

**A Singing World, a Saving Lord, and a Failed Servant
The Problem with Digging Holes Too Deep
Isaiah 42:10 – 25**

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We are in the courtroom with YAHWEH. He has just presented His case against the nations as well as the fallen members of the heavenly host. He has announced that His Servant, the Messiah, will be the cause of the new things about to take place.

As a result of what we have seen and heard in the courtroom, Isaiah is moved to praise and what follows is a song of praise. This is followed by what God will do to those who worship false gods.

YAHWEH has spoken about Messiah, spoken to Messiah as He receives His charge from God, and now God is commanding the nations and His people to worship and praise.

Isaiah 42:10–17

“Sing to the LORD a new song, Sing His praise from the end of the earth! You who go down to the sea, and all that is in it. You islands, and those who dwell on them. Let the wilderness and its cities lift up their voices, The settlements where Kedar inhabits. Let the inhabitants of Sela sing aloud, Let them shout for joy from the tops of the mountains. Let them give glory to the LORD And declare His praise in the coastlands. The LORD will go forth like a warrior, He will arouse His zeal like a man of war. He will utter a shout, yes, He will raise a war cry. He will prevail against His enemies. “I have kept silent for a long time, I have kept still and restrained Myself. Now like a woman in labor I will groan, I will both gasp and pant. I will lay waste the mountains and hills And wither all their vegetation; I will make the rivers into coastlands And dry up the ponds. I will lead the blind by a way they do not know, In paths they do not know I will guide them. I will make darkness into light before them And rugged places into plains. These are the things I will do, And I will not leave them undone. They will be turned back and be utterly put to shame, Who trust in idols, Who say to molten images, “You are our gods.”” (NASB95)

The nations, apart from YAHWEH, are helpless and hopeless as they listen to and follow the lies of the no-gods. But now His servant, Messiah, is a light to the gentiles and he has opened blind eyes. New things are declared. It is easy to try and say this is a veiled promise of the church age and how

everything will change with Messiah arriving on the scene and, with His death and resurrection, set free the prisoners; saved OT Saints, who were in Sheol, to ascend with Him to the Father.

We would like to think that this points to that but even Paul said the church age was a mystery (Ephesians 3:8-10).

In retrospect, as we look at this section of scripture from the 21st century, it might possibly be a pointer to the coming church, at the very least, it is a pointer to the Lord doing something in the last days for the nations and removing their blindness. He will be doing something new among them (Joel 2:27 – 28). It could also be pointing to the world post Armageddon.

Here though in verse 10 is a command, to sing to the Lord a new song. This is a song that is to be sung around the world. From the ends of the earth to include all those traveling on the oceans and those in the islands (continents).

Back in verse 4 the coastlands had hope as a result of what the Messiah would do, now, they rejoice and praise Him. "Sing to the LORD a new song, Sing His praise from the end of the earth! You who go down to the sea, and all that is in it. You islands, and those who dwell on them." (Isaiah 42:10, NASB95) Thus the whole world unites in a new song (10), that is, a song (Pss 33:3; 96:1; 98:1) responding to a new display of the goodness of God, a new song prompted by the 'new things' (9) and, as always, the motif of entering with joy into a freely given benefit (54:1). The conqueror provoked universal terror (41:1–7); the Servant prompts universal song. (Motyer 1999, 296)

What is the new thing being done by the Lord? He has reconciled the nations back to Himself through the work of His Servant the Messiah. He has dealt with the no-gods. He has rescued His people and changed the planet. He has poured out His Spirit. Clearly, this is pointing to the new things that are a direct result of the working of YAHWEH through Messiah and His entire work and achievement on the cross.

This is a song being sung not only by those who are seafarers and those who dwell around the world, but the islands and those who are in the sea will also be praising. This points to the end of the age.

This is a song that can only be sung at the end of the age after Messiah has returned in glory and released nature from the bondage of corruption. "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now." (Romans 8:19–22, ESV) Because here, creation itself is also singing.

Isaiah 42:11

"Let the wilderness and its cities lift up their voices, The settlements where Kedar inhabits. Let the inhabitants of Sela sing aloud, Let them shout for joy from the tops of the mountains." (NASB95)

The locations referenced in verse 11 are significant. This shows that the actions promised in Isaiah 41:17-19 have been completed. The wilderness, before a barren desert, is now inhabited and cities are now there. These cities and those who live there are among the singers praising the Lord. Kedar and Sela are two locations that are known for being desert, but no longer as a result of Messiah. To a Jew, this is what is meant by wilderness.



