Introduction to Isaiah Chapters 40-66
The prophet Isaiah presents a dramatic shift in emphasis in chapters 40-66 compared to the preceding 39 chapters. This shift was so striking that many scholars have concluded that the author of chapters 40-66 was someone other than the author of the first 39 chapters. The question of the authorship of the prophecy of Isaiah has been discussed by many conservative and evangelical scholars such as Bryan E. Beyer, Victor Buksbazen, Geoffrey W. Grogan, Gary V. Smith and Herbert M Wolf who have concluded that the prophet identified as Isaiah chapter 1 vs. 1 is the sole author of all sixty-six chapters of this prophetic book. The understanding that Isaiah was the sole author of all sixty-six chapters is the position taken in this series of studies. For those who wish to examine the evidence for the single authorship of Isaiah, it is recommended that the writings on Isaiah by the above noted authors be consulted.

The first thirty-nine chapters of Isaiah’s prophecy consisted of warnings and judgments on the people of Judah for their rebellion against God during the looming threat of the expansionist movement by the Assyrians who were growing in power and influence during the early years of Isaiah’s public ministry. The fierce Assyrian armies had captured much of the territory to the north of Judah including the nation of Israel which was conquered by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. and most of its people were taken into captivity. The later chapters of this first great section of Isaiah dealt with the impending threat of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Assyrians who had already captured most of the smaller cities of Judah. The final four chapters of this section give details of the great victory of God over the Assyrians who although they threatened to destroy Jerusalem never laid siege to the City. Chapters one to thirty-nine, are not just about the Assyrian threat. Isaiah declared many wonderful messianic prophecies about a coming Messiah who would rule the nations of the world in the latter days from Mount Zion.

Chapters forty to sixty-six of Isaiah also contain many additional prophecies about the Messiah to come. Details regarding His first coming, including His suffering and death and His second coming including His victorious and dramatic appearance and the establishment of His messianic kingdom are highlights of this great second section of Isaiah. The external threat to Jerusalem in this section deals not exclusively but mostly with the rise of the kingdom of Babylon which would not only threaten the city but actually conquer and destroy it and take many of its prominent citizens into captivity and transport them to the city Babylon, the capital of the kingdom. Isaiah speaks of these events which would happen many years in the future. One of the most amazing prophecies of these chapters is the name of a foreign king, Cyrus, who will issue an edict allowing the exiled Israelites to return to their homeland. One of the great themes of this section of Isaiah is comfort for those who have just experienced the wrath of the Assyrians and for these returning exiles who will be making the return journey from Babylon to Jerusalem. The final chapters of the prophecy of Isaiah deal with the messianic and eternal kingdoms. These chapters provide many details about these kingdoms that are not discussed in such detail in New Testament passages.

Chapters forty to sixty-six are usually sub-divided in three sections by scholars and students of Isaiah. The first section covers chapters 40 to 48 which deal in a large degree with the return of the exiles from Babylonian captivity. This first section ends with the 22 verse of chapter 48 which states: “There is no peace, says the LORD, for the wicked.”

The second section, chapters 49-57 deal with the magnificent prophecies of the Servant of the Lord and specifically with the atoning death of the Messiah which is highlighted in the passage 52:13 to 53:12. This section of Isaiah is arguably the pinnacle of Old Testament teaching on the salvation of the Lord. It may have been the passage Paul referred to when discussing salvation learned from the Scriptures (the sacred writings)
as it applied to Timothy. (2 Timothy 3:15). Similar to the ending of the first section, Isaiah states in verse 21 of chapter 57: “There is no peace,” says My God, “for the wicked.”

The third and final section, comprising of chapters 58-66, deal mostly with the future Messianic Kingdom to be ruled by Jesus Christ from Mount Zion and the eternal Kingdom. Many wonderful prophecies about the Messiah are contained in this final section including the first six verses of chapter 63 which provide rich detail about the dramatic return of Jesus Christ, not as a humble Servant but as a conquering warrior who has stained His garments with the blood of those whom He has defeated. As with the first two sections, this final section concludes in verse 24 of chapter 66, with details about the eternal destiny of the wicked who will find neither rest nor peace.

Victor Buksbazen provides a brief outline of chapters 40-66:

“The twenty-seven chapters of Isaiah, part 2 are a series of messages of comfort and promises of deliverance. This part of the book can be readily divided into three equal sections, of nine chapters each. The first two end with a stern warning to the unrepentant: “There is no peace, says my God, to the wicked” (Isa. 48:22; 57:21).

The third section also ends with an ominous warning to the wicked (66:24).

The major theme of the first section (ch. 40-48) is the comforting prediction of the approaching deliverance from the Babylonian exile, through God’s chosen instrument, Cyrus, the king of Persia.

The omnipotence and omniscience of Jehovah is compared with the helplessness and futility of the pagan idols.

Both national Israel and a certain individual personality, are called “the servant of Jehovah.” However, Israel is described as “the deaf and blind servant” who had failed to accomplish the task which Jehovah entrusted to him. The individual servant of Jehovah is always well pleasing to Him and carries out His will. This servant is the mediator of the new covenant with Israel and brings light to the nations of the world.

In the second section (chapters 49-57) an even more glorious spiritual redemption is envisioned. Here the central is “the servant of the Lord,” who by his suffering and vicarious death, described in chapter 53, the center of the second part of Isaiah, brings redemption to His people and to mankind.

In the third section, chapters 58-66, the universal message of redemption reaches a majestic climax. The repentant and regenerated remnant of Israel will finally become a blessing to the nations of the world, and Jerusalem will be the spiritual center of all nations. The vision of a new Jerusalem where there shall be “no sound of weeping, or cry of distress” blends with the vision of a new heaven and a new earth (Isa. 65:17-19 and 66:18-23). At this point Old Testament prophecy reaches its glorious climax. It was later beautifully amplified by John in Revelation 21:1-4.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, pages 329-330).

Introduction to Chapters 40-48
It is within these nine chapters that Isaiah lays the foundation for the future ministry of the Messiah as the Servant of the Lord and the comfort and hope of Israel who can look confidently to a time when God will ransom and redeem His people. God will destroy the future enemy Babylon in a prescribed time after the Babylonian armies will have conquered and destroyed Jerusalem. Those who had been taken captive to be exiled in the capital Babylon will one day be released to return to Jerusalem. The name of the king who issues the edict for the Jews to return to Jerusalem is named by Isaiah as Cyrus. The time of the release of the Jews to return to Jerusalem was about 190 years in the future from when Isaiah declared this prophecy. Even though God will comfort and redeem His people, they will still need to repent and turn to God and
completely trust Him. However not all of chapters 40-48 nor all of chapters 40-66 refer to the days of the return of the exiles from Babylon. See notes on 41:9 and 41:15-16.

John A Martin comments on Chapters 40-48:

"In these chapters the prophet reminded the people of their coming deliverance because of the Lord's greatness and their unique relationship with Him. He is majestic (chap. 40), and He protects Israel and not the world's pagan nations (chap. 41). Though Israel had been unworthy (chap. 42) the Lord had promised to regather her (43:1-44:5). Because He, the only God (44:6-45:25), was superior to Babylon He would make Babylon fall (chaps. 46-47). Therefore Isaiah exhorted the Israelites to live righteously and to flee away from Babylon (chap. 48). Judah’s people are viewed as being in Babylon (43:14; 47:1; 48:20) and Jerusalem in ruins (44:26).” (John A. Martin, Isaiah, page 1091, © 1985 John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck. The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament is published by David C Cook. All rights reserved).

Outline of Chapters 40-48:
**God's Promises to Provide Protection for His People**

1. The Comfort and Greatness of God: 40: 1-31
2. God is With the People of Israel: 41:1-29
5. God’s Promise to Redeem Jacob: 43:1-7
7. Further Blessings to Israel: 44:1-8
8. The Futility of Idolatry and the Forgiveness of God: 44:9-23

1. The Comfort and Greatness of God: 40: 1-31

Thomas Constable comments on Chapter 40:

“This chapter is an introduction to the remainder of the book, in that it deals with the basic issues and sets the stage for what follows. It also serves as a bridge carrying over such themes as comfort (ch. 12), the highway (chs. 11; 19; 33; 35), and hope (ch. 6). Also, the revealed Word of God is prominent again as the source of hope for God's people. Chapter 40 also contains an expansion of Isaiah's call (ch. 6; cf. 40:1-11 and 6:1-13; 40:3 and 6:3; 40:5 and 6:3; 40:6 and 6:4; 40:9 and 6:11).” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 181).

Basic Outline of Isaiah Chapter 40
1. 40:1-11: The Comforting God
2. 40:12-31: The Incomparable God

**40:1-11: The Comforting God**

Verses 1-2: The Call of Comfort from the Lord

40:1-2 *Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.*
2 Speak kindly to Jerusalem; 
announce to her
   that her warfare is over,
   that her iniquity is pardoned,
   that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.

Students of God’s Word must remember that the prophecy of Isaiah and specifically the great scroll of Isaiah found in the caves of Qumran near the Dead Sea did not have chapters and verses like the modern versions of the Scriptures. The great scroll of Isaiah has no discernable break between what we know as chapter 39 and chapter 40. Isaiah had in verses 5-7 of the previous chapter proclaimed a prophetic message to king Hezekiah regarding the future destruction of the house of the king (implying the city itself) by (forces from) Babylon. Even King’s Hezekiah’s sons (grandson’s etc.) would be taken captive to this pagan capital. The news that Jerusalem would be destroyed and its leaders taken captive must have been devastating to the people of God.

The people of God may have cried out in anguish after hearing the doom of Isaiah’s prophecy. They may have called out to God: Would there be no Jewish nation left on the earth? Would the kingly line of David fail? Would all of God’s promises and specifically His covenants with the Jewish people come to nothing? Is there any hope for the chosen people of God?

God, through his prophet and servant Isaiah gives a ready answer to the cries of His people who were left with no hope of a future for their nation. Isaiah in the first words of the first verse of chapter 40, declares God’s words: “Comfort, O comfort my people.” God is offering hope for the future through someone who will bring comfort. It may be that it was Isaiah the prophet who was being called upon to bring comfort to the people of God. D. L. Cooper suggests:

   “These words are directed by the Lord to a certain people who worship the God of Israel as their God. Thus Isaiah brought a message from the eternal God to this group, whom he urges to comfort His Chosen People. Obviously, the ones addressed are able to comfort others. The Lord would never command them to do that which they cannot accomplish by His help. We may believe that these who are addressed have a comforting, consoling message for His people. When I read this verse in the light of the entire revelation of God, I know the ones to whom the Lord here speaks. They are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ who have the comfort of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, and who are able to bring a message of comfort to those in distress.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly-January 1945. Biblical Research Studies Group).

Even though the words “comfort, comfort” are plural imperatives implying that the Lord is requesting others (plural) to obey His request it is ultimately the Lord who brings comfort to His people. He may indeed do this through the ministry of His servants but it is His loving care for His chosen people that moves Him to bring hope to the hopeless and comfort to those who mourn. See also, J. Alec Motyer, Isaiah, page 243 for a discussion on verses 1 and 2.

Victor Buksbazen comments on the role of the Lord and the Holy Spirit in bringing comfort to the people of God:

   “It is significant that in rabbinic literature, one of the Messiah’s names is “Menachem” – the Comforter. This is reflected in the words of Jesus: “And I will pray to the Father and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever.” (John 14:16).” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 332).
A few passages on comfort from Isaiah and other Scriptures are worthy of contemplation and study: Psalm 23:4; 86:15-17; 119:81-82; Isaiah 49:13; 51:3, 12; 52:9; 61:2; 66:13; Zechariah 1:17; Matthew 5:4; 2 Corinthians 1:3-7; and 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17.

In Isaiah 40:2, the prophet continues the message of the Lord by requesting that Isaiah speak kindly to Jerusalem and tell her that: (1) her warfare has ended; (2) her iniquity is pardoned and (3) she has received from the Lord, double for all her sins. Do the words “her warfare is over” apply to the recent threat of destruction by the Assyrian army? The Assyrian army did not actually attack the city. Therefore, the words of verses 1-2 must apply to another time and circumstances that Isaiah has just recently (39:6-7) declared to Hezekiah. These words refer to the dreadful and chaotic experience Jerusalem and its inhabitants have had with Babylon.

The prophet and others are to speak kindly to Jerusalem delivering a fourfold message. (1) a message of comfort; (2) a message that her warfare has ended; (3) a message that her iniquity is pardoned; and (4) a message that Jerusalem has received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.

(1) It is a message of comfort because of the great turmoil and upheaval the people of God in defeat, captivity and exile have endured. It is a message of comfort because they are reminded many years before it will happen that the Lord will not forget them when they will suffer the atrocities of the Babylonians who will conquer their city, put many thousands to death, remove their king, destroy their temple, displace their priesthood, put an end to their sacrificial system of repentance and worship, carry away their valued treasures, demolish their homes and way of life, remove the elite and educated among them to a foreign, brutal and pagan environment and keep these exiles in captivity for seventy years. It is little wonder the psalmist remembered these years in sadness (Psalm 137).

Only the very young who were taken captive would have endured to return to Jerusalem and it is to these retuning captives that this message of comfort is most applicable. All of the Lord’s children can take comfort in the nurturing care of the Lord yet this specific message is addressed to those who will return to Jerusalem following the decree of Cyrus the Persian king in approximately 539 B.C.

(2) It is a message that Jerusalem’s warfare has ended. This does not mean her days of distress have ended or any future warfare will not occur for they certainly will: against Rome and other nations and finally against the armies of Antichrist. The Lord’s message is that their warfare with the Babylonians has come to an end and the exiles can return to rebuild the ancient city. At another time in the far future, it will be true that warfare for Jerusalem will finally be ended. At that time the city will enjoy an extended time of peace when King Messiah rules the world from His capital city Jerusalem.

(3) It is a message that the iniquity of the inhabitants of Jerusalem who rebelled against the Lord has now been removed. The most insidious evil continually practiced by the people of Jerusalem was idol worship. It is to this persistent and intolerable practice that the Lord, through the prophet Isaiah, repeatedly warned His people to stop and repent of their sin and return to Him. (Isaiah 2:6-8, 18-22; 10:10-11; 31:7; 40:19-20; 42:17; 44:9-20; 48:5; 57:13; and 66:3-4). The people of God had been warned by the Lord many generations in the past that they would forsake the Lord and turn to other gods and God would hide His face from them. (Deuteronomy 31:14-18). The Lord had also warned them through the writings of Jeremiah (13:12-27; 15:1-14; 16:1-13; 22:1-12; 25:1-11 and other passages), Habakkuk (1:5-11; 2:2-20) and Zephaniah (1:2-13). It is in Jeremiah 25:11-12 that the
length of the captivity (70 years) is revealed. The iniquity of idol worship had been removed during the 70 years of captivity. Yet there is more implied in this message and Isaiah reveals details about the removal of the iniquities of the people later in chapters 52:13-53:12 which describes that the Lord’s Servant will have the iniquities of all (people) fall upon Him. (Isaiah 53:6).

It is a message that Jerusalem had received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins. Some may understand this as a double judgment of God on the people of Jerusalem for all their sins and the time of judgment is now over. However, this does not fit the overall message of comfort that God wants to convey to His people. It seems best to understand this as a future reference to a time when: “Instead of your shame you will receive a double portion, and instead of dishonor, they will rejoice in their land inheritance.” (Isaiah 61:7). For a more extended discussion see Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, Page 95).

Also, Thomas Constable comments:

Indeed, Israel had received a double pardon, by God's grace (cf. 61:7). She had also suffered a double penalty for her sins (cf. 51:19). Paying back double may be an expression indicating proportionate payment, making the punishment equivalent to the crime.452 I tend to believe that the meaning is that Israel will receive twice as much blessing as she had received judgment (cf. Jer. 16:18; Zech. 9:12; Rev. 18:6).

