

## Contrasting the Coming Messiah and the Nation of Israel

### Isaiah 42

Isaiah 42:1-4 - *“Behold! My Servant whom I uphold; My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him. He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. <sup>2</sup> He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. <sup>3</sup> A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench. He will bring forth justice for truth. <sup>4</sup> He will not fail nor be discouraged till He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands shall wait for His law.”*

#### Background Notes

At the end of Isaiah 41 the Lord challenged the nations about their idolatry, and the utter failure of their foolish worship of idols. In chapter 42 the Lord challenged the nations to consider the coming Messiah of Israel, the Servant of the Lord. He will bring justice to the world - something idols could never do.

In the book of Isaiah, the term “My servant” is used to describe different people or people groups, depending on the context. “My servant” can refer to the whole nation of Israel, as we saw in Isaiah 41:8-9. “My servant” can also refer to the small godly remnant of the nation of Israel, as we will see in Isaiah 43:10. A third “My servant” is Cyrus, the Persian king, as we will see in chapters 44-45. The exact terms that describe Cyrus are “My shepherd” in chapter 44, and “My anointed” in chapter 45.

The fourth - and the primary - way in which the term “My Servant” is used in Isaiah refers to the coming Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. In fact, there are four “Servant Songs” in Isaiah - all of them exalting this perfect Servant of the Lord. The first Servant Song is in Isaiah 42. The second Servant song is in chapter 49, the third in chapter 50, and the fourth - and most well-known - Servant Song is in chapters 52-53.

The first of the Servant Songs is found in Isaiah 42:1-4, extending on down to verse 9. In verses 1-4, the Lord spoke **about** His perfect Servant, and then in verses 5-9 He spoke directly **to** His perfect Servant.

#### Doctrinal Points

##### 1. Jesus, the perfect Servant, fulfilled His mission.

It doesn't take much insight to realize that verses 1-4 were speaking of the coming Messiah – the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, Matthew quoted these verses in reference to Jesus Christ (Matthew 12:15-21). The point of these verses is that the

perfect Servant will be gentle and gracious. He will not arrive with a lot of fanfare, pomp, and ostentatious display. And He will not burn out - He will completely fulfill His mission. *"He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has established justice in the earth..."* (v4). The Lord will establish justice in the earth for all nations when He returns to the earth to set up His kingdom.

In verses 5-9, the Lord spoke directly to His perfect Servant.

Isaiah 42:5-9 – *"Thus says God the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it, and spirit to those who walk on it:*

*<sup>6</sup>"I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house.*

*<sup>8</sup>I am the Lord. That is My name, and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to carved images. <sup>9</sup>Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them."*

In verse 5 God said that He was the One who created and stretched out the heavens. This may say something about the way God created the fabric of space and the stretching out of light waves during Creation Week.

Verse 6 says that the mission of God's servant would be to both Israel and the Gentile nations, and some of the miracles of our Lord were predicted in verse 7: *"To open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house."*

In verses 8 and 9 the Lord's glory was contrasted with that of the lifeless idols who cannot tell the future. All that the true prophets predicted in the past had come to pass - and all that Isaiah was predicting now about the Messiah would also come true. Verses 8-9: *"I am the Lord, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to carved images. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them."*

Isaiah 42:10-13 - *"Sing to the Lord a new song, and His praise from the ends of the earth, you who go down to the sea, and all that is in it, you coastlands and you inhabitants of them! <sup>11</sup>Let the wilderness and its cities lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar inhabits. Let the inhabitants of Sela sing. Let them shout from the top of the mountains. <sup>12</sup>Let them give glory to the Lord, and declare His praise in the coastlands. <sup>13</sup>The Lord shall go forth like a mighty man; He shall stir up His zeal like a man of war. He shall cry out, yes, shout aloud; He shall prevail against His enemies.*

In verses 10-13, the call went out for a new song of praise – a song for everyone to sing to the Lord, because the perfect Servant's ministry will benefit the whole earth. Notice that the perfect Servant's ministry will include the judgment of all His enemies (v13). This will take place at our Lord's second coming.

Isaiah 42:14-17 - *"I have held My peace a long time. I have been still and restrained Myself. Now I will cry like a woman in labor; I will pant and gasp at once.*

*<sup>15</sup> I will lay waste the mountains and hills, and dry up all their vegetation; I will make the rivers coastlands, and I will dry up the pools.*

*<sup>16</sup> I will bring the blind by a way they did not know; I will lead them in paths they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight. These things I will do for them, and not forsake them.*

*<sup>17</sup> They shall be turned back. They shall be greatly ashamed, who trust in carved images, who say to the molded images, 'You are our gods.'"*

In verses 14-17, the Lord revealed that He had been quiet for a long time, but in the future He would both judge the wicked and lead His people into the light.

The fulfillment of this prophecy had an historical aspect, when God brought His people back from the Babylonian captivity. But it was only partially fulfilled at that time. It will be completely fulfilled in the future, when the Lord returns and establishes His kingdom. He will judge the nations and lead the remnant of godly Jewish believers into His earthly kingdom. Then all will agree that Jesus, the perfect Servant, fulfilled His mission.

## **2. Israel, the imperfect servant, failed its mission.**

Isaiah 42:18-21 - *"Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind, that you may see. <sup>19</sup> 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? <sup>20</sup> Seeing many things, but you do not observe; opening the ears, but he does not hear. The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness' sake; He will exalt the law and make it honorable*

Don't confuse the "servant" in verses 18-19 with the "Servant" of verse 1! The Servant in verse 1 was the Messiah, the perfect Servant. In verses 18-19 the servant was the nation of Israel, the imperfect servant. God considered Israel to be blind and deaf. Israel was supposed to serve God as His messenger to the world, and a light to the nations. But Israel failed in its mission because its people were blind and deaf to the message - the great and glorious Law of God.

Isaiah 42:22-25 - *"But 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!"*

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

*<sup>24</sup> Who 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. <sup>25</sup> Therefore 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."*

As a result of its failure to carry out the mission, and because its people did not respond to the discipline of God, Israel itself was plundered and incapacitated (v23-25). Israel, the imperfect servant, failed in its mission.

## Practical Application

### Let the Lord fan your flame.

Isaiah 42:3 is one of my favorite verses in the Bible: “A bruised **reed** He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench...” Of course I change the spelling of “reed” to “Reid” - my own name! Seriously speaking, however, Isaiah 42:3 is a wonderfully encouraging verse for all of us, because all of us are weak and prone to failure.

Do you sometimes feel crushed and bruised – or that you have no strength? Do you feel that you’re not on fire for the Lord like you used to be? Are you facing burnout? Do you feel like you’re a dying ember - that barely a spark of flame remains? What’s the answer to these problems?

First, acknowledge your own lack of strength. Remember - the Lord knows our weakness and our tendency to become discouraged. “As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust” (Psalm 103:13-14).

Then - turn your problem over to the Lord. Ask Him to provide His strength. Ask Him to fan your smoking ember into flame. He knows just what to do in your life to gently coax the spark back to a small flame, and then fan the small flame to a useful fire, so allow Him to do what He needs to do in your life. “Be of good courage, and He will strengthen your heart, all you who hope in the Lord” (Psalm 31:24).

Let the Lord fan your flame!