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The wilderness, Kedar (Kuwait and the Arabian Peninsula), Sela (rock or craig); in other words, desert locations to the east and south of Israel is now land made into a garden because of Messiah. Instead of desert, these are now inhabited places and garden like. The former enemies of Israel, “People everywhere should sing and shout to the LORD because of His victory over His enemies at the Messiah’s second coming.” (Martin 1985, 1096)

Isaiah 42:12

“Let them give glory to the LORD And declare His praise in the coastlands.” (NASB95)

Again, the call for the entire planet to give praise to the King who has proven to be the only one who is reliable and worthy of praise, unlike the no-gods the world had followed in the past.

This is a God who is telling the nations in advance, what is to come.

Isaiah 42:13

“The LORD will go forth like a warrior, He will arouse His zeal like a man of war. He will utter a shout, yes, He will raise a war cry. He will prevail against His enemies.” (NASB95)

The idea of the Lord being a warrior is not one that a Jew of Isaiah’s time would find unusual. “The phrase “Lord of Hosts” communicates God’s role as a warrior who fights both in the cosmic conflict against divine forces and through human historical events for His people, Israel. The phrase appears 285 times in the Old Testament, with a high concentration in the Prophets.” (Acosta 2016)

Why is the praise being sung worldwide, why the joy? It is because the enemies of His people have been dealt with.

This is a song to be sung at the end of the Tribulation. He has returned as the avenger of blood and rescued His people.

YAHWEH is the King of the universe. As the King, He has a distinctive role we see in the scriptures as Head of the Divine Council. “The Old Testament describes Yahweh as the king of the universe and ruler of all the divine entities and humanity. The biblical authors also describe the God of Israel as the military leader of all the deities in the divine assembly.” (Acosta 2016)

If there is any doubt about our Lord being a military leader, a quick review of scriptures related to the end of the age should clear that up.

Joshua 5:13–15

“When Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him holding a drawn sword. Joshua approached him and asked him, “Are you on our side or allied with our enemies?” He answered, “Truly I am the commander of the LORD’s army. Now I have arrived!” Joshua bowed down with his face to the ground and asked, “What does my master want to say to his servant?” The commander of the LORD’s army answered Joshua, “Remove your sandals from your feet, because the place where you stand is holy.” Joshua did so.” (NET)

The taking of the land under Yeshua (Joshua) is a type of the taking of the planet by Yeshua the Messiah. He is also the commander being talked to here.

Zechariah 14:3–4

“Then the LORD will go to battle and fight against those nations, just as he fought battles in ancient days. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives which lies to the east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in half from east to west, leaving a great valley. Half the mountain will move northward and the other half southward.” (NET)

The meaning is according to the Targum, “As the day when he waged war at the Red Sea,” for then Israel was in great affliction, for the Egyptians were pursuing after them, and Moses, our master, peace be upon him, said, “The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace” (Exod. 14:14.). And so it is said, “And fight against those nations.” (Kimchi 1837, 179)

Revelation 19:11–16

“Then I saw heaven opened, and a white horse was standing there. Its rider was named Faithful and True, for he judges fairly and wages a righteous war. His eyes were like flames of fire, and on his head were many crowns. A name was written on him that no one understood except himself. He wore a robe dipped in blood, and his title was the Word of God. The armies of heaven, dressed in the finest of pure

white linen, followed him on white horses. From his mouth came a sharp sword to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod. He will release the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty, like juice flowing from a winepress. On his robe at his thigh was written this title: King of all kings and Lord of all lords.” (NLT)

Judah is well aware of YAHWEH being a military leader. They have just recently seen over 180,000 members of the strongest military in the world killed over night by the Angel of the Lord (Isaiah 37:36).

This is a picture of His rescue at the end of the age.

Isaiah has been referring to YAHWEH as the Lord of Hosts (Heavenly Armies) ever since he started with his prophecy back in Isaiah 1.

The people know that there is a book, the Book of the Wars of the Lord (Numbers 21:13), that outlines all His works as a military commander. We do not have this book today.