"Jerusalem had not suffered more than its sins had deserved; but the compassion of God regarded what His justice had been obliged to inflict upon Jerusalem as superabundant." 453 [Note 453: Delitzsch,2:140]. (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 184).

Verses 3-5: The Call of Preparation for the Lord

These verses contain a significant prophecy regarding the future revealing of the glory of the Lord following the preparation of a way for the Lord, a highway to be built that will require valleys to be lifted up, mountains to be lowered and the rough ground and the rugged terrain to be made smooth. It is certain that this is a prophetic message and the discernment of its meaning needs careful consideration.

40:3 The voice of one crying out,

"Prepare in the wilderness the way of the LORD;
make level in the desert a highway for our God."

Isaiah announces that a voice is calling. Isaiah as a true prophet of the Lord receives his messages directly from the Lord. (Isaiah 8:1; 18:4; 28:14; 29:13; 30:12; 31:4; 40:1 and many others). It should be plain that this voice who is calling also comes from the Lord (vs. 5) and is a direct command for action, likely by the people of God, to be performed in a future time. The command of the “voice” (vs. 3) is for a way (an unobstructed passage way) to be prepared in the desert (wilderness) for use by the Lord and to make a level highway in the desert for use by our God (the Holy One of Israel who is their redeemer and Messiah). A question would naturally arise: why does God need a highway to travel on? Another question may be asked: do the references to this passage from Isaiah by John the Baptist, in the Gospels completely fulfill this prophecy? (Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4-6; and John 1:23).
Isaiah declares in 35:8-10 and 51:11 that a highway will be prepared for the ransomed of the Lord, the remnant, to walk on as they proceed joyfully to Zion. This is a very clear reference to the days of the second coming of the Messiah who will rescue His people who have escaped into the desert to flee the armies of the Antichrist. The highway mentioned by Isaiah in 40:3 is within the context of the comfort to be brought by God to His people. Not all Biblical scholars agree but students of Scriptures have every confidence to understand that the highway of 40:3 is the same as 35:8-10 and 51:11. The reason Isaiah declares that this way is for the Lord and is a highway for our God is that Messiah, the returning Lord will Himself walk upon it leading the faithful remnant. Zephaniah 3:15 is a message to the remnant:

The LORD has taken away the judgments against you;
he has cast out your enemy.
The King of Israel, even the LORD,
is in your midst;
you will never again fear disaster.

And Micah 2:12-13 is also a message to the remnant:

I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob;
I will surely gather the remnant of Israel;
I will put them together as the sheep
in the midst of a pasture;
it will be noisy because there will be so many people.
13 The leader who breaks out will go up before them,
they will break out and pass on through the gate,
and leave.
Their king will pass on before them,
and the LORD will be at their head."

John the Baptist was the one who prepared the way for the Lord at His first coming. The Gospel writers applied the words of Isaiah 40:3 to John and his mission, however John denied that he was the prophet Elijah (John 1:21) who was predicted to be sent by God: “before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes.” (Malachi 4:5). The Malachi prophecy is clearly about the times of the “day of the LORD” which refers to the second coming of the Messiah and not His first coming. The angel of the Lord clarified John’s role: “He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” (Luke 1:17). Thus, even though the Gospel writers applied Isaiah 40:3 to John it was as a forerunner of the future days, yet to come, when Elijah will be sent to: “turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers.” (Malachi 4:6).

40: 4 Every valley will be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill will be made low;
the uneven ground will be leveled,
and the rough places made smooth.

In the preparation for the highway that will be ready for the coming of the Lord (His second coming), Isaiah states that every valley will be lifted up and every mountain will be lowered and by implication all uneven places will be levelled and made smooth. Some scholars understand that verses 3 and 4 also refer to the return of the exiles from captivity in Babylon which can be implied from vs. 2. However, verses 3-4 refer to a
far future time. It is not unusual for Isaiah to telescope both near and far future events within the same prophetic message as was seen in Isaiah 7 verses 14-16. See notes on chapter 7. Some who do not see this telescoping of near and far prophetic events seem to ignore the obvious response to the question: who will prepare this highway and raise valleys and level mountains and hills for those who are returning? It certainly would not be the freed exiles from Babylon.

Victor Buksbazen comments that the highway is prepared by God Himself:

“When God leads, every obstacle or hindrance which stands in the way of His redeemed people is swept away. It should be noticed here that the theme of a safe God-prepared highway, echoing the exodus from Egypt, is common to both parts of the book of Isaiah (Isa. 11:16, 35:7-10, 40:3-4, 41:18-19, 42:15-16).” (Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, page 333).

40:5 *Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed,*
   *and all flesh will see it together;*
   *the mouth of the LORD has spoken it.*

The reason for the preparation of the highway is revealed in vs. 5. Everyone in the world will see the revelation of the glory of the Lord. It is certain for the prophet authoritatively avows that this is the spoken word of the Lord. This fifth verse gives both the reason and the timing for verses 3-5. The reason is that highway, prepared by God Himself and to be walked upon by the Messiah as He leads the faithful remnant to Zion will be the means for all flesh to see God’s glory. It will happen when the Messiah returns to rescue the remnant from pending destruction from the armies of the Antichrist and by doing so the majestic glory of the Lord will be seen by everyone on the earth. Isaiah in 52:10 states:

*The LORD has bared his holy arm*
*in the eyes of all the nations.*
*All the ends of the earth*
*will see the salvation of our God.*

The certainty of this event is ensured by Isaiah’s concluding comment that: “*the mouth of the LORD has spoken.*” (See also Isaiah 1:20; 58:14 and 62:2). It has the same divine authority as the prophet Zechariah’s often stated “*Thus says the LORD.*” The meaning of the words “*all flesh*” are repeated in vs. 6 as “*all people*” for they pertain to the necessity that the return of the Lord will be revealed to everyone on the earth (vs. 5) and that everyone on the earth will live but a moment in time compared to the eternal word of God. (vs. 6).

Verses 6-8: The Call of God’s Eternal Word

40:6 *A voice said,* "*Cry out.*"
   *So I asked,* "*What should I cry out?*"
   "*All people are like grass,*
   *and all their beauty fades like the flowers of the field.*"

Isaiah states that another voice speaks and states: “*Cry out.*” It is a message from God (implied) for the prophet to “*cry out*” the message of comfort to God’s people. The question Isaiah asks in response to the command to call out is: “*What shall I call out?*” (vs. 6). The answer is immediate: “*All people are like grass,*
*and all their beauty fades like the flowers of the field.*” The word “*beauty*” is the Hebrew word *chesed* which can be translated as “*goodness*” or “*kindness.*” The KJV has “*goodliness,*” while the NKJV has “*loveliness.*”
The ESV translates *chesed* as “beauty” and the ESV marginal note has “constancy”. The NIV translates *chesed* as “glory.”

The obvious meaning is that humans will not have lives that are considered long in duration while living on the earth. They are compared to grass and flowers which last but a season. Verses 7-8 provides God’s intended meaning for humans who are like grass and flowers and live for a brief time but the word of God is eternal. The Apostle Peter quotes these verses (1 Peter 24-25) following his comment: “You have been born again, not from perishable seed, but from imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.” (1 Peter 1:23). See also James 1:10-11 for a similar discussion on the short lives of those who are rich.

40:7 The grass withers,
   the flower fades,
   because the breath of the LORD blows on it;
surely people are like grass.

It is not just that humans will not endure long on the earth. God explains the cause of their demise: “because the breath of the LORD blows on it.” The word breath is *ruah* in the Hebrew and can be translated as spirit, wind or breath. In the book of Isaiah, the word *ruah* occurs several times. It is translated breath in the DASV in: 25:4; 30:28; 33:11; 40:7; 42:5; and 57:16. In Isaiah 33:11 God, in declaring judgment on the enemies of Israel, states: “My breath will consume you like a fire.” (NASB). In the New Testament, James discusses the humbling of the rich in similar terms: “But the rich should take pride in God’s humbling, because as the flower of the field, he will pass away. 11 For the sun rises with the scorching heat, and the grass withers, and the flower drops off and its beauty fades. So also will the rich fade away.” (James 1:10-11).

Isaiah also often translates *ruah* as the Spirit (meaning the Holy Spirit) in 11:2 (4 times); 30:1; 32:15; 34:16; 40:13; 42:1; 44:3; 48:16; 59:21; and 61:1. Isaiah translates *ruah* as the Holy Spirit in 63:10 and 11 and records the phrase “Spirit of the LORD” in 63:14. See the notes on the verses where the Spirit and the Holy Spirit is recorded for further discussion.

40:8 The grass withers,
   the flower fades,
   but the word of our God will stand forever.

Isaiah provides God’s reason for comparing the lives of created humanity to grass and wild flowers. Isaiah states: “But the word of our God will stand forever.” Taken in context of the call to comfort His people, God is assuring them that they can wholeheartedly trust in the endurance of God’s word. When everything else is failing or perishing, there exists the certainty that like God Himself, His word is eternal and will not fail or fade away. The prophet will later in 55:11, state on the reliability of God’s word:

*So will my word be that goes forth out of my mouth;*
   *it will not return to me empty,*
   *but it will accomplish what I desire it to,*
   *and it will succeed in the matter for which I sent it.*

Verses 9-11: The Call of God’s Coming

Isaiah proclaims a third call of comfort from God to His people in verses 9-11 of Isaiah chapter 40. Following His marvellous statement that His word will stand forever (vs. 8), God calls for good news to be proclaimed. But who is to proclaim the good news and to whom is it to be proclaimed? Vs. 9 in the DASV is translated: “Get up on a high mountain, O Zion, messenger of good tidings. You who announce good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with strength; do not be afraid. Announce to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!"

The NASB, updated edition translates vs. 9 as: “Get yourself up on a high mountain, O Zion, bearer of good news. Lift up your voice mightily, O Jerusalem, bearer of good news; lift it up, do not fear. Say to the cities of Judah, Here is your God.” The KJV, NKJV, and ESV translate this verse similar to the NASB, however the NIV translates vs. 9 as: “You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, Here is your God.”

All of the above versions state that the good news is to be proclaimed at least to the cities (towns) of Judah while the NIV states this news is also to be proclaimed to Zion / Jerusalem. The other versions mentioned above state that it is Zion and Jerusalem (by implication its people) who are to proclaim this good news to the cities of Judah. Scholars also have differing opinions on which version is to be followed. The weight of evidence seems to favour the DASV and the NASB rendering of these words. It is interesting that Luke, recording the words of Jesus, addressed to the disciples, states in Acts 1:8: “But you will receive power, when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” God’s words, addressed to His people, as recorded in vs. 9 of Isaiah chapter 40, has a similar intent. It is the Jewish people themselves who are to be evangelists to their own people first and then to the nations. (Psalm 98:2; the work of the Servant: Isaiah 42:1, 6 and 49:6 and Acts 26:23).

40:9 Get up on a high mountain, O Zion,
  messenger of good tidings.
  You who announce good tidings to Jerusalem,
  lift up your voice with strength;
  do not be afraid.
  Announce to the towns of Judah,
  "Here is your God!"

The message of the good news is first (1) “Here is your God.” (vs. 9). It is a reminder of the meaning of the name for the coming Messiah, Immanuel: “God with us” (Isaiah 7:14, 8:8-10). It is also a reminder of one of the most treasured words in all of Scriptures: “tabernacle” which from the earliest days of the sojourn of the people of Israel in the wilderness to the eternal state is a word rich with intent: God is dwelling (living) with His created people. (Example: Leviticus 26:11-12 and Revelation 21:3). Isaiah later declared a similar message of “good news” that is also proclaimed on the mountains: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that brings good tidings, who announces peace and brings good news, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, Your God reigns!” (Isaiah 52:7). The good news in Isaiah 40:9 and 52:7 will ultimately be fulfilled at a future day when God will deliver His people and bring them joyously and triumphantly to Zion and yet by having faith in the God of good news, those who trust in Him for salvation can rest assured that they will enjoy the benefits of His presence immediately. This is what God wants them to do. The purpose of His proclamation of good news is so they can be comforted and trust confidently and completely in the One who is the Shepherd and Guardian of their souls (1Peter 2:25). For other examples of “good news” see Isaiah 41:27; 52:7; 60:6; 61:1 (the Messiah is the preacher of good news); Nahum 1:5; Luke 1:19; 7:22; 8:1; Acts 8: 4,12; 10:36; 13:32 15:35; Romans 1:15; 10:15-16; and 1 Corinthians 15:2. This good news is the message that a loving God has rescued, ransomed and redeemed all who would trust in His
Son, the Messiah who was sent by God the Father in His great love to be the perfect sacrifice a just God demanded to remove the guilt of sins from all mankind. No one is exempt from needing to respond to this good news by having faith in the Messiah who is the bearer of this good news.

David L. Cooper advocates for Christian workers to evangelize the Jews:

The third division of Isaiah, chapter 40, is "Instructions for workers among the Jews." These are found in verses 9-11. This message is for those who are responsive to God's call to evangelize Israel. That this paragraph is addressed to Christian workers is evident from the command, "0 thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up on a high mountain; 0 thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid." In the Common Version the translation is exactly the reverse and reads, "0 Zion, that bringest good tidings," etc. But the marginal reading is the same as the text rendering of the American Standard Version. The Hebrew is capable of either of these translations. Thus, we must determine which accords with all the facts of this context in order to know which rendering we should choose. When we remember that what we have already seen in verses 1-5 is addressed to those who have the message of comfort, and who are commanded to give it to the Jews, we see that the text of the Revised Version is the only possible one. In view of these facts, I have put as the heading of the third section, "Instructions for Workers among the Jews."

The worker in Israel who brings the good tidings from the Lord is not to be timid; he is exhorted in these words, "lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid." A person should know his message: he should know how to deliver it--and should do it with confidence, conviction, strength, and power in order that it might reach the heart of the hearers. He is to preach with no uncertain sound, speaking the truth in love.

The worker is to cry to the cities of Judah, to the daughter of Zion--the Jewish people. The gist of the message is, "Behold, your God!" The word rendered "behold," as Professor Franz Delitzsch has well pointed out, calls attention to something in the future. Thus these missionaries are to direct Israel's attention to the future. But what is central in their message? This question is answered in the next verse: "Behold, the Lord Jehovah will come as a mighty one." Here the messengers are to tell Israel that the Lord Jehovah will come as their Deliverer. In Psalm 45:3-5 we see the Lord coming as a warrior--victorious over all enemies. The very word used by Isaiah was employed by the psalmist. It occurs again in Isaiah 9:6 in connection with God and is rendered "mighty God." I can just as accurately render it "God the Mighty Warrior." From this verse, therefore, we see that God urges believers to evangelize Israel before the Messiah's advent and to tell her of His coming as a warrior. Clearly, this ministry is to be conducted before He comes, because the messengers are to tell Israel that He will appear in this role.

On the other hand, we are sometimes told by earnest students that we are not to evangelize the Jews; for they, according to this erroneous hypothesis to which I have already called attention, are to be converted by looking upon the Lord personally at His return. This theory is contrary to the plain instructions in this passage regarding Jewish evangelization.

Furthermore, the messengers to Israel are to inform her that, when the Lord Jehovah comes as a mighty warrior, He will take the reins of government and will rule. From other passages we know that He will reign from sea to sea and from the river unto the ends of the earth, and of the increase of His government there shall be no end upon the throne of David (Isa. 9:7). When He returns in fulfillment of this passage, He will come with His reward and recompense. Then He, the Good Shepherd, will tend His sheep according to verse 11. This flock can be none other than the faithful remnant which survives the Tribulation, after the apostate portion of the nation has been swept away by the judgments of the great Tribulation. (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – January 1945).
40:10-11 Look, the sovereign LORD will come with might, he will rule with his strong arm; his reward is with him, and his prize goes before him.

