judgment upon the sin of His people that He then brings salvation to them.

We may see this same pattern of God working first through His judgment and then bringing His salvation to the remnant in the prophecy of **Amos**. Let us consider the message of Amos 9.

I saw the Lord standing by the altar, and He said:

*“Strike the doorposts, that the thresholds may shake,
And break them on the heads of them all.
I will slay the last of them with the sword.
He who flees from them shall not get away,
And he who escapes from them shall not be delivered.*

*²⁶Though they dig into hell,
From there My hand shall take them;
Though they climb up to heaven,
From there I will bring them down;*

³And though they hide themselves on top of Carmel,
From there I will search and take them;
Though they hide from My sight at the bottom of the sea,
From there I will command the serpent, and it shall bite them;
⁴Though they go into captivity before their enemies,
From there I will command the sword,
And it shall slay them.
I will set My eyes on them for harm and not for good.”

⁵The Lord GOD of hosts,
He who touches the earth and it melts,
And all who dwell there mourn;
All of it shall swell like the River,
And subside like the River of Egypt.

⁶He who builds His layers in the sky,
And has founded His strata in the earth;
Who calls for the waters of the sea,
And pours them out on the face of the earth—
The LORD is His name.

⁷“Are you not like the people of Ethiopia to Me,
O children of Israel?” says the LORD.

“Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt,
The Philistines from Caphtor,
And the Syrians from Kir?

⁸“Behold, the eyes of the Lord GOD are on the sinful kingdom,
And I will destroy it from the face of the earth;
Yet I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob,”
Says the LORD.

⁹“For surely I will command,
And will sift the house of Israel among all nations,
As grain is sifted in a sieve;
Yet not the smallest grain shall fall to the ground.

¹⁰All the sinners of My people shall die by the sword,
Who say, ‘The calamity shall not overtake nor confront us.’

¹¹“*On that day I will raise up
The tabernacle of David, which has fallen down,
And repair its damages;
I will raise up its ruins,
And rebuild it as in the days of old;*

¹²*That they may possess the remnant of Edom,
And all the Gentiles who are called by My name,”*
Says the LORD who does this thing.

Now we have seen in the Isaiah passage that God’s judgment of Israel in history was a precursor to the salvation that Jesus Christ, the Servant of the Lord, would bring to His people. We have the same idea conveyed in this passage of Amos. God revealed through His prophet that he would bring His judgment upon the northern kingdom of Israel. But in verses 11 and 12 we read of a prophecy that God would raise up the Savior, because He purposed to once again restore His people. God would raise up His Savior from the house of David, here described as the “tabernacle of David.” This was God’s promise that He would restore

the dynasty of David, the promised King who was destined to be God's King, who would rule over a kingdom, not only of a remnant of Jews, but of Gentiles also.

We may turn to the New Testament to see that this prophecy was and is being fulfilled through Jesus Christ who has been enthroned in heaven as the promised Savior. God rebuilt the tabernacle of David in raising Jesus Christ, the Son of David, from the dead. God the father enthroned His Son on His throne, reestablishing the Davidic dynasty, a kingdom that included a remnant of Jewish people and many Gentiles. Let us turn to Acts 15 to see this expressed.

The setting of this account is the difficulty the Jewish Christians had in accepting Gentiles becoming Christians. In the church at Antioch, some of the Jewish Christians believed that these Gentile believers in Jesus Christ must become Jewish proselytes, keeping the terms of the Mosaic Covenant in addition to their faith in Jesus Christ in order to be saved. The church could not solve the dispute, so they sent representatives to Jerusalem to inquire of the apostles about the matter. The meeting at Jerusalem has come to be known as the Jerusalem Council. Here is the account in Acts 15:1ff.

And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." ²Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.

³So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren. ⁴And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them. ⁵But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses."

⁶Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. ⁷And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. ⁸So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, ⁹and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. ¹⁰Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? ¹¹But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they."

¹²Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles. ¹³And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, "Men and brethren, listen to me: ¹⁴Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. ¹⁵And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:

¹⁶*'After this I will return
And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down;
I will rebuild its ruins,
And I will set it up;
¹⁷So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD,
Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name,
Says the LORD who does all these things.'*

James, the half brother of our Lord, an elder in the church at Jerusalem, although he was not one of the twelve apostles), set forth the conclusion of the council. In doing so he quoted the passage from Amos 9. He was declaring that God was fulfilling the prophecy of Amos 9:11 and 12. God in raising Jesus from the dead had enthroned Jesus in which the dynasty of David was renewed. David's family, that being the remnant of Israel, was restored. But in addition the Gentiles were also brought into the Kingdom of God over which King Jesus ruled. Thus we see the same principle foretold in Amos 9 that we are seeing before us in Isaiah's

Book of Consolation. Through the judgment of God upon Israel, He brings forth a remnant of Jews who would be saved by the Servant of God, who would also extend His kingly rule to encompass the Gentiles.