Isaiah 42:14–15

“I have kept silent for a long time, I have kept still and restrained Myself. Now like a woman in labor I will groan, I will both gasp and pant. I will lay waste the mountains and hills And wither all their vegetation; I will make the rivers into coastlands And dry up the ponds.” (NASB95)

This silence from God is why we are encouraged in the Psalms (Psalms 27:14, 37:34) to wait on the Lord. He will fulfill His promises, just not necessarily in the time frame we would like Him to do so. We forget He is eternal, and we forget He delays for even more to come to faith in Him. Habakkuk had this same issue.

Habakkuk 1:2–4

“How long, O LORD, must I call for help? But you do not listen! “Violence is everywhere!” I cry, but you do not come to save. Must I forever see these evil deeds? Why must I watch all this misery? Wherever I look, I see destruction and violence. I am surrounded by people who love to argue and fight. The law has become paralyzed, and there is no justice in the courts. The wicked far outnumber the righteous, so that justice has become perverted.” (NLT)

The Lord does not disagree with the assessment. In this case, He announced it would be Babylon He would use to end the problem. Just as they had been warned and judgement came, so have the nations. But we are impatient.

The Prophet meets the temptations which commonly give us great uneasiness, when God delays his aid. We are tempted by impatience, and dread that his promises are false. We reckon it unreasonable that God should be silent, and fall asleep, so to speak, while the wicked carry themselves high; that he should be cool, while they burn with eagerness to do mischief; and that he should wink at their crimes, while they keenly pursue every kind of cruelty. When their minds were distressed and almost overwhelmed, the Prophet wished to comfort them, that they might not think that God had forsaken them, though everything appeared to be desperate. (Calvin and Pringle 2010, 301-302)

2 Peter 3:3–9

“Above all, understand this: In the last days blatant scoffers will come, being propelled by their own evil urges and saying, “Where is his promised return? For ever since our ancestors died, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation.” For they deliberately suppress this fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago and an earth was formed out of water and by means of water. Through these things the world existing at that time was destroyed when it was deluged with water. But by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, by being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. Now, dear friends, do not let this one thing escape your notice, that a single day is like a thousand years with the Lord and a thousand years are like a single day. The

Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some regard slowness, but is being patient toward you, because he does not wish for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.” (NET)

For those of us waiting on Him to come and rescue us from this present world, just as He promised to do, we wait and watch. He will not be silent much longer. We do find ourselves a bit like Habakkuk at times though. Be patient, judgment is indeed coming. Evacuation is soon.

John 14:2–3

“In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.” (ESV)

He is coming back to get us to be with Him. That day is much sooner than many of us can even conceive of.

1 Thessalonians 4:14–17

“For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.” (ESV)

Be patient.

Zephaniah 3:8–9

“Therefore you must wait patiently for me,” says the LORD, “for the day when I attack and take plunder. I have decided to gather nations together and assemble kingdoms, so I can pour out my fury on them— all my raging anger. For the whole earth will be consumed by my fiery anger. Know for sure that I will then enable the nations to give me acceptable praise. All of them will invoke the LORD’s name when they pray, and will worship him in unison.” (NET)

It is interesting that in verse 14, God compares the beginning of His action of judgement to that of childbirth. Where have we heard that before? “You are going to hear of wars and rumors of wars. See to it that you are not alarmed. These things must take place, but the end hasn’t come yet, because nation will rise up in arms against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. But all these things are only the beginning of the birth pains.” (Matthew 24:6–8, ISV)

Jesus, the Servant being talked about in chapter 42, picks up on the same example as He talks about the end of days.

God is bringing forth, as promised, a new thing. The use of a birth metaphor makes sense in that light. Just like birth, once the process begins, nothing can stop it. “Nothing in all creation would be able to resist and prevent the Lord from acting. His coming to judge sin and sinners would be as devastating to them as the searing east wind was to Palestinians.” (Constable 2003, Is 42:15)

Isaiah 42:15

“I will lay waste the mountains and hills And wither all their vegetation; I will make the rivers into coastlands And dry up the ponds.” (NASB95)

As part of the process to rescue His people and bring the changes that have already been referred to by YAHWEH, as part of the process of dealing with those who worship and follow the no-gods, we see here that God will destroy mountains and hills.