11 He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, he will gently lead those sheep with young.

The prophet Isaiah records the rest of the message to be proclaimed. (2) the Sovereign LORD will come with might, He will rule with his strong arm.” (vs. 10). This statement identifies the time of the Lord’s coming. These are great words of comfort for His people from Isaiah’s day to this day. The Lord Messiah will come with power and authority to rule the nations. This was not fulfilled during Messiah’s first coming. Both the Jews and the Gentile nations await a day to come in the future when all will witness the coming of the Lord as a great warrior, conquering the rebellious people who oppose Him and also as the King of kings to rule the earth from Mount Zion, in His capital city Jerusalem. The words “He will rule with his strong arm,” are an anthropomorphism for the often-stated portrait of God who demonstrates His great power and salvation by means of His hand and arm. (Selected verses: Exodus 6:6; Psalm 44:3, 89:10, 21; 98:1; Isaiah 30:30; 51:5; 52:10; 59:16; 63:5; Jeremiah 27:5; 32:17; Ezekiel 20:33-34 and Luke 1:51).

Isaiah continues the content of this message, (3) “His reward is with him and his prize goes before him.” The words reward and prize (recompense) seem to be synonyms suggesting that the Lord will deliver righteous justice to those living on the earth when He returns. He will punish those who rebel against Him and reward those who are faithful to Him. All of His actions when He returns can be understood as being defined by these two words which are rightfully His to dispense as He alone determines and according to His good pleasure.

Isaiah uses another metaphor for the Lord in vs. 11 in continuing the content of the great message of comfort to be proclaimed to the faithful remnant of God who await His coming. (4), The fourth part of the content of the message of good news is “He will feed his flock like a shepherd.” This fourth part of God’s comforting message itself contains four portraits of a “gentle shepherd”. The first portrait (4a) is: like a shepherd He will “feed” or tend to His flock. One of the most enduring portraits of God in the Scriptures is that of a Shepherd who lovingly and gently cares for His sheep (a very apt and suitable metaphor for the people of God). The following selected verses remind the student of God’s word of the precious ways the Messiah cares and tends His flock: Genesis 48:15; 49:24; Psalm 23:1; 28:9; 80:1; Isaiah 63:11-14; Ezekiel 34:11-24; 37:24-28; Micah 5:4; 7:14; Matthew 2:6; 18:10-14; John 10:11-18; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:4 and Revelation 7:17. This portrait of God as Shepherd is one that is found starting in Genesis and continuing to Revelation. It is similar to the portrait of God as Saviour which also is found early in Genesis and continues through to the end of Revelation.

The second portrait (4b) of the Lord as Shepherd (vs.11) is: “He will gather the lambs in his arms.” This portrayal of God’s arm is vastly different than the image given in vs. 10. God who demonstrates His mighty power and ruling authority by His arm also uses (anthropomorphically) His arm to gather His lambs. The picture here is that of a loving and gentle shepherd shielding a vulnerable lamb from any harm. In the Gospel of John, Jesus states that He fulfills this role and goes beyond just shielding His lambs from danger. Jesus states: “I lay down my life for the sheep”, John 10:15
The third portrait (4c) of the Lord as Shepherd is stated in vs. 11: “and carry them in His bosom.” This is a portrait of loving and tender care for His sheep (His faithful people). It is more than just picking up a scared and perhaps sickly lamb in His arms. The Messiah carries (embraces) them close to His heart. It is a scene of loving protection and devotion by the great creator of the universe who so beautifully elects to leave the glories of Heaven to provide salvation (for those who are but helpless sheep). Philippians 2:5-11.

The fourth portrait (4d) of the Lord as Shepherd is stated in vs. 11: “He will gently lead those sheep with young.” King David as recorded in Psalm 23:2 stated that the Lord as his shepherd, “leads me beside still waters.” Still waters can also be translated as “waters of quietness or rest”. It is a comfort to all the people of God that He like a gentle shepherd leads those who are most vulnerable and in need of care such as those nursing ewes who are caring for their own little ones. The God of comfort is also a Shepherd who carefully tends, protectively gathers, lovingly carries and gently leads His sheep who have placed their complete trust in Him.

Two important Old Testament passages regarding the Lord as shepherd are stated in Ezekiel 34:11-24 and 37:24-28. The longer passage in Ezekiel 34:11-24 comes immediately after the Lord’s declaration of woe against the shepherds of Israel who have failed to feed the hungry, strengthen the sick, heal those with diseases, restored the broken, recovered the scattered, nor searched for the lost. The stricken of Israel were scattered throughout the earth for lack of a shepherd and no one sought after them. The Lord Himself would deliver the flock from the mouths of the shepherds who were devouring them. (Ezekiel 34:1-10). In verses 11-24, the Lord promises to seek out the scattered flock of Israel and will judge between those who are fat (those with no concern for the hungry and ailing) and the lean (those who are needy). In verses 23-24, the Lord an outstanding promise which refers to a time in the future which in the context of the following verses refers most certainly to the messianic kingdom. “I will set up one shepherd over them, and he will feed them, even my servant David; he will feed them, and he will be their shepherd. 24 I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.” (Ezekiel 34:23-24). This one shepherd who is David, the servant of the Lord refers to the greater son of David, the Messiah. See also Jeremiah 30:9; Hosea 3:5 and Zechariah 14:9. The Messiah is also described as a prince which can be understood as a regal title. See Ezekiel 37:24-28 stated below.

24 My servant David will be king over them; and they will all have one shepherd. They will also walk in my regulations, and observe my statutes, and do them.
25 They will live in the land that I have given to Jacob my servant, in which your forefathers dwelt. They will live there, they, and their children, and their children's children forever, and David my servant will be their prince forever.
26 I will make a covenant of peace with them, it will be an everlasting covenant with them. I will settle them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them forever.
27 My dwelling also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be my people.
28 Then the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary will be in their midst forever.”

The above Scriptural references regarding the Shepherd remind the Christian of a beloved hymn: “Saviour Like A Shepherd Lead Us” attributed to Dorothy A. Thrupp (1836) and composed by William B. Bradbury (1838). From the study of the first eleven verses of Isaiah 40, the student of the Scriptures is prepared to understand the remainder of Isaiah’s prophecy with anticipation of the glories that are to come both in the text of the prophecy and in the realization that what Isaiah declares, is not an ancient writing buried in the past, but the living word of God which proclaims the message of salvation by a God who loves His creation. The second half of Isaiah chapter 40 compels the student to contemplate the majesty and incomparable wonder of this God who decrees in His wisdom to bring comfort to His people.
2. 40:12-31: The Incomparable God

In verses 12-31 of Isaiah chapter 40, the prophet describes the splendours majesty and incomparable uniqueness of the one declared in vs. 8 as “here is your God!” Isaiah is expanding on the revelation of the Lord that he witnessed and recorded in Isaiah chapter 6. The Lord who is lifted up (exalted), completely holy and fills the whole earth with His glory is described in these few verses as a being with no equal anywhere in the universe. There is no one like Him: no one wiser, no one greater, no one more powerful, no one more enduring, no one as creator, no one who sustains all things, no one who redeems His creation and no one worthy of the world’s praise than the great triune God, the Holy One of Israel, the Sovereign Lord, the Maker, the Creator, the Redeemer, the Saviour, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Wonderful Counsellor, the Prince of Peace and One who is also the Holy Spirit. Isaiah later declares, “There is no other God besides me, a righteous God and a Saviour; there is no one besides me.” Isaiah 45:21. The student of the Scriptures should compare Isaiah 40:12-31 with Job chapters 38-41 to begin to grasp the significance of this incomparable God who is revealed in the pages of the Bible. From this foundation, the student will marvel at the revelation of God’s supreme greatness as it is unfolded throughout the entire Word of God.

Those who read the revelation of God in verses 12-31 should meditate on these inspired words and then unreservedly worship their Creator and humble themselves before His majesty and glory in reverent fear. It is to the shame of the modern church that God’s character and attributes are not widely proclaimed, preached and taught as they were generations ago. Theology, the study of God, was once the greatest educational pursuit of universities and it is now abandoned, shunned and vilified by those who would deem to call themselves academics. Many in this present day who profess to be Christians and disciples of the Lord are arguably not familiar with nor seem to have the patience and desire to enter into a deep contemplative study of the character and attributes of God. These would include (selected only – not exhaustive) God’s: eternity, infinity, holiness, omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, sovereignty, love, patience, and wisdom. It would be suggestive if those who attend the modern Christian worship service could be given a blank sheet of paper and be challenged with providing a Biblical definition of these few characteristics of God just mentioned. The student to God’s Word should therefore attend most carefully to the words of the Lord recorded in the second section of Isaiah chapter 40.

The second section of Isaiah chapter 40 comprise a series of rhetorical questions of which the answer for each is “no one” for they all point to the obvious conclusion that there is no one like God, anywhere or at anytime. These questions and their response are designed to bring hope and comfort to those first in Judah (vs. 9) and to all who would read the messages of the prophet Isaiah. The people of Judah including Jerusalem had just witnessed a very stressful period of threats to the capital city and actual capture of many Judean cities by the armies of Assyria. Many scholars suggest that the words of Isaiah chapter 40 were written for those either in captivity in Babylon or just returning to Jerusalem following the 70 years of this captivity. While these words may fit that situation, specifically verses 1-2, there is no actual reference to the Babylonian captivity in this chapter. See Gary V. Smith, Isaiah 40-66, pages 103-105 for an expanded discussion of the historical setting of chapter 40.

The rhetorical questions in these verses are:
Verse 12: Who has measured the waters; marked off the heavens, calculated the earth’s dust, or weighed the mountains or hills of the earth?

Verse 13: Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD or been His mentor or counsellor to inform Him?

Verse 14: Who was God’s consultant, or gave Him understanding, or taught Him justice, knowledge and understanding?
Verse 18: To whom will you liken God or what likeness or image will you compare with Him?

Verse 25: “To whom will you compare him or who is his equal?”

There are other questions to which the people of God must respond in verses 21, 27 and 28. To these non-rhetorical questions a much more in-depth response is required. For it is in their response that the true heart condition of the people is revealed. The purpose of the rhetorical and non-rhetorical questions is to invoke trust in the Lord alone for wisdom, guidance, purpose, safety and salvation and for those who wait for Him, the Lord grants new strength to achieve great things for Him. For an extended discussion on verses 12-31 see J. Alec Motyer, Isaiah, page 246.

Verses 12-17: None equal to God

40:12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and measured out heaven with the span of his hand, and measured out the dust of the earth by the basketful, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills on a balance?

The prophet begins his rhetorical questions with comments similar to those He had when he encountered Job with the beginning question: “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?” (Job 38:4). Like Job, the people of Judah would have no response but to acknowledge God’s divine caveat to create the world without any assistance or permission from anyone. In the beginning, there was only God, who exists forever without any beginning in Himself. He existed as a triunity as we understand from Scripture, God exists eternally as One God yet having three distinct personalities: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God (the Creator Elohim) asks a series of questions in vs. 12 that must have as their answer: only God. The four questions in vs. 12 relate to the creation of the earth:

(1) “Who measured the waters in the hollow of His hand?” The earth’s entire expanse of water totally unknown to even the wisest scholar in Isaiah’s day was known to the Creator and considered so small that its volume could be measured in the hollow of God’s hand. The anthropomorphic portraits (ie: God's hand) help the human reader/listener to grasp the insignificance of the amount/volume of created matter from God’s point of view. A measure of liquid in the hollow of a human’s hand would be a trifle, almost nothing in comparison to all that is known by humans of the amount (volume, weight, mass etc.) of matter contained in the created heavens and the earth. How much more insignificant is the volume of water in the entire earth compared to what God’s knows about what He has created in the universe? No one else but God who is indescribably infinite could make such a claim. The question, could God create something larger than Himself? is answered with a resounding “no”; for all of created matter including the immensity of the universe is something God can easily measure with an item humans can relate to, the size of the hand.

(2) “And (who) measured out heaven with the span of his hand?” The second question is also related anthropomorphically to the hand of God. The span is the distance between the tip of the thumb and the little finger when the hand is stretched out. God is describing that to Him the distance scale of the universe can be measured by Him simply by stretching out “His hand”. It is an insignificant distance to an infinite God but to humans it is immeasurable and beyond comprehension for it appears limitless. The Scriptures attest that God made the heavens (stretched them out) with his hands: Psalm 102:25; Isaiah 45:12; 48:13 and Hebrews 1:10.
(3) “And (who) measured out the dust of the earth by basketful?” The word interpreted as “measured” in the DASV is the Hebrew word kuwl which has the meaning of “to keep in,” “to measure,” “to contain,” or “to comprehend.” This question can be re-phrased as: Who had the ability to contain and measure the amount of the dust on the earth when the earth was created? The Lord in vs. 12 describes the materials of the earth which He alone could produce and measure.

(4) “And (who) weighed the mountains in scales and the hills on a balance?” Who is large enough (larger than the earth) to be able to weigh the hills and the mountains? Like the first three rhetorical questions, this one has only one possible answer. God by asking these questions is not satisfied with a response by His people of “we don’t know”. He demands they face the reality of His creative works and His ability to maintain and superintend His creation. If God can create and maintain the heavens and the earth He certainly can look after His people whom He also created for His glory. (Isaiah 43:7).

40:13 Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or instructed him as his mentor?

The prophet continues with the Lord’s rhetorical questions about His actions and the reasons for His actions. “Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD? The NIV translates this phrase as “Who has understood the mind of the LORD? The word “directed” is the Hebrew word tikken which has several meanings in the Old Testament. It can be translated as: to regulate; to balance; to measure; to test; or to prove. The word “Spirit” is translated as “mind” in the NIV. It is the Hebrew word ruah which is often translated in the Old Testament as: spirit, wind, or “breath. See notes on vs. 7 above. Scholars have struggled as to how best to translate ruah. Thomas Constable comments:

“We could interpret "Spirit" as the mind of the Lord (cf. Rom. 11:34; 1 Cor. 2:16). This is how the Septuagint translators rendered ruah here and in 1 Chron. 28:12 and Ezek. 20:32. It may refer to the volitional, effective, and cognitive aspects of God's intelligence, in other words, His inner workings. God alone saw to the heart of things in creation and made the correct decisions at the proper time. No one advised Him in His creation or in His administration of the world. Now His omniscience is in view.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 186).

Isaiah continues the rhetorical question as recorded in vs. 13 with the second part of this question: “Or (who) instructed him as his mentor? The word “mentor” is the Hebrew word etsah which can be translated as counselor, advice or plan. The word etsah occurs several times in Isaiah and is most often translated as counsel in English versions. See Isaiah 5:19; 8:10; 11:2; 14:26; 16:3; 19:3, 11, 17; 25:1; 28:29; 29:15; 30:1; 36:5; 40:13; 44:26; 46:10, 11; and 47:13.

The implication here as with vs. 12 is that there was no one present with the Lord when He created the heavens and the earth nor was there anyone capable of informing Him of anything regarding His actions at the time of creation or at any time. There is no one that any person could bring forward as a witness to the creative actions of God nor is there anyone who could claim to have been God’s counsellor or consultant to bring Him knowledge or to inform Him about anything. The Apostle Paul cites vs. 13 in his letter to the Christians in Rome, Romans 11:34 and in his first letter to the church in Corinth, 1 Corinthians 2:16.

The rhetorical question stated in vs. 13 is re-stated in vs. 14 so as to bring home the obvious point that God acts completely alone and is responsible to no one and has no one to consult Him or to give Him understanding in anything or has been His teacher to instruct Him in any course of knowledge or justice. In vs. 14 the words enlighten (or understanding) and understanding are closely related to knowledge which is also stated in this verse. These words are linked to wisdom in describing the attributes of the Messiah in Isaiah 11:2. The attributes of wisdom and understanding are ascribed to God in Job 12:13; Proverbs 3:9;
Isaiah 11:2; Jeremiah 10:12 and 51:15; as are the attributes of wisdom and knowledge in Isaiah 11:2; 33:6; Romans 11:33 and Colossians 2:3.