Let us return to **Isaiah 42:25**.

***²⁵Therefore He has poured on him the fury of His anger
And the strength of battle;
It has set him on fire all around,
Yet he did not know;
And it burned him,
Yet he did not take it to heart.***

The culpability of the people of Israel is set forth in a stark manner. They have no excuse. Rather, because of their privilege, their failure and defection from their God to prefer idols renders them hopelessly lost and under the just judgment of God.

But veiled in this message of the guilt and condemnation of Israel, it brings about the cause and basis and hope for the nations of the world. For prior to Israel breaking the Mosaic Covenant with God, God had regarded the nation of Israel with favored status, the Gentile nations being excluded from this privilege. (We have spoken of these things before.) But with Israel's defection and subsequent rejection by God, God was free to have mercy on Gentiles who were under His wrath in the same manner that He would show mercy to the Jews who were under His wrath. Paul wrote of this in Romans 11.

²⁸Concerning the gospel they (Israel that had rejected Jesus) are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. ²⁹For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ³⁰For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, ³¹even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. ³²For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all (i.e. Gentiles too).

³³Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!

³⁴“For who has known the mind of the LORD?
Or who has become His counselor?”

³⁵“Or who has first given to Him
And it shall be repaid to him?”

³⁶For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.
(Rom 11:28-35)

This chapter ended with a somber note regarding the guiltiness of the nation of Israel. God had judged this people severely for their sins, yet Israel, amazingly, was unaware of God's judgment that it was encountering. The prophet likened the nation as having been defeated by God on the battle field, and then had been set afire like so many implements of war. And yet, due to the blindness of his condition, Israel did not even know that he was burning (cf. 42:25). Such is one consequence of sin, it blinds one to the fact that God's wrath is upon him.

This may be the experience of professing Christians also. Our Lord declared to the church at Laodicea, “Because you say, ‘I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,’ and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked...” (Rev. 3:14ff.). Thus passages such as these in Isaiah 42 should lead each of us to proceed cautiously in the way, and confess our ever present need for His illumination and assistance. For our Lord has taught us that it is for the ones who are poor in spirit, and mourn, and hunger and thirst after righteousness who are the blessed ones. And it is

the ones who have judged themselves rightly that will escape the coming judgment of the world (1 Cor. 11:31).

As a result of Israel's sin, God's judgment fell upon them severely. Yet, the servant, did not even understand that it was God Who had done this to them. As a result, there was no change of attitude or thinking with respect to their relationship with Him. Israel, was so blind and insensitive that even though he was set on fire by God, he was unaware.

Now, thankfully, grace comes to sinners, and Isaiah 43 certainly reveals that this is so. The change of tone is abrupt between 42:25 and 43:1. It suggests very clearly that any blessing that comes from God is due to no meritorious working on Israel's part; it is solely on the basis of God's free grace. In the first seven verses we have a continuation of the theme that we have considered in the last eight verses of chapter 42, which is "Israel, the Blind and Deaf Servant of God." But here we read of God's intention to save His people by His work of grace. Here God makes known to Israel His commitment to bring it salvation.

H. God's Commitment to Save His People by His Grace (43:1-7)

We first read in **verse 1** that God affirms to Israel that He was its Creator.

*¹But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob,
And He who formed you, O Israel:*

What is suggested in these words is that God created Israel for a purpose. He had a plan, a design, that He would accomplish on behalf of His people.

God opens the chapter with these words, "But now." First there was judgment, then came salvation. God's judgment preceded God's favorable dealings with Israel. Sin must be judged in order for God to be just in justifying sinners before Himself. Prior to Calvary, God could be just in showing favor because of the certainty of the work of Christ that would be performed.

Notice that assurance may be possessed by the remnant of Israel in that:

- 1) God had created them (v. 1)
- 2) God had redeemed them (v. 2a)
- 3) God called them to Himself (by name) and possessed them (v. 2b)

We then read,

*"Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by your name;
You are Mine.*

God declared His intention to "redeem" Israel; that is, to buy them back unto Himself. It is expressed in the past tense in order to affirm to His people that it will indeed come to pass. He declared that He owned them. He was expressing to them that He took peculiar and special attention to their interests. And so, in spite of their sinfulness, God assures His people that they would be the objects of His saving action.