Recall that mountains in the OT is also a term used of governments or kingdoms. "Mountains and hills are symbols of the heathen world in general." (Cheyne 1880, 259)

This is descriptive of the actions being taken by the Servant when He returns in power at the end of the Tribulation. Much of the world has been laid waste as a result of the bowl judgements. "This is a picture of devastation, the destruction of all that makes the world habitable. The contrast between uplands and river valleys; between food (vegetation) and water; and between rivers (water bounded by land) and islands (land bounded by water) makes up a picture of totality." (J. A. Motyer 1996, 324)

Isaiah 42:16

"I will lead the blind by a way they do not know, In paths they do not know I will guide them. I will make darkness into light before them And rugged places into plains. These are the things I will do, And I will not leave them undone." (NASB95)

Who are the blind being referred to here? The nations? Those who have rejected YAHWEH in favor of the no-gods? Israel? In the context of God describing what He is doing to the nations at the end of the age, He is leading out His people with His Servant Messiah. They were blind, but that is ending as the remnant has now turned to the Lord.

The "blind" are those who have been deprived of sight by their sin, and the consequent punishment. The unknown ways in which Jehovah leads them, are the ways of deliverance, which are known to Him alone, but which have now been made manifest in the fulness of time. The "dark space" (*machshâk*) is their existing state of hopeless misery; the "rugged places" (*ma'âqashîm*) the hindrances that met them, and dangers that threatened them on all sides in the foreign land. The mercy of Jehovah adopts the blind, lights up the darkness, and clears every obstacle away. (Keil and Delitzsch 1996, 420)

Remember what the Servant was going to do in verse 7? "To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the dungeon And those who dwell in darkness from the prison." (Isaiah 42:7, NASB95) Here in verse 16 we are seeing the results of that. They need a guide. They have been blind for so long that this is not only a new work but new landscape for them to walk through. "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." (Oswalt 1998, 127)

YAHWEH is committed to doing a new work for His people. He will see to it that through His Servant, their eyes will be opened, and they will be able to see and then be a light to the world as Messiah delivers His people.

These are things that only the Creator God could do. Can the no-gods do this?

Isaiah 42:17

"They will be turned back and be utterly put to shame, Who trust in idols, Who say to molten images, "You are our gods."" (NASB95)

God is telling His people the future, what He will be doing for them through His Servant. We started this conversation in the court earlier in Isaiah 41 when the nations were confronted with the need to trust YAHWEH and they refused but turned to the no-gods. YAHWEH has now played off that and the inability of the fallen ones to tell the future by going to great details and prophesy the future that will be made available for His people at the end of the age.

Those who trust in no-gods, the Beast, themselves, they will be disgraced.

The idea of being disgraced is related to the false gods and with those who follow them. "I trust in you, my God! Do not let me be disgraced, or let my enemies rejoice in my defeat. No one who trusts in you will ever be disgraced, but disgrace comes to those who try to deceive others." (Psalm 25:2-3, NLT)

When you must nail your false god to the wall to keep him from tipping over, you are indeed talking about disgrace. Shades of the Philistines.

1 Samuel 5:2–4

“Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and set it up beside Dagon. And when the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD. So they took Dagon and put him back in his place. But when they rose early on the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD, and the head of Dagon and both his hands were lying cut off on the threshold. Only the trunk of Dagon was left to him.” (ESV)

That will not be the case for those who believe in the true God. Whatever may be the questions along the way, on the last day those who have dared to commit themselves to him will find their trust vindicated (Rev. 7:14–17). 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. (Oswalt 1998, 127)

Back to those who need sight and hearing...Israel.

God intends to deliver His people. The song which just concluded makes that clear. He will move at the time of His choosing even though He has been provoked by sin. Justice will prevail, His Servant will see to that. Those who choose poorly from the nations back in chapter 41 and decided to rely on the no-gods will be put to shame.

The problem though is some of God’s own people have also decided to follow the same path as the nations resulting in blindness. This is a blindness that will be dealt with, but the blindness exists today with His people. Paul also detected this problem.

Romans 11:1–5

“So I ask, “God has not rejected his people, has he?” Of course not! I am an Israeli myself, a descendant of Abraham from the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he chose long ago. Do you not know what the Scripture says in the story about Elijah, when he pleads with God against Israel? “Lord, they have killed your prophets and demolished your altars. I am the only one left, and they are trying to take my life.” But what was the divine reply to him? “I have reserved for myself 7,000 people who have not knelt to worship Baal.” So it is at the present time: there is a remnant, chosen by grace.” (ISV)

Romans 11:25

“For I want to let you know about this secret, brothers, so that you will not claim to be wiser than you are: Stubbornness has come to part of Israel until the full number of the gentiles comes to faith.” (ISV)

This was a problem for the nation in the past as well. Sin has an impact. It causes spiritual hearing and seeing difficulties.