40:14 With whom did he consult to enlighten him?  
Who taught him the path of justice?  
Who taught him knowledge,  
or showed to him the way of understanding?

Another important characteristic of God as stated in vs. 14 is “justice”. The concept of God’s justice (Hebrew: misphat) is often discussed by Isaiah. “For the Lord is a God of justice.” (Isaiah 30:18). God is righteous and holy and rules His kingdom with justice that He Himself has determined is the benchmark for discerning what is right and just. There is no other being, teacher, consultant or counsellor that makes this determination of deciding what is absolutely just as God sees fit to both define and administer it. To who else can the people of God cry out or appeal to for justice to be meted out? Every action, thought and deed by every person on the earth will be justly examined by God. Those who trust in God will have no fear of His righteous justice. God can be depended upon to dispense this justice in every situation and circumstance in which His people find themselves seeking God’s intervention. He will remain true to His word and to Himself. God’s people are to take great comfort for they can completely trust God to dispense His justice even if, for the moment, it seems that life’s circumstances seem unfair and unjust. One day, God will leave no unjust act unresolved or not treated with holy and righteous justice. For a word study of justice in the prophecy of Isaiah examine these verses: 1:17; 1:21; 1:27; 5:7; 9:7; 10:2; 16:5; 28:6; 28:17; 30:18; 32:16; 33:5; 40:14; 40:27; 42:1; 42:3; 42:4; 49:4; 51:4; 56:1; 59:8; 59:9; 59:11; 59:14; 59:15; and 61:8.

As recorded in verses 15-17 of Isaiah chapter 40, the prophet gives God’s answer to His own rhetorical questions. If the answer seemed obvious in that no one is equal to Him, God explains that not only are there not any who are equal to Him, there are none that can even compare to Him in any way. It is not that any being cannot compare to Him, it is stated by God that all nations are less than nothing in comparison to Him. Because He is the infinite omnipotent Creator who cannot be affected by His creation including the beings He has created, of what value or use are the nations of the earth to God.

40:15 Look, the nations are like a drop in a bucket,  
and are regarded like dust on the scales;  
he picks up the islands like fine dust.

Isaiah states that the nations are considered as a “drop in a bucket” or “like dust on the scales”. Compared to God, they are so insignificant as to be not worthy of consideration. That is why when the nations, at the end of the millennial kingdom era, conspire to assault His anointed king, the Messiah when He will reign on Mount Zion, God will scoff at them and laugh (Psalm 2:4) for they will be reduced to the ashes in an instant (Revelation 20:9). Isaiah further states in vs. 15: “he picks up the islands like fine dust.” In comparison to the insignificant and meaningless dust on the scales, God lifts up or considers the ends of the earth (the islands) as if they were merely fine dust. They will blow away with the slightest breath of wind. The prophet next turns his attention to what offering will be sufficient for God from the entire earth before returning to the hopeless might of the nations in comparison to God. See also Isaiah 17:13 and 29:5.

40:16 Lebanon is not enough to burn for sacrificial fire,  
nor are its animals sufficient for a burnt offering.
The prophet considers what resources are available on the earth to provide a suitable and adequate burnt offering to God. Even prior to the dictation by God to Moses of the requirements of the sacrificial system, burnt offerings were made to God (Noah: Genesis 8:20) and were requested by God (Abraham with Isaac: Genesis 22:2-13) and were important to the Israelites (Moses before Pharaoh: Exodus 10:25) and were important to Jethro, the father in law of Moses (Exodus 18:12). As significant as this pre-law practice offered to and requested by God was in God’s dealing with mankind, there really was no burnt offering large enough in the entire earth adequate to satisfy the full demands of God’s holy justice. God is so transcendent above and beyond anything He has created that nothing within the confines of this created order can have any impact upon Him or satisfy Him in any way. (Acts 17:25).

40:17 All the nations are as nothing before him; they are accounted by him as less than nothing and worthless.

Isaiah sums up God’s response to the first set of rhetorical questions by stating that not only are the nations considered to be like dust on the scales or like a drop of water in a bucket (verse 15), they are actually less than that in God’s view. In vs. 17, God bluntly declares that the nations (the peoples of the world who defy Him and rebel against Him) are counted as less than nothing and are considered as worthless. It is significant that the pagan peoples of the world who have rejected God and worship idols actually worship nothing for the meaning of the word idol is “worthless.” What else can be said that would, in the slightest instance from any person or nation on earth be of any consequence to God? The earth’s greatest conqueror or its most powerful nation or a combined army of all the nations on the earth conspiring against God would not influence Him in any way. Psalm 2 provides God’s response to an attempt by the kings of the earth to overthrow the Messiah’s rule. The words of these three verses, Isaiah 40: 15-17, are meant to instil reverent fear within the nations of the world and to the people of God. To the nations of the world who seek to rebel against God, they should know the folly of their intent and their sure defeat even before they begin any action against God. However, this incomparable God who transcends His created order and the beings He has created is also a God of immeasurable grace. Even though the nations are considered by God as less than nothing in might or power, He still loves them and sent His Son to die for them. (John 3:16; 17:23-26).

To the people of God, this message brings great comfort. They should know that only by putting their complete trust and faith in God will they have eternal protection from any worldly conflict or affliction. God is bigger than any problem or enemy. He is able to defend His people; to rescue them from any harm and to redeem them so they will live forever with Him in his heavenly kingdom.

Verses 18-20: None comparable to God

The prophet next turns his attention to the detestable practice of idol worship and how it is no comparison in any way to the true worship of God. God’s reaction to the rebellious and wicked practice by the nations of idol worship is a common discussion in the prophecy of Isaiah. One of the less known results of the exile of the people of Jerusalem during the Babylonian captivity was, that upon their return to Jerusalem, idol worship by the people of God is not mentioned. God caused His people to be exiled to cure them from many sinful practices including the rebellious act of worshipping idols instead of the One true God.

40:18 To whom then will you compare God? What image will you equate him to?

Isaiah asks two most thought provoking rhetorical questions: “To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare with Him?” These questions sum up the preceding verses (12-17) and prepare
Isaiah’s audience for the discussion about God in verses 21-31. The obvious answer to both of these questions is: no one or no idol. There is no one who has ever lived or who will ever live that can be compared with God or whom any idol crafted by man could compare with God. Hannah, when giving praise to God for the birth of her son, Samuel, declared: “No one is as holy as the LORD, for there is no one besides you, there is no Rock like our God.” See also Exodus 8:10; 15:11; Deuteronomy 4:35, 39; Psalm 86:8; Isaiah 40:25; 44:8; 45:5, 14, 21, 22; 46:5, 9; Daniel 3:29; Joel 2:27; Micah 7:18; and Acts 17:29.

40:19-20 An idol? A workman casts it in a mold, and the goldsmith overlays it with gold, and fashions silver chains for it. Or if someone is too poor for such a sacrifice they may choose wood that will not rot and then find a skilful craftsman to set up a carved idol that will not topple.

Isaiah next discusses the practice of making an idol. The word “idol” in verses 19-20 is the Hebrew word pesel which is a carved image. In other passages in the Book of Isaiah, (eg. chapter 2), Isaiah uses the Hebrew word elil which has the deeper meaning of “worthless.” Isaiah discusses idols in verses 40:19-20 and in 2:8, 18, 20; 10:10-11; 19:1, 3; 31:7; 42:17; 44:9-20; 45:16, 20; 48:5; 57:13 and 66:3. Related words are image / images which are discussed by Isaiah in 10:10-11; 21:9; 30:22; 41:29; 42:8, 17; 44:9-20; 44:17; 46:1 and 48:5. Isaiah discusses the craft of idol making in verses 19-20 as a comparison with the one true God. As in other passages, Isaiah makes clear that there is no comparison whether the idol maker is rich or poor for as Isaiah has stated in vs. 18 “what image will you equate him to?” The vile and rebellious activity of making idols was often addressed by Isaiah as that which deeply offended God. This activity was directly in opposition to the second commandment (Exodus 20:4-6) and continued persistently up until the days of the Babylonian captivity. However, in the far future it would again be a practice condemned by God, (Revelation 9:20-21).

David L. Cooper comments on the making of idols and the creative power of God:

This mighty Creator is infinite in all His attributes; therefore it is inconceivable for one to make any image of Him. It is folly on the part of anyone to think that men with their limited, finite minds could conceive of any form by which to picture Him to others. It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers. It is He who stretches out the heavens as a curtain and spreads them out as a tent in which to dwell. He raises up princes and brings them to naught. He dethrones kings. He abases the judges of the earth. He overrules and controls the affairs of men.

This very Creator, whose coming the works are to announce to Israel, is the one who created the starry heavens above and whose power keeps each of these bodies in its proper orbit. He calls them all by name, and, because He is so very powerful, not one of them is lacking. (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – January 1945).

Verses 21-24 None eternal like God

40:21 Do you not know? Have you not heard? Have you not been told from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?
The prophet records God’s rhetorical questions regarding their knowledge and understanding of Him that was declared to the people of Judah (and all earth’s inhabitants) from the foundation of the earth. They were made known in the written text of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament and were made known by creation itself. Psalm 8:1-9 and Psalm19:1-6 would have been known to the people of Judah and they should have listened to the message God had written in His Word and in His creation. Romans 1:18:31 is a further testimony of what is known about God within each person on the earth. Verses 18-20 of Romans 1 states: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth by their unrighteousness, because what can be known about God is clear to them; for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes are clearly seen, even his everlasting power and divinity, being seen through the things that are made. So they are without excuse.”

40:22 He sits above the circle of the earth; its inhabitants are like grasshoppers. 
He stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to live in.

God’s perspective is described as “He sits above the circle of the earth.” This is not a statement about Isaiah’s knowledge that the earth was round and not flat. The “circle of the earth” most likely refers to the visible horizon where the stars “circled” each night. It has the meaning that God resides above the earth and is knowledgeable about every person as the next phrase describes in a most graphic comparison: “its inhabitants are like grasshoppers”. This descriptive term for humanity fits the preceding verses regarding the miniscule or zero might of the nations of the world. God is next described as One “who stretches out the heavens like a curtain.” The descriptive phrase “stretching out the heavens” is often used by Isaiah and other writers of Scripture to describe God’s creative powers and His infinity: See also: Exodus 15:12; Job 9:8; 26:7; 38:5; Psalm 104:2; Isaiah 42:5; 44:24; 45:12; 51:13; Jeremiah 10:12; 51:15; and Zechariah 12:1. The last phrase of vs.22: “and spreads them out like a tent to live in” reminds the student of Scripture of God’s living or dwelling place which is often described as a tent (or tabernacle) within which God has elected to live with His people. (Leviticus 26:11-12; Deuteronomy 12:5; Revelation 21:3).

40:23 He reduces rulers to nothing, and makes the judges of the earth worthless.

The prophet reminds the people of Judah that their God is the One who “brings the princes to nothing and makes the judges of the earth as vanity” KJV (language updated). This re-emphasizes Isaiah’s comments about the insignificance of the nations in vs. 15: like a drop in a bucket, or as a speck of dust on the scales and in vs. 17: as less than nothing. The rulers of so-called mighty nations who boasted of their might and glory (Isaiah 36:4-10 and 13-20 and Daniel 4:30), have been reduced to nothing as have the judges of the earth before the almighty Creator.

40:24 Scarcely are they planted, scarcely are they sown, scarcely has his stem taken root in the earth, when he blows on them, and they wither, and the whirlwind blows them away like stubble.
Isaiah describes the comparison of the rulers and judges of the earth as being like fragile flora which wither and are blown away by God’s slightest breath as soon as they are planted. Even the most powerful and mighty of the earth live but a moment in comparison to God who lives eternally. The message of the prophet in verses 21-24 is meant to instil confidence in God’s people in Judah who were terrified by recent events during the crisis of the threat of conquest by the Assyrians. Where are the Assyrian warriors now? Where is the great and mighty king of Assyria? God alone stands forever with His people and lives with them under the tent He has spread for their protection.

Thomas Constable comments on verses 23-24:

People of position and office, as well as the decision-makers of the world, may appear to wield power, but they are really under the enthroned God's authority. He can dispose of any human leader because He is over all of them. He can dispense with them just as easily as He can make flowers wither and blow chaff away (cf. vv. 6-8). He can reduce them to a state of comparative nothingness (Heb. tohu; cf. Gen. 1:2). Thus He is not only superior but sovereign. Furthermore, He is imminent as well as transcendent. God did not just create the world and then abandon it, as deism teaches. (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 188).

Verses 25-26 None mighty as God

40:25-26 "To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal?" says the Holy One.

26 Lift up your eyes on high and see. Who has created these?

He brings them out in ranks by number; he calls each one of them by name. Because of the greatness of his might, and because of his strong power, not one of them is missing.

In comparison to the impotent and short lived rulers and judges of the earth who are no match for God in any category, God, the Holy One, asks the people of Judah in vs. 25: “To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal?” This is a repetition of the question asked by Isaiah as recorded in vs. 18 and summarizes the thoughts stated in verses 12-24. This is an emphatic rhetorical question that has only one possible reply: No One is God’s equal. God next requests, as recorded in vs. 26 that the people of Judah look to the heavens and ponder who created the stars and who directs and names each one. Psalms 147:4-5 states:

4 He counts the number of the stars; he calls all of them by name.

5 Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; his understanding is limitless.

God accomplishes His mighty works due to the greatness of His might and powerful strength and because of this not one of the stars under His guidance is missing. The obvious meaning of these statements by God is that if God has the power and might to create and superintend the stars (by implication the entire universe), then who is equal to Him? This question was mean to be answered by the people of Judah and by the nations. By acknowledging the mighty power of God in creation and in overseeing His creative works, humans can have complete confidence and trust in God, that He will comfort and look after them. It is the height of folly for anyone to imagine they can manage or even take the reins of their own destiny for even a moment.
Verses 27-31 None enduring as God

In verses 27-31, Isaiah brings to a conclusion this magnificent proclamation of the Lord’s eternal power and His comfort and care for His people. As recorded in vs. 27, the Lord confronts the people of Judah because of their assertion that God does not notice them nor gives them the justice they feel is their due. After all God has just proclaimed about His presence with them (vs. 9) and His tender mercy towards them (vs. 11) and His great power (verses 12-17) and His Creative majesty (verses 18-26) and particularly His protection of the City of Jerusalem (chapter 37), how can these people complain that the Lord does not know them or provide justice to them? The Lord answers this spurious claim in verses 28-31.


40:27 Why do you say, O Jacob, 
and claim, O Israel, 
"My way is hid from the LORD, 
and the justice due me is ignored by my God?"

The prophet records the complaint of the people of Judah against the Holy One of Israel. These ungrateful and untrusting members of the chosen people of God complain that God does not notice them, for their ways seem hidden from Him. This is a stark contrast to an earlier claim by the people recorded in Isaiah 26:8, 15 but is similar to the way God sees them as the prophet states the words of the Lord in Isaiah 29:13. The additional complaint that the justice due to them escapes God’s notice is also a sign of their blind eyes, deaf ears and hard heart that God told Isaiah would characterize these people (Isaiah 6:8-13).

Verses 28-31: God’s Response.

40:28 Have you not known? 
Have you not heard? 
The everlasting God, the LORD, 
the Creator of the ends of the earth, 
He does not faint or get tired; 
his understanding is unfathomable.