Here God further assures His people that His divine favor is toward them. This is because of His presence, "I will be with you", and due to His protection.

Note the idea of a journey, it alludes to the journey from Babylon back to the promised land after their liberty had been obtained. God promised Israel that He will escort them in their return from "captivity." No obstacle will prevent their successful journey. No threat against them will bring them harm. The reason is that God promised to be with them to preserve and protect them, as we see in **verse 2**.

*²When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you.*

***When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned,
Nor shall the flame scorch you.***

But how can this occur? How is it that He could do this, that He would do this? We read in **verse 3** reads,

***³For I am the LORD your God,
The Holy One of Israel, your Savior;
I gave Egypt for your ransom,
Ethiopia and Seba in your place.***

We know that God will save His people because:

- 1) He is “the LORD your God” -- He is your Head
- 2) He is the “Holy One of Israel” -- He is your Sanctifier
- 3) He is their Savior -- He is your Deliverer

Our God regards His own people as of foremost importance to Himself and would sacrifice other nations in order to bring about their safety. This probably has reference to the deliverance that Judah had experienced when Sennacherib turned from Jerusalem and attacked these nations of North Africa. The diversion rescued Israel but had resulted in the defeat of these people (2 Kings 19:28; Isa. 37:8).

God at times brings relief or deliverance to us by causing two tyrants to fight one another rather than turn against us. In a sense, they are given over as a ransom in our place. In order to preserve us, He destroyed them.

And so, the Lord affirms His covenant people, Israel, in a number of ways to assure them that He will bring them into His Kingdom. The theme of the pilgrimage from Babylon to Zion. The reason was that He cared for Israel, as expressed in the following verses:

***⁴Since you were precious in My sight,
You have been honored,
And I have loved you;
Therefore I will give men for you,
And people for your life.***

Here we read the reason that God would do this on behalf of this people. God has a love for them that is above and beyond any love that He has for all others. This speaks of God’s covenant love for His people. They are precious because God regards them so, not because they are any better, nobler than others. God prefers His people to others.

The result of this is hatred and hostility of people toward His people. This has always been the case down through biblical history. One of the reasons that people hate God’s people is because they perceive that we claim to be the objects of God’s love in a manner and degree that they are not. There is envy and jealousy, anger and often persecution. **J. C. Philpot** once described this antipathy of unbelievers toward the child of God:

However various sects differ among themselves, they all unite in condemning him. All other religion is right, and his alone wrong; everyone else’s faith is genuine, and his only is spurious. Of him alone the charitable augur uncharitably; universal salvationists cut off him alone from salvation; those that pity the heathen have no pity for him; and those who compass sea and land to make one proselyte, pronounce his case alone as past recovery. And what is his trespass and what is his sin, that they so hotly pursue after him? (cf. Gen. 31:36). Does he live in sin? No. Is he buried in the world, head over ears in politics, heaping together dishonest gains, or eaten up with covetousness? None dare say so. Does he

neglect prayer, reading the Word, hearing the truth, contributing to the necessities of saints, and living peaceably with all men? No. Why then this universal baying at him from every dog of the pack? For the same reason that Joseph's brethren hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him—the Father loves him, and has clothed him in a garment of many colours, and given him revelations which He has denied to them.¹

God then again assures His people that He will deliver them from His wrath and bring them back to Himself. This work of God's salvation is in the context of delivering His people from captivity in Babylon and enabling their return unto their land; that is, unto Himself.

*⁵Fear not, for I am with you;
I will bring your descendants from the east,
And gather you from the west;
⁶I will say to the north, 'Give them up!'
And to the south, 'Do not keep them back!'
Bring My sons from afar,
And My daughters from the ends of the earth—
⁷Everyone who is called by My name,
Whom I have created for My glory;
I have formed him, yes, I have made him."*

God issues the command for His people to be gathered to Himself from among Gentile lands. And who is it that are the objects of this summons? "Everyone who is called by My name, And whom I have created for My glory, Whom I have formed, even whom I have made." These are all descriptions of not only this remnant of Old Testament Israel, but they describe New Testament Christians also.

"Oh come, let us sing to the LORD! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms. (Psa 95:1f)

¹ J. C. Philpot, "*Winter Afore the Harvest, or, the Soul's Growth in Grace*", a sermon preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham, on Lord's Day Morning, 20th August, 1837.