Isaiah 42:18–19

“Hear, you deaf! And look, you blind, that you may see. Who is blind but My servant, Or so deaf as My messenger whom I send? Who is so blind as he that is at peace with Me, Or so blind as the servant of the LORD?” (NASB95)

Who is blind and deaf? Is it the nations, who are busy nailing false gods to the wall, or is it Israel? Israel. God identified His servant Israel earlier in Isaiah 41:8. Unlike the perfect Servant, Messiah, this servant is willfully blind and deaf. The call to hear and look is in the plural imperative, this is a command from the Lord to all of the people. But how can blind and deaf hear or see anything?

God has explained in verse 14 that He will move when it is time, and His people are to wait on Him. It appears that they have accused God of being deaf and blind to their condition. Really? Didn’t YAHWEH

just rescue them from the Assyrian army? Or is this coming from the nation later, either from Babylon or the diaspora?

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 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. (Oswalt 1998, 130)

We know the blind and deaf are Israel because of the language in verse 19. He refers to them as His servant and His messenger. The construction here is ironic as it is saying basically who is as blind as My servant.

“Who is so blind as he that is at peace.” Israel has a covenant with YAHWEH, they should be following Him closely and watching for His every need and the slightest sign of direction from Him. Nope, blind. A servant needs to be able to watch His employer to anticipate needs and direction as to how to best serve him. But this servant is blind.

2 Chronicles 34:14–19

“While they were bringing out the money that had been brought into the house of the LORD, Hilkiyah the priest found the Book of the Law of the LORD given through Moses. Then Hilkiyah answered and said to Shaphan the secretary, “I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD.” And Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan. Shaphan brought the book to the king, and further reported to the king, “All that was committed to your servants they are doing. They have emptied out the money that was found in the house of the LORD and have given it into the hand of the overseers and the workmen.” Then Shaphan the secretary told the king, “Hilkiyah the priest has given me a book.” And Shaphan read from it before the king. And when the king heard the words of the Law, he tore his clothes.” (ESV)

How blind and deaf can you be when you wind up being shocked about finding God’s word in the Temple of all places and nowhere else. Tough to follow Torah when you are not even studying it.

In fact we see here in verse 19 the charge of being blind leveled three times. This is willing blindness that makes no sense. Why would a servant choose to be blind? Why would a messenger choose not to listen to the message they are charged to communicate? It becomes obvious that here, “the servant of Jehovah is blamed and reproved for the harsh contrast between its actual conduct and its divine calling, between the reality and the idea.” (Keil and Delitzsch 1996, 422)

How bad is it? Sin has blinded YAHWEH’s people. Did they have any advantages over the nations? We can understand the blindness of the nations, but His own people? Surely there must be a reason for this?

We are still in court and now follows the charges for Israel.

Isaiah 42:20–22

“You have seen many things, but you do not observe them; Your ears are open, but none hears. The LORD was pleased for His righteousness’ sake To make the law great and glorious. But this is a people plundered and despoiled; All of them are trapped in caves, Or are hidden away in prisons; They have become a prey with none to deliver them, And a spoil, with none to say, “Give them back!”” (NASB95)

God called his people out of the nations (Genesis 15:7). As He led them, they witnessed His glory and His working for them on their behalf (Exodus 3:14 – 22, 12:23 – 24, 12:33 – 36, 14:13 – 31). The Exodus out of Egypt primary.

The good news is they saw all that the Lord did for them, the bad news is they saw all that the Lord did for them. “The problem with the Lord’s people (then and now) is not that the basic work of transformation is yet to be done, but that, transformation having taken place, no attention has been paid, the open ears hear nothing. The word of God is available but ignored.” (J. A. Motyer 1999, 300)

Is this variety of blindness a problem for believers today? Absolutely. God moves powerfully on our behalf, we see miracles in our life, He provides for us, and we yawn.

Just like Judah, many today do not even crack open their Bibles until they get to church each week, or whenever they go to church. Like the nation of Judah and as we saw with King Hezekiah, the temptation is to compartmentalize our lives and separate out God stuff from life stuff and keep them separate. The worldview of most nations is reflective of the findings of the American Worldview Inventory recently completed by Dr. George Barna and the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University.