God again asks a rhetorical question about His eternality. His role as creator, His ever-present strength and vitality, and His unfathomable (inscrutable) understanding. The two-fold question “Have you not known? Have you not heard?” is answered by God in four declarative statements:

First, God is everlasting or eternal (olam in the Hebrew). The Old Testament speaks about the eternal existence of God. Selected verses only: Genesis 21:33; Deuteronomy 33:27; 1 Chronicles 16:36; Psalm 41:13; 90:2; 93:2; 106:48; Isaiah 9:6; 43:13; Jeremiah 10:10; Micah 5:2; and Habakkuk 1:12. Moses in Psalm 90:2, expressed God’s eternity very succinctly: “from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.”

Second, God is the Creator of all the earth. The Scriptures open with the plain statement: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1) It is surprising that God would have to ask His people: have you not known or have you not heard that He was the Creator of the ends of the earth? Yet the people of God had forsaken Him and forgot His creative works and abilities on their behalf. The word Creator is a title for God as well as a descriptive term for his creative activities. Many Old Testament verses ascribe the creation of the world and its inhabitants to God. In Isaiah God’s activity of creation is mentioned in: 4:5;
40:26; 40:28; 41:20; 42:5; 43:1, 7, 15; 45:7, 8, 12, 18; 48:7; 54:16; 57:19; 65:17, and 18. See comment on these verses in this study of Isaiah. Not only do the Scriptures declare that God created the heavens and the earth, but He will re-create them in the future (Isaiah 65:17), although some understand this as a renewal rather than a new creative act of God. It is best to take God at His word and if the word of God states plainly that He will create new heavens and a new earth and this is exactly what He will do!

Third, God never tires nor faints from exertion. A few of the many magnificent compound names for God describe His everlasting strength, power, and might. For example, Elohim which means the powerful and mighty God.; El-Shaddai which means God almighty; El-Olam which means the everlasting God; and El-Roi which means the God who sees. God, is the context of Isaiah 40:18-31, has described His creative and superintendence works including knowing and naming all the stars of heaven and declares in vs. 26: “because of the greatness of his might, and because of his strong power, not one of them is missing.” In God’s work of sustaining His creation He never grows weary, tires or faints from exhaustion. God hears the prayers of the people of the world. He establishes and disposes rulers, leaders, kings and presidents. He never stops in working out His perfect plans for His world. He comforts the sorrowful, heals the sick, protects the weak and vulnerable, gives hope to the despondent, and most importantly redeems the lost. He ceaselessly governs His universal kingdom both in heaven and on earth. In all this He never lacks for strength and power. In contrast to God’s divine strength is the youth of the world who will faint and grow weary and with not much exertion will fall exhausted (vs. 30).

Fourth, God’s understanding is unfathomable (or inscrutable). The word “unfathomable” in the DASV is a translation of two Hebrew words ayin cheqer and can be also translated as unsearchable or inscrutable. The basic meaning is that God’s understanding is “beyond comprehension” to humans. Isaiah states it another way with the same meaning in chapter 55:9: “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” The people of Judah in Isaiah’s day and all God’s people in any time can trust God without reservation or doubt for He will look after His world and His people because of the depth (unfathomable) of His knowledge and wisdom. He has never failed and will never fail in His marvellous plans for His creation. Isaiah in 46:10 declares the words of God: “I declare the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that have not yet happened; saying, My purpose will stand, and I will fulfill what I have planned.”

40:29-31 He gives strength to the weary; to the weak he increases strength.

30 Even youths will faint and grow weary, and vigorous young men fall exhausted,

31 but those who wait for the LORD will renew their strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles; they will run, and not grow weary; they will walk, and not faint.

Isaiah declares that God strengthens the weary and increases power to those who lack might. Those including the youth and young men who tire, grow weary and stumble, if they and any others wait upon the LORD, they will be strengthened by God for the task God has assigned them. The lesson to those who need the strength of God is that they must “wait for the LORD.” (vs. 31). Victor Buksbazen comments:
“Here is one of the most beautiful promises given to those who put their trust in God. They shall forever renew their strength. They shall always rise above seeming defeat and soar up to lofty heights. God Himself will enable them to run their course, even where much younger and stronger men stumble and fall. Their secret is that “they wait upon the Lord.” Jehovah Himself is the inexhaustible fountain of their strength.” (Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, page 336).

As a patient and compassionate Shepherd to His people, God again extends an invitation to wait upon Him. To wait upon Him is *first* to trust that He has the ability to accomplish what He promises and *second* to act upon that trust by stepping out in faith and obedience to complete the task that God has purposed. This was the message of Isaiah, 700 years before the birth of Christ and it is the message of the New Testament in the present day. It is an eternal message that all who are called the children of God must understand and by faith undertake.

Many scholars see, in these verses, a reference to the return of the exiles from the Babylonian captivity in which during the long return journey from Babylon to Jerusalem, God will be working in the midst of His people to strengthen them to be able to complete the long and perilous task. Others understand that these promises are applicable to every situation the people of God find themselves in that requires the help and strength of God to endure. A few scholars apply these promises to the time of the return of the Messiah when the faithful remnant will need the supernatural help of God to endure the perilous times they are encountering. For example, one who adheres to this third understanding of these verses is David L. Cooper who writes:

THE message to be delivered to Israel ends with an appeal in verses 27-31. Herein the prophet calls Israel's attention to the fact that this God is omniscient and omnipresent. She must believe Him. She must trust Him, even though she cannot understand and comprehend His existence and being. All of them must yield their lives to Him; they must give Him their hearts; they must follow Him. It is He who gives power to the faint; it is He who gives increased strength; it is He who, coming to Israel in her last great struggle, will, as she waits for His appearing, renew her strength, so that she shall mount up with wings as eagles; so that she shall run and not be weary; and may walk and not faint. (D. L. Cooper, *Commentary on Isaiah*, Biblical Research Monthly – January 1945).

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 40:

1-11: The Comforting God
   1-2  The Call of Comfort from the Lord
   3-5  The Call of Preparation for the Lord
   6-8  The Call of God’s Eternal Word
   9-11 The Call of God’s Coming

12-31: The Incomparable God
   12-17 None equal to God
   18-20 None comparable to God
   21-24 None eternal like God
   25-26 None mighty as God
   27-31 None enduring as God

2. God is With the People of Israel: 41:1-29

Most scholars suggest that chapters 40-41 of Isaiah were written by the prophet to bring comfort and encouragement to the exiles returning to Jerusalem following the seventy year Babylonian captivity and that chapter 41 speaks prophetically of Cyrus the Persian leader who will be God’s chosen one to fulfil God’s
plans for the destruction of Babylon and the one who would issue the decree allowing the exiled Jews to return to Jerusalem. The main message of chapter 41 is that God is stronger than any nation and their idols (their so-called gods) and the people of God can completely depend of Him for protection and help.

Outline of Isaiah Chapter 41:

41:1-20: The True God of Israel
- The Rule of God: Verses 1-7
- The Strength of God: Verses 8-16
- The Blessings of God: Verses 17-20
41:21-29: The False gods of the Nations

The Rule of God: Verses 1-7

In verses 1-7 God calls the ends of the earth (the islands) to listen in silence as His witness as He declares His just decree as the one and only ruler of the world. God will bring someone to subdue kings and conqueror nations and the nations in response will rely on worthless idols for their help. In verses 2-7, God asks two rhetorical questions (vs. 2 and 4) about someone to come who will accomplish His purposes by subduing nations and causing the ends of the earth to tremble. The person God calls is not mentioned as it seems that the intent of Isaiah is to just introduce him in this declaration and then later provide more revelation from God about him. The initial purpose of verses 2-7 is to declare that it is God alone who decrees the outcome of history and only God can do this. Isaiah returns to this declaration in verses 21-29 of this chapter.

41:1 Be silent before me, O islands.
    Let the peoples renew their strength;
    let them come near;
    let them speak;
    let us come together for judgment.

Isaiah records that God calls the nations (the islands) and all peoples to listen to Him in silence as He declares His justice upon them. (Habakkuk 2:20; Zechariah 2:13) These nations by obeying God’s call will gain new strength as will the people of Judah in a future time. (Isaiah 40:28-31) These nations are invited to speak in God’s presence as if before a judge who brings judgment. Later, in vs. 21, the prophet records God’s command to these nations to state their case before Him and declare their strong arguments. The purpose of God is to allow the nations to see for themselves their folly in trusting idols instead of the One true God. If they trust in Him alone, they will gain new strength. The far nations will in the end times finally acknowledge that the Holy One of Israel is their God and they will come and worship Him along with the people of Israel. (Isaiah 19:18-25; 27:12-13)

41:2-3 Who has roused up one from the east?
    Who calls him in righteousness into his service?
    He gives nations to him,
    and enables him to subdue kings.
    He makes them like the dust by his sword,
    like the windblown stubble by his bow.
    He pursues them,
    passing on in safety,
    by a path that his feet have never traveled.
God describes one He calls from the east and who is called in righteousness to the feet of God and who will deliver up nations, subdue kings and makes nations and their kings like dust with his sword and like chaff with his bow. This one will also pursue kings, passing them by in safety while travelling in a way he had not been before. The identity of this one is not stated by Isaiah in Isaiah chapter 40. The majority of scholars link this passage with Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1 in which the prophet states the name of Cyrus as being God’s shepherd who will perform the desire of God and is also called the Lord’s “anointed” which in the Hebrew is “messiah”.

41:4 Who has performed and done it, summoning each generation from the beginning? I, the Lord, am the first, and will be with the last of them, I am the one.

The prophet records God’s question and His own response. God asks the assembled nations (verses 1 and 21) who it was that performs and accomplishes the great things He has just announced? And who it was that has called forth (created) the peoples of the earth from the beginning (when they were created)? God continues to address the nations with questions (see vs. 2) of which the nations must acknowledge that the great Creator, the Self-existent One, the Eternal God is as God exclaims in response to His own questions: “I the Lord, am the first and will be with the last of them, I am the one.” (vs. 4). This is one of the greatest declarations in Scripture of God regarding His eternality. The statement that He is the first and will be with the last is again recorded by Isaiah in 44:6 and 48:12. This statement is repeated by Jesus Christ in Revelation 1:17; 2:8 and 22:13 as pertaining to Himself as the risen Lord. In the book of Revelation, the Lord adds the Greek alphabetic rendering of “alpha and omega” (Revelation 1:8; 21:6 and 22:13) as descriptive of His eternity. The great triune God proclaims that He is the Eternal One always existing and the One who creates, controls and directs all things including the peoples of all the nations. The last phrase of vs. 4: “I am the one” is an emphatic statement of identification so Judah and all nations would clearly understand that He alone is God, there is no other and that His name can be stated with the deepest of reverence as “I am.” See also Exodus 3:14; Isaiah 42:8; 43:10, 13; 46:4

41:5 The coastlands have seen, and fear; the ends of the earth tremble; they draw near and come.

The result of God’s existence and His creative power is explained by God. Those who see Him will tremble and are afraid of Him. Isaiah often stated that the world and its inhabitants will tremble at the presence of the Lord: 2:19, 21; 13:13; 14:16; 19:1, 16; 23:11; 64:2 and 66:5. See also: 1 Chronicles 16:30; Psalms 96:9; 97:4; 99:1; 114:7; 119:20; Jeremiah 33:9; Ezekiel 7:27; Joel 2:1 and 3:16. Isaiah the prophet expressed his great fear of seeing God by exclaiming: “Woe is me! For I am doomed; for I am a man of unclean lips and I live in the midst of a people of unclean lips. My eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.” (Isaiah 6:5). Isaiah later states in 8:13: “The Lord of hosts is the one you must recognize as holy, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.” (see comments on Isaiah 8:13). It is to the great and terrifying God that the nations of the earth have been called to face. How they react to this summons is stated in verses 6 and 7.

41:6-7 They help each other; each says to his brother, "Be strong."
So the craftsman encourages the goldsmith,
the one who smooths with the hammer
encourages him who strikes the anvil,
saying of the welding, "It is good."
Then he fastens it down with nails
so that it will not tip over.

The nations react to the summons of facing their Creator, the almighty God. Instead of humbling themselves before Him in reverent fear, the nations seek courage and strength from the presence of their neighbours. King Ahaz rejected the plea of Isaiah to trust in God and not to seek the aid of Assyria (Isaiah 7:1-16). The consequences of Ahaz’s refusal to trust in God is stated in 2 Chronicles 28:16-27. Later Isaiah had to warn the people of Judah not to seek protection from the threat of Assyria from neighbouring countries that God declared would be useless and too weak to help them nor to count on their own defences. (Isaiah chapters: 18-23 and 28-31). The Gentile nations were just like Judah in their seeking help from others and their dependence on idols instead of trusting in God. The judgement of God against the idolatrous practices of the nations and Judah is a major theme of the book of Isaiah. See notes on 40:19-21.

The Strength of God: Verses 8-16

This section of Isaiah chapter 41 is a beautiful statement of God’s promises to lovingly care and strengthen His people. Even though they have failed to trust Him many times in the past and have sought the help of neighbouring countries and the evil of trusting in idols, God remembers His unconditional covenant with Abraham and offers to once again come to the aid of those He calls “My servant” (vs. 8). For an extended discussion on God’s covenant with Abraham, refer to Arnold Fruchtenbaum, Genesis Commentary, Ariel Ministries, 2008, pages 239-343.

41:8-9 But you, Israel, my servant,
Jacob whom I have chosen,
the seed of Abraham my friend,
you whom I am bringing back from the ends of the earth,
and summoned you from its remotest corners,
and told you, 'You are my servant,
I have chosen you and not cast you away.'

God, through the prophet, makes the declaration in vs. 8a: “But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen.” The description of Israel and Jacob, the chosen people of God, as the servant of God is found often in the Old Testament. This description (of servant) is found very often in Isaiah beginning with Isaiah 41:8. Other references in Isaiah: 41:9; 42:19; 43:10; 44:1, 2, 21 (2x); 45:4; 48:20; 49:3; 54:17; 56:6; 63:17; 64:14; 65:8; 9, 13 (3x); 14 and 15. But in which sense is Israel/Jacob the servant of God? Each reference must be taken in its context. In vs. 9, God describes His servants as those “whom I am bringing back from the ends of the earth, and summoned you from its remotest corners.” Thomas Constable comments:

41:8 The Lord turned from addressing the nations to speaking to Israel. God had chosen the Israelis for special blessing because He chose to love them more than other peoples. Election rests on love (cf. Deut. 7:7-8). The reference to Jacob recalls the unworthiness of the Israelis, and the mention of Abraham the fact that Abraham loved God (Gen. 18:17-19), the proper response to electing love (cf. 1 John 4:19). Both references also connect to God’s covenant with the patriarchs. God had called Israel to be His servant. This is the first of 31 references to a servant of the Lord in Isaiah.476
"Old Testament slavery/servanthood must never be thought of on the model of the West Indian slavery of the Christian era. Mosaic legislation extended protection to the slave and—such was the institution—had to make provision for the slave who loved his master and would not leave slavery (Ex. 21:2ff.). Such a 'slave', as a matter of social status, may have been at the bottom of life’s heap, but in another sense he was as powerful as his master, for should he ever have been molested, it was the master the molester had to reckon with."477

41:9 God reminded His people that He had called them from the remotest part of the earth to be His servant. He did this in Abraham’s case when He called him out of Ur into the Promised Land, and He did it in Jacob’s case when He brought him back into the land from his sojourn near Haran. God had determined not to reject His people. Israel had nothing to fear (cf. John 15:14-15). [Note 419: See Allan A. MacRae, "The Servant of the Lord in Isaiah," Bibliotheca Sacra 121:483 (July 1964):218-27, for a study of the progressive revelation of the servant of the Lord in Isaiah. For a good overview of the title "Servant" in Isaiah, see Willis J. Beecher, "The Servant," in Classical Evangelical Essays in Old Testament Interpretation, pp. 187-204. Note 477: Motyer, p.312. (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, pages 193-194).

“you whom I am bringing back from the ends of the earth, and summoned you from its remotest corners.”

The word “you” in these two phrases must refer to the remnant whom Isaiah had earlier discussed within the context of the beginning of the millennial kingdom of the Messiah as recorded in Isaiah 11:12:

Then he will set up a signal flag for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

The faithful remnant of Israel, described by many words such as “outcasts” and “dispersed” in Isaiah 11:12, are those whom God will gather from all parts (corners) of the earth to populate the millennial kingdom of the Messiah. They will be those who have come out of the horrible days of the Tribulation and will rejoice when they meet their Messiah for whom they have sought in repentance for the great sin of their ancestors whom rejected their Messiah when He first walked among them. For further Biblical evidence of the gathering of the remnant, see (selected verses only): Isaiah 14:2; 27:13; 43:5; 49:8-23; 54:7; 56:8; 62:10-12; 66:20-21; Jeremiah 16:14-15; 31:10-14; and 32:37:41. For an extended discussion of the faithful remnant of Israel, refer to: The Remnant of Israel: Past, Present and Future, Messianic Bible Study, MBS 191, Ariel Ministries, by Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum.

Some scholars attempt to combine a near fulfillment, the return of the captives from Babylon to Jerusalem, and the eschatological calling of God for His people, the faithful remnant of Israel, to travel from the far reaches of the earth to Israel. This combination or “two fulfillments” would at first glance seem to contradict the “single meaning” hermeneutical approach to understanding a Biblical text. Many conservative, evangelical authors of previous generations, who held to a strong pre-millennial viewpoint of the OT and NT, often saw two or more fulfillments from a single text. They also saw many types-antitypes in the Scriptures that modern scholars do not necessarily endorse. Does this mean that these godly scholars of a previous generation were wrong in how they interpreted and applied Scripture? Not in the least! These scholars held to the highest possible belief in the inspiration, sufficiency, inerrancy, clarity and authority of all Scripture. They would have agreed to the “single meaning” hermeneutical approach to Biblical interpretation. However, they would differentiate between a “single meaning”: (that the Biblical text needs to be interpreted as it is written without confusion as to the meaning of individual words) and a “double fulfillment”: (that the text can apply to the then present day (the historical period in which the author wrote the text) and to a future day). For example, many commentators understand Peter’s use of Joel 2:28-32 on the day of Pentecost (Acts
2:16-21) as being “applied” to the day of Pentecost and also to be completely fulfilled in the days just prior to the second advent of Christ.

Another issue that needs further discussion is the comparison in the writings of Isaiah of Israel/Jacob as God’s servant with another (an individual) who is called God’s servant. This issue has great implications for the understanding that Isaiah reveals in his Book that a person who is called God’s servant is the promised Messiah and that He will rule over a future messianic kingdom. Many who deny that the Old Testament contains direct and clear revelation of the person and work of the Messiah assign the individual/servant passages to Israel as a singular corporate identity. An excellent study of this topic is presented by Michael Rydelnik in his book: *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?* Reference to this resource has been previously made in the notes on Isaiah 7:14-16. This issue will be addressed throughout the remainder of the study of the Book of Isaiah. The major theme of this study of Isaiah is that the prophet declares quite convincingly that the birth, life, death, resurrection and significance of the Messiah’s first coming and many aspects of His second coming and kingdom has been revealed in the prophet’s writings. There is so much detail about the first and second appearances of the Messiah, who is later revealed in Scripture as Jesus Christ, the Son of God, that any comprehensive study of the revelation of Jesus in the Scripture that ignores the writings of Isaiah would need to be declared as deficient.

The words of verses 8-9 and the following verses would have been in Isaiah’s day and continue to day to be a great source of comfort for those who are the faithful remnant of the people of Israel. Those who have faith in the Messiah and because their faith has been counted as righteousness (Genesis 15:6; Habakkuk 2:4) have the very promise of God that they have not been rejected by Him. If they have not been rejected, they must be accepted and all of the blessings of these verses and following verses apply to them, as do all the wonderful promises contained in the Book of Isaiah and in the entire Scriptures.

Victor Buksbazen links verses 8-9 with the preceding verses and those that follow:

“From His dispute with worshippers of the worthless idols, Jehovah now turns to Israel. This whole passage breathes a spirit of great compassion and affection. God sees Israel not as they are in reality, but as He intends them to become. Israel is called “the servant of Jehovah” by virtue of His sovereign grace and election. This election is of an indelible character, and does not depend on Israel’s merits or lack of them, but rather on God’s own faithfulness and integrity. If Israel disobeys Him, their disobedience brings upon them disaster and punishment. Nevertheless they remain His servant and chosen people.” (Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, page 339).

“I have chosen you and not cast you away” (vs. 9)

A study of why God chose the people of Israel and why He has not rejected them will be of tremendous benefit for the student of the Scriptures. God chose a small (in numbers), weak and sinful people from among all the nations of the earth to be called “His chosen people.” God explains why He chose them:

*First*: He chose them because of His love for them and because He kept the oath He had sworn to their forefathers (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) and therefore He redeemed them with a mighty hand from Egypt; from the house of slavery and from the hand of Pharaoh. “For you are a holy people to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be his own special people, above all peoples on the face of the earth. 7 The LORD did not set his love on you or choose you because you were more numerous than any other people, for you were the fewest of all peoples. 8 Rather it was because the LORD loved you and was keeping the oath he promised to your forefathers when the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of slavery from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.” Deuteronomy 7:6-8.
Second: He chose them to spread the fame of His great name. “For the LORD will not abandon his people, for his great name's sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you his very own people.” 1 Samuel 12:22. Also: “What other nation on the earth is like your people Israel? Is there another nation whom God redeemed as a people for himself, to make a name for himself, by performing great wonders and awesome deeds and by driving out nations and gods for those whom you redeemed from Egypt?24 You established your people Israel to be your people forever, and you, O LORD, became their God.” 2 Samuel 7:23-24 God also protects His people and will not ultimately reject them so that His name will be proclaimed throughout the earth. “But for this reason I have raised you up, to show you my power and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth.” Exodus 9:16. See also Romans 9:14-18.

It needs to be stated that God has not rejected His people: Romans 11:1-32. God’s word in Isaiah 41:9: “I have chosen you and not cast you away.” is as true today for the Jew as it was during Isaiah’s day. The truth that God has chosen and not rejected His people for His great name’s sake has also not changed for God has bound the fame of His name with the people He has chosen.

41:10: Do not be afraid, for I am with you; do not be troubled, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; yes, I will help you; yes, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

In keeping with the above brief discussion on the “single meaning” of a Biblical text, do the words of vs.10 apply only to the faithful remnant of Israel? Can they also apply to all who have faith in Christ? The Apostle Paul’s gave the world a wonderful explanation of justification (declared righteous) through faith in Christ as applying to Abraham and to all (even Gentile) who have faith (Romans 3:21-4:25) Paul later in Romans states: “For whatever things were written in former times were written for our instruction, so that through the endurance and encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” Romans 15:4. A proper understanding of the words of Paul make it clear that all believers can apply the promise of vs. 10 to their lives.

By claiming that all Christians can apply the truth of vs. 10 and (other parts of the Old Testament) to their lives is not in any way saying that the “Church” has replaced the true Israel (the faithful remnant of Israel) in God’s current and future plans for Israel as a nation. God has not rejected His people as Isaiah 41:9 clearly states. He is working out His perfect plan for them today and will continue to perfect His plan for them for all eternity. Chapters 9-11 of Romans is clear that God has not totally rejected His chosen people. Paul states: “For I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you become conceited: a partial hardening has happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And so all Israel will be saved, just as it is written, "There will come out of Zion the Deliverer; he will remove ungodliness from Jacob. 27 And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins." Romans 11:25-27. Paul quotes Isaiah 59:20-21. More discussion on God’s preservation of His people will be provided in the notes on Isaiah chapter 59.

The words of vs. 10 are very precious therefore to all who believe in Christ. Isaiah wrote these words for the encouragement of the people of Judah. Isaiah wrote these words to the people of Judah during his lifetime and many years before the Babylonian captivity. Isaiah’s message in chapters 40-66 therefore would have been a source of great comfort to his countrymen. The people in Judah would have immediately applied
Isaiah’s message to their lives and would not have understood them to apply to a future time. See Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah*, Vol. 2, pages 42-48 for an excellent defence that the audience of Isaiah for his messages in chapters 40-66 were Jews living in Judah and not in Babylon.

Many still have fond memories of this verse in the KJV and for its inclusion (adaptation) as a verse in the old hymn: *How Firm a Foundation*. David Powlison has written a thought provoking discourse on this hymn in *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*, Crossway Books, 2006, chapter 7: God’s Grace and Your Sufferings, pages 145-173.

God gives the believer much to consider in vs. 10:

“*Do not be afraid.*”  
Often God and His holy angels have spoken these words to those whom He loves. When a messenger from God approached or God spoke directly to someone in Scripture, it was not uncommon for the first words spoken to be “fear not” or “do not be afraid”: to Abraham, Genesis 15:1; to Isaac, Genesis 26:24; to Joshua, Joshua 8:1; to Gideon, Judges 6:23; to Daniel, Daniel 10:12; to Joseph, Matthew 1:20; to Zacharias, Luke 1:13; to Mary, Luke 1:30; to the shepherds on the night Christ was born, Luke 2:10 and to John, Revelation 1:17. The words in vs. 10 “do not fear” were comforting words that Isaiah would often repeat in his prophecy: 7:4, 25; 8:12; 10:24; 35:4; 40:9; 41:10, 13, 14; 43:1, 5; 44:2; 51:7; 54:4, 14. The intent of the message from God “do not fear” is that, in God, believers have nothing to fear for the reason God gives is the next phrase of vs. 10.

“For I am with you.”  
This is a source of the greatest comfort for all believers. No one can replace, compare or have the protective power of the Lord of the universe. The wonderful promise God gave through Isaiah to king Ahaz was of the Son to come who would be given the name “Immanuel,” (God with us), Isaiah 7:14. This promised name was for the Messiah, Jesus Christ: Matthew 1:23. Isaiah would again bring the great news about God’s presence in Isaiah 43:5. The blessing of God’s presence (to be with us) is a recurring theme of Scripture: Genesis 26:24; 28:15; 48:21; 1 Chronicles 22:18; 2 Chronicles 13:12; Isaiah 8:10; Jeremiah 1:8, 19; 15:20; 30:11; 42:11; 46:28; Haggai 1:3; 2:4; Matthew 28:20; and Acts 18:10.

One of the most precious portraits of the Scriptures is that of God as a “tabernacle” (a dwelling) among His people. This picture of the tabernacle portrays God’s awesome and comforting presence with those who believe in Him. Psalm 27:5. In John’s vision of heaven, he heard a voice from the throne saying: “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.” Revelation 21:3 (NKJV). Those who trust in God have a precious promise from Him that He will live among them. He will never forsake them or leave them. Not only is God with them, but He also stands for them and upon faith in Christ, will live in them: God is with us: Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23); God is for us (Romans 8:31); and God is in us: “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Colossians 1:27.

“Do not be troubled.”  
The believer has no need to be anxious or troubled for any reason. An anxious look is to show worry as if everything is not under control. Those who are anxious are to look to God for comfort and peace: Psalm 94:19; 139:23; and Isaiah 35:4. The Apostle Paul stated that believers are to be “anxious for nothing.” There is no need to be anxious. It should be noted that the NASB has the word “anxious” in a few texts which has the meaning of fervently looking: Daniel 2:3; Luke 2:48; Romans 8:19 and Jude 1:21. This is not the same as sinful anxiousness. The New Testament has much to say about anxiousness as worry: Matthew 6:31, 34; 10:19; 13:22; Mark 13:11; Luke 12:11, 22, 25, 26, 29; and 1 Corinthians 7:21.
“for I am your God.”
This great statement should cure all worry and anxiety of the believer. This is one of the greatest statements of comfort in all of Scripture. The only true God, the all-powerful Ruler of all things, the awesome, majestic, glorious and fearsome God who alone created, upholds and lovingly cares for the people of this world is the God of the believer. God often reminded His people (throughout the Old Testament) that He was their God. Isaiah frequently declares this truth: 41:10; 41:13; 43:3; 48:17 and 51:15. The prophet Joel declared in 2:27:

You will know that I am in the midst of Israel,
and that I am the LORD your God,
there is no other.
My people will never be put to shame.

“I will strengthen you.”
God promises to give strength to those who believe in Him. God strengthens the believer in many ways. He gives confidence when a believer’s self-esteem is low. He fortifies the believer to meet seemingly overwhelming challenges. He provides strength during times of loss, bereavement, and calamity. He gently supports and comforts the believer up during the storms of life. He comes along side the believer during times of loneliness, doubt and during the dark times when all seems to be in confusion. The words of Psalm 23 are an apt description of the words of God: “I will strengthen you”. Isaiah often speaks of the strength the Lord has given and will give to His people: 12:2; 28:6; 33:2; 35:3; 40:29, 31; 41:1, 10; 45:24 and 58:11.

“yes, I will help you.”
The significance of the promise of the Lord’s help to the believer is stunning. Those who trust in God have this beautiful promise that God Himself is present at all times to aide and help them. There is no greater, better, perfect, or timely help that could ever be provided to the believer than the help God promises. Any help God gives is in His perfect and holy will to accomplish His plans and is always for the best interests of and for the best good of the believer. The psalmist in Psalm 46:1 proclaims:

God is our refuge and strength,
always there to help in trouble.


“yes I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”
One of the most assuring anthropomorphisms in Scripture is that of God’s sustaining and keeping power described as being provided by God’s “right hand.” The portrait of God’s right hand is that of being powerful for many people are right handed and their right hand has more exercise and strength than their left hand. So with His righteous and powerful right hand God describes Himself as upholding (holding fast, keeping for God’s own use) the believer with His full strength. This is not to say God’s left hand is weak. This anthropomorphism must be seen as a picture of God’s provision in a manner that those who heard Isaiah, and those who read Isaiah’s words would easily understand. See also Psalm 63:8.

The right hand of Jacob was used for blessing: Genesis 48:8-22. The right hand of God is a source of righteousness as declared by the psalmist in Psalm 48:10:
Like your name, O God,  
your praise extends to the ends of the earth;  
your right hand is full of righteousness.

Also, another psalmist declares in Psalm 89:13:

You have a mighty arm;  
strong is your hand,  
and high is your right hand.

Several Old Testament texts declare the power and righteousness of God’s right hand. Selected verses only: Exodus 15:6, 12; Psalms 16:11; 17:7; 18:35; 20:6; 48:10; 60:5; 63:8; 89:13; 98:1; 108:6; 118:15-16; 138:7. Isaiah also declares this truth: 41:10, 13; 48:13 and 62:8. God’s right hand is not just powerful, it is also righteous. Charles C Ryrie provides a description of righteousness:

“Though related to holiness, righteousness is nevertheless a distinct attribute of God. Holiness relates to God’s separateness; righteousness to His justice. Righteousness has to do with law, morality and justice. In relation to Himself, God is righteous; i.e., there is no law, either within His own being or of His own making, that is violated by anything in His nature. In relation to His creatures, he is also righteous; i.e., there is no action He takes that violates any code of morality or justice. Sometimes these two aspects of righteousness are called absolute (in relation to Himself) and relative (in relation to His Creation).” (Charles C. Ryrie, Basic Theology, page 48).

41:11-13 Look, all those who are angry with you  
will be put to shame and disgrace.  
Those who dispute with you  
will come to nothing and perish.  
12 You will look for your opponents,  
but not find them.  
Those who attack you  
will come to nothing at all.  
13 For I, the LORD your God, will hold your right hand,  
saying to you,  
"Don't be afraid;  
I will help you.