In a nation where around 30% of Americans have self-identified as being born again, just 6% of all U.S. adults have a biblical worldview. *If American adults do not have a biblical worldview, what is the dominant worldview among the other 94%?*

The simple—and surprising—answer is, there isn’t one!

Based on half-hour-long personal interviews with a nationally representative sample of 2,000 adults, the CRC study found that the most common worldview might best be described as Syncretism. That’s the summary name for a disparate, irreconcilable collection of beliefs and behaviors that define people’s lives.

It’s a cut-and-paste approach to making sense of, and responding to life. Rather than developing an internally consistent and philosophically coherent perspective on life, Americans embrace points of view or actions that feel comfortable or seem most convenient. Those beliefs and behaviors are often inconsistent, or even contradictory, but few Americans seemed troubled by those failings. (Barna 2021)

Translated, less than 20% of those who say they have experienced a transforming relationship with Jesus Christ actually believe and live by what the Bible says in it. I am sure those numbers are now worse in light of the rapidly declining numbers of people even attending church nationwide.

Welcome to Laodicea. Blindness and deafness are becoming real problems in the 21st century just as they were problems for Judah.

What is it that the people have seen and not seen? They have Torah, they have the law straight from the finger of YAHWEH and the quill of Moses.

Isaiah 42:21–22

“The LORD was pleased for His righteousness’ sake To make the law great and glorious. But this is a people plundered and despoiled; All of them are trapped in caves, Or are hidden away in prisons; They have become a prey with none to deliver them, And a spoil, with none to say, “Give them back!”” (NASB95)

God revealed Himself to Israel. They were to reflect YAHWEH to the nations. “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. The verse especially emphasizes this helplessness. No one, humanly speaking, is even seeking their return.” (Oswalt 1998, 133)

They are stuck in holes that they dug themselves and they are unable to get out. They are imprisoned by their own hand.

Isaiah 42:23–25

“Who among you will give ear to this? Who will give heed and listen hereafter? Who gave Jacob up for spoil, and Israel to plunderers? Was it not the LORD, against whom we have sinned, And in whose ways they were not willing to walk, And whose law they did not obey? So He poured out on him the heat of His anger And the fierceness of battle; And it set him aflame all around, Yet he did not recognize it; And it burned him, but he paid no attention.” (NASB95)

God asks the people of Israel a question. Remember, these are His servants hand picked by God Himself. Who is listening to Him? Who will listen and make the appropriate changes beginning with repentance?

Let’s go through the list God gives here.

“Who among you will give ear to this?” No one. “Who will give heed and listen hereafter?” No one. “Who gave Jacob up for spoil, and Israel to plunderers?” The Lord did. “In order to help his hearers to look to the future, as he suggested, and to listen carefully for something new, the prophet puts a further question (the question in v. 24 corresponds to that in v. 19)—who is the God, and what manner of God is he, who brought this judgment upon you?” (Westermann 1969, 113)

Since YAHWEH is God, He can point to the future and one of the new things that will be presented to Israel, as a result of their willful blindness, is they will be given over to their enemies. Just as promised by God multiple times in the Torah, the most graphic being in Leviticus 26.

Why would Israel be plundered? (cf. v. 22) Was it because the LORD could not protect them? No, it was because the Lord was punishing them for disobeying the Law (cf. v. 21). Though God in His anger against their sin would destroy Jerusalem in flames and lead them into captivity, they still would be blind to their sin and His ways (cf. vv. 19–20). That is why the Lord would send His Servant to open their eyes. (Martin 1985, 1096)

Israel will be judged and will not even recognize it for what it is. “We take the meaning of the text to be, that the corrupt part of Israel had become so depraved by their sins that they were not to be roused even though they witnessed the judgments of God inflicting upon the nation the just penalties of their rebellions: “they laid it not to heart.” It matters not whether we regard the judgment as a special interposition of God or as a natural result of sin, the doctrine is frequently illustrated in human experience.” (Betram and Tucker 1892, 140)

Chapter 42 started with the Servant, Messiah, who will achieve everything He has been tasked to do, perfectly. We end chapter 42 with another servant, Israel, who has failed abysmally.

Even though Israel failed, God still will rescue them. He has already made that abundantly clear, that is why the Messiah will come. They will be delivered, and it is only by the grace of God that He has not cast them off.

More on that theme as we start chapter 43 next time.

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