Following the precious promises of vs. 10, Isaiah describes the effect these promises have on the believer in God. Endued with God’s presence, help, strength and being upheld by God, believers have the assurance that any enemy (vs. 11) will who are angry (burning, or kindled with anger) with them will be put to shame and dishonoured. Also, any who disputes (contends with strife) with them will be considered as nothing and will ultimately perish (to become as nothing). In vs. 12, Isaiah repeats the intention of vs. 11. Those who quarrel or dispute with God’s people will not be found and those who war (fight against) them will be as nothing and will be non-existent. Many would understand these verses as applying to any enemies of God’s people in Isaiah’s day and also a far future day. However, Gary V. Smith suggests that the proper setting for these verses is appropriate:
Isaiah Chapters 40-48: Page 34

41:11–13 God’s presence and strengthening will result in the defeat of Judah’s enemies (41:11–12). The identification of these enemies is very important if one desires to discover the setting of the prophet and his audience, but relatively few commentators labor to discover the impact of these words. J. D. W. Watts believes these words “point to Israel’s opponents in all the conflicts of the past,” but the imperfect verbs in these verses most likely point to a defeat of Israel’s enemies at some point in the future. It also is difficult to suggest that this is God’s promise to the exiles about the imminent fall of Babylon, for the prophetic books referring to the exile never refer to the Babylonians or the Persians being enraged with or at war against the Jewish people while they were in exile. A. Schoors admits that it is very difficult to fit this chapter into an exilic setting in Babylon for “it is hard to accept that Israel was at war (milḥāmā) with any nation” during those days. But if the text does not fit a peaceful exilic context in Babylon, then this literary unit must be set in a different historical setting where a major conqueror from the east defeated many nations and made war against God’s chosen people (41:2–3). The most natural setting is during the Assyrian attack on Judah (701 BC) or the Babylonian attack on Jerusalem in 587 BC. (Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, pages 135-136).

Vs. 13 is similar to vs. 10 and may be overlooked as a repetition for the sake of emphasis. However, the reader should note that Isaiah records in vs. 13 that God holds (upholds) their right hand whereas in vs. 10 God declares “I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” The difference is very important. In vs. 10 it is God who takes direct action to uphold (sustain, hold fast, keep) the believer. In vs. 13, Isaiah states that God stands with the believer to strengthen the works and actions of the believer through times of difficulty which, in the context of chapter 41, it is most often applicable when enemies afflict and assault them.

41:14 Do not be afraid, O Jacob, you worm.
You men of Israel,
I will help you," says the LORD;
your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.

God again, as in verses 10 and 13, addresses His people with the comforting words: “do not be afraid.” For an extended note on God’s command for them: “do not be afraid”, see vs. 10 above. God’s description of His chosen people as “O Jacob, you worm” is fitting within the context of chapters 40 and 41 of Isaiah. Isaiah, in 40:17, records that: “all nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and worthless.” From among all these “worthless nations”, God in His sovereign choice (election) selected a people whom He called Jacob/Israel. He chose them not because they were large in number or had done anything that would impress God, but because of His great name, (1 Samuel 12:22). This great truth of God acting to make a name for Himself is most clearly seen in 2 Samuel 7:23: “What other nation on the earth is like your people Israel? Is there another nation whom God redeemed as a people for himself, to make a name for himself, by performing great wonders and awesome deeds and by driving out nations and gods for those whom you redeemed from Egypt?” Also, Isaiah later would declare that God led His people to make for Himself a glorious name; (Isaiah 63:14). Therefore, it is not that God is intentionally disparaging His people to purposely compare them with creatures that live most of their lives below the surface of the ground; but He is declaring a wonderful message of help, hope and Godly care to those whom He has chosen so that His name would be great in all the earth. This truth is certainly most pronounced in the prayer of Jesus to His Father, recorded in Matthew 6, often called the “Lord’s prayer”. Jesus begins His model prayer with the request: “hallowed be your name.” Matthew 6:9. See also Luke 11:2. It is the prayer of the Son that the name of the Father be hallowed (glorified, known, revered, worshiped, exalted, uplifted) throughout all the earth.
God, as recorded in vs. 14, reveals some parts of His name that He holds most high over all names:

First, He calls Himself their “Redeemer.” The Hebrew word is go’el which has the meaning of kinsmen redeemer. The Biblical book of Ruth is a beautiful story of a man, Boaz who acts as a kinsmen redeemer for his relative, Ruth. Victor Buksbazen comments on the role of the kinsmen redeemer in Israel:

“Redeemer – Hebrew “goel”, a kinsman, who pays up the debt in order to redeem a near but impoverished relative, who was forced to sell himself or his property to satisfy a debt. (See Lev. 25:25, 32, 48, also Isa. 59:20). (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 340).

God as Israel’s (Judah’s) Redeemer is a major theme of the book of Isaiah. God is described as the Redeemer (go’el): Isaiah 43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26 and 54:5, 8; 59:20; 60:16; and 63:16. The action of God in redeeming His people (go’el) is declared in Isaiah 35:9; 43:1; 44:22; 44:23; 48:20; 51:10; 52:3, 9; 62:12; and 63:9. Not only was this description of God as a Redeemer (go’el) a source of great eternal comfort for His people in the Old Testament but it is also the believer’s great hope for an eternal destination with God through the great accomplished word of God’s Son, the believer’s Saviour as described so clearly in the New Testament. See extended comment on “go’el” on the notes for Isaiah 35:9 in this study

Second, God in vs. 14 describes Himself as the “Holy One of Israel”. This is a very special name for God, that occurs 28 times in Isaiah: 1:4; 5:19, 24; 10:17, 20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19, 23; 30:11, 12, 15; 31:1; 37:23; 41:14, 16, 20; 43:3, 14, 15; 45:11; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5; 55:5; 60:9 and 14. Isaiah also uses “Holy One” as a title 4 times: 10:17; 40:25; 43:15; 49:7 and “Holy One of Jacob” once: 29:23. The repetition of this title in Isaiah must not be overlooked as just a common title. It is a most sacred name for God. He declares Himself to be the “Holy One.” The word “holy” as applied to God is a description of His essential nature. It has a variety of meanings but its most basic meaning is glory, honour, abundance (literally: weight) and is the opposite of anything evil, profane or common. Hosea 11:9 states: “For I am God and not a man, the Holy One in the midst of you.” The spectacular revelation of the Scriptures is that the Most High God, whose holiness is Himself, (and not just one of His attributes), has elected to live among His chosen people. There is none like Him, none holy like Him, and there is no other God, anywhere, at any time Who has come to live among mankind. He therefore is no far from anyone but close to all. The New Testament reveals a divine mystery. This Holy One comes even closer to those who profess faith in His Son by entering into residence within the believer through the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 3:16 and Colossians 1:27. For an extended article on the holiness of God, refer to the Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. 3; Holiness: pages 173-183.

41:15-16 Look, I will make you to be a new sharp threshing instrument having many teeth.
You will thresh the mountains, 
crush them and make the hills like chaff.
16 You will winnow them and the wind will carry them away, 
and the whirlwind will scatter them. 
Then you will rejoice in the LORD; 
you will glory in the Holy One of Israel.

In the context of chapter 41, and specifically with reference to vs. 9 (see notes on vs. 9), the message of Isaiah in verses 15-16 would not easily apply to the returning exiles from Babylon. Many Biblical scholars claim the message of Isaiah chapters 40-66 are mostly directed to these returning exiles. However, this claim needs to be examined closely. Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, pages 41-51 has provided an excellent
discussion on this issue. There are certainly specific references to Babylon within chapters 40-66: 43:14; 44:24 - 45:7; 45:11-13; 46:1-13; 47:1-15; and 48:12-22 but it would be unwise and not exegetically sustainable to consider that these references indicate that all of chapters 40-66 are about the return of the exiles from Babylon. Verses 15-16 of Isaiah chapter 41 certainly do not fit the days of the return of the Babylonian exiles to Jerusalem. The question then must be asked: to what days or time do these verses apply? As was discussed in the notes on vs. 9, these verses must apply to some day or period in the future that has yet to be fulfilled. The days that best apply to these verses therefore, would be those immediately following the second coming of Jesus Christ when He as a warrior King will enable His remnant people to defeat their enemies and along with Christ, establish His Messianic kingdom. For example, Micah 4:11-13 refers to the future days when Israel will arise and thresh and pulverize many nations. This prophecy comes immediately after a reference to Babylon: Micah 4:10.

When the time arrives, Isaiah 41:15-16, God will make His people like a threshing sledge to pulverize the mountains so that nothing remains and then His people will rejoice in Him and glory in “the Holy One of Israel.” J. Alec Motyer comments on these two verses:

15–16. Note the balance between I will make and you will winnow. The Lord’s transforming power is not meant to immobilize but to enable His people. A threshing-sledge was a heavy wooden platform with sharp cutting edges fitted underneath. Thresh the mountains: i.e. tackle the seemingly impossible, remove the seemingly impenetrable (Zech. 4:7). Wind … gale: the ‘forces of nature’ are often used as symbols of divine action (Pss 18:7–15; 104:4). So, here, the Lord who transforms (15a) and mobilizes (16a) his people leaps in powerfully on their side to scatter and remove what stood in their way. The LORD … the Holy One of Israel occurs here as the end ‘bracket’ matching verse 14. Rejoice … glory: joy, here (cf. the singing of 54:1) symbolizes glad entrance into what the Lord has done for us; he is the Agent, we the beneficiaries; his the work, ours the joy. (J. Alec Motyer, Isaiah, page 255).

Introduction to Isaiah 41:17-20

These verses are a declaration of God’s care and saving acts on behalf of His people. These words from God as recorded by Isaiah were addressed to the people of Judah. Isaiah delivers a message of hope and comfort for a future time when God will restore the natural world that has been under the curse of God since the fall of earth’s first parents. The location of this restoration will undoubtedly be the kingdom of Messiah where His people Israel will live in harmony with nature and under the rule and nurture of their divine King. The description of God’s restorative work complements similar promises found in the writings of the prophets: Isaiah 11:6-10; 30:19-26; 32:15-18; 35:1-10; 43:19-21; 44:1-5; 55:13; 65:17-25; Ezekiel 34:23-31; Hosea 2:18-23; and Amos 9:11-15.

41:17 The poor and needy seek water,  
but there is none.  
Their tongue fails for thirst;  
I, the LORD, will answer them,  
I, the God of Israel, will not abandon them.

At the end of the chaotic and terrifying days of tribulation, the remnant of God’s people (the afflicted and needy) will be seeking relief from their thirst but they will not be able to find water in the desert lands where they have fled. But God will nourish them. Revelation 12:13-14. See also Zechariah 14:1-8. God will take upon Himself the care of His afflicted people. As the God of Israel, He will not forsake them. This is one of the most comforting promises for the people of God. In vs. 9, Isaiah declared a similar promise: “I have chosen you and not rejected you.” See also Isaiah 43:1-7. The Apostle Paul wrote: “I ask then, has God rejected his people? Certainly not!” Romans 11:1. The writer of Hebrews, quoting Deuteronomy
Isaiah Chapters 40-48: Page 37

31:6, states: “for he has said, I will never leave you or forsake you.” Hebrews 13:5. One of the reasons for God’s care for His people is stated in vs. 20. God jealously guards His reputation and accomplishes great things so that the whole earth will know of Him and glorify His name. See notes on vs. 14 above.

41:18 I will open rivers on the bare heights,  
and springs in the midst of the valleys.  
I will make the wilderness a pool of water,  
and the dry land springs of water.

God promises that His care for his thirsty people will involve a supernatural transformation of areas known to be devoid of water: the bare heights, barren valleys, wilderness areas, and dry land. To these areas, God will cause water to flow like rivers, springs to rise up, pools and fountains of water to emerge. Isaiah gives a dramatic picture of this transformation as recorded in 43:19-21.

19 Look, I will do a new thing.  
Now it springs forth.  
Can't you see it?  
I will even make a way in the wilderness,  
and streams in the desert.

20 The wild animals of the fields will honor me,  
the jackals and the ostriches;  
because I provided waters in the wilderness,  
and streams in the desert,  
to give drink to my people, my chosen,  
the people I formed for myself,  
that they might declare my praise.

21 God will create waters in the desert to give drink to His chosen people.” Isaiah 43:20. The result of God’s life preserving work in these dry and arid places will be for the people whom He had formed for Himself and they will declare His praise. Isaiah 43:21.

41:19 I will grow in the wilderness the cedar,  
acacia, myrtle, and olive trees.  
I will set in the desert the cypress,  
fir, and pine tree together.

God, not only will provide a supernatural water supply to dry and waterless places, but He will also create (put) trees in the wilderness and desert. The supply of water will be necessary for the trees to survive. Not only does God miraculously care for His people but He transforms the natural world by the supply of trees that support animal life, provide shade and shelter for people and create beauty from bareness. As in many other passages in Isaiah, vs. 19 demonstrates God’s care for His created world. For example, in 32:15 Isaiah predicts:

Until the Spirit is poured on us from on high,  
and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field,  
and the fruitful field considered a forest.
See greater context: 32:15-20. There are seven trees described in 41:19: cedar, acacia, myrtle, olive, cypress, fir and pine. These are all native to Judah and its immediate surrounding areas but not to other parts of the Near Eastern geographical area. The cedar will once again be the glory of Lebanon and the myrtle will have much significance. In the future days of the Messianic kingdom, God will restore a specific feast to honour His presence. The Feast of Tabernacles (or booths) will be celebrated (Zechariah 14:16). In preparation for the feast of Tabernacles, the Israelites gathered branches from leafy trees including the myrtle to use in the construction of booths (Nehemiah 8:15). The requirements for the Feast of Tabernacles are described most specifically in Leviticus 23:33-44 and Deuteronomy 16:13-17. Peter, the disciple of Christ, was overwhelmed by Christ’s transfiguration and, as he understood it, desired to make booths. (Matthew 17:4, Mark 9:5; Luke 9:33). Peter may have had a sense of the reason for the Feast of Tabernacles for it celebrates the truth of God’s dwelling among His people. The Lord will provide abundant leafy trees including the myrtle so that every year, in the Messianic kingdom, everyone will participate in this glorious Feast to celebrate the presence of the Lord among them. The significance of God’s usage of “tabernacle” in Revelation 21:3 should not be missed!

41:20 *This is done so they may see, know, consider, and understand together,*

*that the hand of the LORD has done this,*

*and the Holy One of Israel has created it.*

The ultimate reason the Lord will supernaturally give water and trees to dry and arid places during the future Messianic kingdom is revealed in vs. 20. It is true that He will do this so that His people will have water to survive and trees to provide shelter and shade and for the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, but the core reason is that His people and all peoples on the earth will see and recognize that it is God Himself who has done these works of creation. God above all else, desires that His name be hallowed in all the earth. Matthew 6:9. He has an intense desire for the recognition of His great name. 1 Samuel 12:22; and that His name would be magnified forever. 2 Samuel 7:26. He does miraculous things, such as parting the waters of the Red Sea, to make for Himself an everlasting name (Isaiah 63:12). A study of the name of the Lord in Scripture will reveal many such passages that declare the truth that the Lord could not accomplish His marvellous works in the name of any other being, human or spiritual. Luke, the author of the Book of Acts declares: “*There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven, given among humans, by which we must be saved.*” Acts 4:12. According to the Scriptures, there is “no other name.” There is no name greater, more exalted, more worthy to be praised, none higher, none to be worshiped forever than the name of the Lord, the Holy One of Israel. God could not accomplish what He does in any other name or exalt any other name. It is entirely holy and righteous for God to exalt His own name. No one could think or suggest a higher more worthy name for God’s creation to praise so God exalts His name as the ultimate reason for His works among mankind.

**Introduction to Isaiah 41:21-24**

This Messianic study of Isaiah suggests that chapter 41 contains both a prophetic message from Isaiah that is eschatological (concerning the end times) and yet has clear references to the return of the exiles from Babylon following the edict from the Persian king Cyrus. There is no Biblical evidence that the returning exiles from Babylon brought with them idols from this nation or any other nation. However, idols will be present in the end times (Revelation 9:20) and will be an abomination to the Lord then as they were during the days of Isaiah. Therefore, Isaiah’s audience regarding God’s taunt regarding idols (gods vs. 23) would understand the message as they would have from Isaiah previous messages: Isaiah 2:8-24; 10:10-11; 19:1-3;
They would have also understood God’s wrathful judgment regarding idols in Isaiah’s coming messages: 42:17; 44:9-20; 45:16-25; 48:1-11; 57:13 and 66:3-4. The prophet in 41:21-24 is declaring that worthless idols have no ability to either predict what is going to happen in the future or to explain what has happened in the past with the conclusion that anyone who would choose to worship an idol is an abomination to the Lord.

41:21 "Present your case," says the LORD.
"Put forth your best arguments," says the King of Jacob.

In contrast to vs. 1 of Isaiah chapter 31, God calls His audience (perhaps the coastlands as in vs. 1) to present their case. In vs. 1 the coastlands were to listen to Him in silence. Verses 21 and following are presented in a courtroom setting where God is both the divine prosecutor and judge. God’s demand for the nations to speak up stem from His claim of His sovereign works recorded in the previous verses of this chapter. The charge directed to these nations is presented in vs. 22. The words “the King of Jacob” are very significant for they are God’s self declaration that He is their King. As King, He righteously reigns over His people and demands that they not only worship Him as their one true God but obey Him as their divine King. The words “King of Jacob” occur only in this verse. The words, “King of Israel” referring to God alone occur in Isaiah 44:6 and Zephaniah 3:15 in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, the words “King of Israel” are ascribed to the Messiah in John 1:49 and 12:13. As King, God is exalted and rules with righteousness. Selected verses for reference: God as King rule (reigns): Old Testament: 1 Chronicles 29:12; Psalm 22:28; 47:8; 59:13; 66:7; 72:8; 93:1; 95:3; 96:10; 97:1; 98:6; 99:1; 103:19; 110:2; 146:10; Isaiah 19:4; 24:23; 32:1; 40:10; Jeremiah 23:5; Lamentations 5:19; and Micah 5:2. New Testament: Matthew 2:6; Romans 15:12; 1 Corinthians 15:24; Revelation 1:5; 2:27; 12:5; and 19:15. As a King, God rule over His Kingdom: Selected Old Testament References: Psalm 22:28; 45:6; 145:11-13; 148:11; Isaiah 9:7; 24:21; 49:7, 23; 52:15; Daniel 4:3, 34; and 7:27. In the New Testament there are numerous references to God’s Kingdom either stated as the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven. See also Revelation 11:15 and 12:10. Another expression of the rule of the King in the New Testament is “King of kings and Lord of lords,” see; 1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 17:14 and 19:16. The term Lord of lords is also found in Deuteronomy 10:17.

41:22 Let them bring in their idols.
Tell us what is going to happen.
Declare what things happened in the past,
what they were,
so that we may consider them,
and check whether they actually happened
or tell us what things are to come.

The first charges against the nations are recorded in vs. 22. The first charge: God calls upon them to declare what is going to take place in the future. The second charge: God calls upon them to reveal what where previous events, which may have reference to God’s work among His people. They are to reveal these events, if they knew them so God, speaking in the plural, can consider or weigh them and know their outcome. The third charge, in the last line of vs. 22, is a repeat of the first: “tell us what things are to come.” There is no doubt that this a taunt from God for it is obvious from earlier messages by Isaiah that idols are worthless. See references within the Book of Isaiah to idols in the notes on introduction to verses 21-24.
41:23 Predict the things that are to come in the future,  
that we may prove that you are gods.  
Yes, do good, or do evil,  
so that we may be frightened and be in awe.

God continues his taunt against the idols of the nations. Again, He charges them (these worthless idols) to declare future things and now God adds: “that we may prove that you are gods.” One certain sign of divinity as God explains is the supernatural ability to declare with accuracy future events. This is similar to God’s judgment upon false prophets: Deuteronomy 13:1-5; 18:15-22; Jeremiah 23:15-40. God’s taunt is next directed at the very core of the inability of any idol to perform any task or to accomplish anything at all. God demands these idols: “do good or do evil that we may be frightened and be in awe.” If they could perform any task (either good or evil) then there would be cause for concern but God is neither fearful nor ignorant of the abilities of these idols. Refer to J. Alec Motyer, Isaiah, page 257 for a discussion on the impotency of idols.

41:24 Look, you are nothing,  
and your work is nothing at all.  
The one who chooses you is an abomination.

God, now the judge, declares His judgment in this courtroom setting. The first judgment is upon the idols. There are two aspects to this judgment. First God states, “you are nothing.” A common Hebrew word in the Scriptures for idol is elil which has the meaning of “worthless.” In vs. 24 in the NIV, God declares these idols to be “less than nothing.” The second aspect of the first judgment of God upon the idols is that: “your work is nothing at all.” The NIV has “utterly worthless.” Idols as described by God have no value nor can they accomplish anything whatsoever. The second judgment declared by God regards those who choose idols to be their gods. God states: “He who chooses you (an idol) is an abomination.” Those who choose to carve, fashion and worship idols have this condemnation from God upon them. This condemnation was as dramatic and eventful in the long days before Isaiah’s ministry and continues in the millennia following the days of Isaiah. God’s judgment upon those who choose idols has not changed and will not change (Revelation 9:20-21). The Apostle Paul stated: “We know that an idol doesn't exist in the real world, and that there is no God but one.” 1 Corinthians 8:4.

41:25 I have stirred up one from the north,  
and he is coming,  
from the rising of the sun one who calls on my name.  
He will trample on rulers like mud,  
and like the potter treads clay.

In keeping with the context of the preceding verses, God makes a declaration of great prophetic importance to prove that He alone can declare the things that are going to come in the future. God is proclaiming to all the earth that because He can do this His name therefore is above every name and He alone is the God of creation and the universe and that the words of vs. 20 apply only to Him. God words in vs. 25 must apply to someone and the great majority of evangelical conservative scholars are of the opinion that this someone is Cyrus whom Isaiah speaks more about in a later passage: 45:1. Not everyone is convinced however that king Cyrus is the identity of the one that God has: “aroused from the north and he has come.” Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, pages 148-149 has provided an detailed discussion on the possibility that the one referenced as the “one from the north” is king Sennacherib of Assyria. For a discussion in support of the view that Cyrus is
intended as the identity of this “one from the north”, see Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *Handbook of the Prophets*, pages 98-99.

The words regarding this coming one in vs. 25: “And he will trample on rulers like mud, and like the potter treads clay.” describe the way in which Cyrus will, in the future (to Isaiah’s day), go about his conquest of nations. Historical records confirm the veracity of this prophecy as Cyrus faced little opposition in his military campaigns and no more so than in the conquest of Babylon. See comments in the notes of this study on Isaiah 45:1-7. The student of Scriptures should take careful notice of the English grammatical tenses of vs. 25. The verse begins with the past tense “I have stirred up” and the present tense “he is coming” and then proceeds to the future tense ‘he will trample.” The NIV translation contains all present tense actions while the KJV has two tenses: the present and the future. The point here is not to engage into an exacting study of the Hebrew verbs but to understand that God sees the past, present and future unlike humans see or perceive time. God experiences time and eternity as a constant experience. He does not simply know about the past, present and future as a constant but experiences them in the “eternal now.” By doing so, God can with precision declare a far future event with divine confidence so that the believer can have absolute assurance that what God declares about the future will take place exactly as He says it will. In verses 26-29, Isaiah expounds on this supernatural ability of God to proclaim the future.

41:26 Who has declared it from the beginning, that we may know?
   Who has announced ahead of time,
   that we may say, "This one is right"?
   Yes, none of them has predicted it,
   yes, there is none of them who have proclaimed it,
   yes, there is none of them who heard your words.

God stands alone in foretelling the future. He asks “Who has declared it from the beginning, that we might know?” He asks this question to the assembled nations accompanied with their idols in a court room setting (vs. 21 and following). The Lord asks those in the courtroom if they could identify who declares the choice of a specific person “from the beginning?” (perhaps from the beginning of human history). This rhetorical question continues with: “or from former times” with the response that the court would state in its decision: “He is right!” The implication of the rhetorical question is that only one positive response is possible. Only the Holy One of Israel is right for He alone accurately and with precision foretells the future. The word “This” in the third line of vs. 26, refers to the one, king Cyrus, whom God has stirred up (vs. 25).

The second part of vs. 26 answers the question in a negative sense with God stating that with the thrice repeated “none of them” who predicted, proclaimed or heard your (God’s) words. There were no words to hear because the worthless idols of the nations could not declare or proclaim anything. See a similar question/response in 41:4 and a similar demand in verses 22-23.

41:27 I first declared to Zion,
   'Look, here they are,'
   I gave Jerusalem a messenger bringing good tidings.

God verbally strikes out against the worthless idols of the nations by stating that He had indeed declared good news to Zion and Jerusalem (His people): See also 40:9 and 52:7 : “Look here they are” and “I gave Jerusalem a messenger bringing good tidings” possibly referring to Isaiah as stated by Gleason L. Archer:
“27. Behold them: ie., behold the fulfillments of my predictions. Render the verse thus: “(As) the first (to say) to Zion, ‘lo and behold them,’ I was giving to Jerusalem a messenger of good news” (i.e., Isaiah himself).” (Gleason L. Archer, Isaiah, page 638).

Victor Buksbazen adds:

“In stark contrast to the pagan idols who cannot foretell the future nor do anything good or bad, Jehovah has sent a messenger of good tidings, who long before the event, predicted the deliverance of His people from the Babylonian exile (Isa. 11:10-16, 21:1-10, 35:10). The whole of Isaiah 13 was a prediction of the future defeat of the Babylonian empire at the hands of the Medians.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 343).

41:28-29 I look but there is no one.
   There is no sage among them,
   that I might ask them and receive an answer.
Look, all of them are nothing.
   Their deeds are empty.
   Their metal images are nothing but an empty wind.

The last two verses of chapter 41 of Isaiah conclude God’s courtroom drama and His final judgment on the idols of the nation. God has declared in verses 25-27 that He alone delivers to His people a true prediction of coming events and it is He who gives them a messenger of good news. God looks among the nations and finds no one, no counsellor who can give an answer to any question God (or anyone else) could ask of them. God’s final statement of judgment is recorded in vs. 29: “Look, all of them (the nations of the world) are nothing; their deeds are nothing (they can perform no works worthy of God’s standard); and their metal images are nothing but an empty wind.”(Their idols are absolutely worthless and of no value to themselves or to anyone else). Thomas Constable comments on verses 28-29:

“When the Lord looked for a messenger from another god who predicted the coming of Cyrus, He could find none. Not one of them could give any information about his coming (cf. 40:13). So He concluded as He began (v. 24), but this time passing judgment on the idolaters rather than on the idols. "Behold" ends each subsection (vv. 24, 29). The idolaters are false in the sense of being untrue and delusive. Their works—the idols—are worthless, and their idol images amount to nothing.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 197).

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 41:
41:1 The Court of God’s Summons
41:2-4 The Call of God’s Servant (Cyrus)
41:5-7 The Coming of God’s Servant (Cyrus)
41:8-10 The Choosing of God’s Servant (Israel)
41:11-20 The Conserving of God’s Servant (Israel)
41:21-29 The Conclusion of God’s Summons


Isaiah, beginning with chapter 42 introduces a magnificent series of prophecies on the Messianic Servant of the Lord. Scholars often refer to these series of prophetic messages as the Servant Songs. They are not really songs but divine declarations regarding One who is to come who will later in Isaiah be revealed as the One upon whom “the LORD has laid on him the sin of us all.” Isaiah 53:6. This Servant will therefore be revealed as the coming Messiah whom the New Testament ascribes the name of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.
Four Messianic Servant messages are usually understood to be recorded in Isaiah 42:1-13; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; and 52:13-53:12.

Chapter 42 is easily divided into two sections regarding the servants of God. The first 13 verses refer to the great Messianic Servant of God (vs. 1: Behold My Servant). This Servant is the Son of God, the Messiah who is revealed in the New Testament as the Lord Jesus Christ. This Servant brings light to His people and to the nations of the world. The second section, verses 14-25 refer to the people of God as the blind and deaf servant of God. The blind and deaf people of God cannot bring light to the nations (or to themselves) and they need, as do all nations to be enlightened by the great Messianic Servant of God.

Much scholarly debate has arisen over the identity of the Servant in these four prophetic messages. This study intentionally does not review the literature regarding this debate. Many excellent scholarly works are available for those who seek to engage in a study of this debate. A few suggested sources are listed below for this purpose. As has been observed, this study stands solidly for a Messianic understanding of the content of Isaiah including the four Messianic Servant messages listed above. The suggested sources for a deeper engagement in the study of the Messianic Servant Messages include (as listed in the Introduction):

1. Baron, David. The Servant of Jehovah: The Sufferings of the Messiah and the Glory That Should Follow, Marshall, Morgan & Scott. An Internet version is available. This resource is referenced in this study as David Baron, The Servant of Jehovah, page__.


These extended comments by Victor Buksbazen on Isaiah 42:1-7 are provided as an example of conservative evangelical scholarship regarding the Messianic identity of the Servant:

“I Behold My Servant

The identity of “the servant of Jehovah” has for many centuries been the subject of a heated controversy. In this passage “the servant” clearly appears to be an individual personality, chosen and appointed by Jehovah to bring salvation to Israel and to be a light to the nations. However, further in this chapter (v. 19 ff.), the “servant of Jehovah “ is distinctly Israel as a people, about whom the Lord complains that they are blind and deaf, unfaithful and hard of understanding. Many Jewish and liberal Christian commentators have maintained that “the servant of Jehovah” always refers to Israel, either as a collective body, or to “ideal Israel,” or to “a faithful remnant of Israel.” Nevertheless the majority of ancient Jewish scholars have interpreted Isaiah 42:1-4 and other related passages, as referring to the Messiah.

Thus, the Palestinian Targum, an ancient Aramaic paraphrase of the Old Testament, renders “Behold my servant” as “Behold the Messiah my servant.” The difficulty in the proper identification of “the servant” is due to the fact the same adjectives are often applied both the servant as a people, and to the servant as a person. Delitzsch explains the seeming contradiction by comparing Israel to a pyramid, the base of which is the whole of Israel, the central part is the spiritual remnant and the apex is the personal mediator of salvation, the Messiah, who is destined to accomplish that which Jehovah intended Israel to be, was not. (Delitzsch Commentary to Isaiah, Vol. 2, pages 174-175, Eerdmans).
Usually the context of the servant passages makes it quite clear whether “the servant” is collective Israel or the individual representative of the true Israel, the anointed mediator and saviour. In the second part of Isaiah there are four distinct Messianic “servant of the Lord” prophecies which apply to the person of the Messiah. These are Isaiah 42:1-7, 49:1-7, 50:4-11 and 52:13-53:12.

Israel is also collectively referred to as the servant in 41:8-16; 42:18-21, 43:10, 44:1-5, and v. 21. It is important that we at all times distinguish between the two types of “the servant of the Lord” prophecies or songs, as they are sometimes called.


In chapter 42:1-4, the servant of Jehovah is an individual personality, as in Isaiah 11:2, is endowed with the spirit of the Lord, and is called to establish true justice for all nations. The Messianic servant of the Lord is humble, unobtrusive and compassionate (v.2). He does not crush the weak or the broken, but heals them (v. 3). He never wavers and is not crushed by His adversaries, nor by the enormity of His task, but will in the end accomplish His divinely appointed task.

**And for his law the islands shall wait**

The implied thought here is that in the hearts of all men there is an unconscious longing for the manifestation of God’s eternal law, for His truth and justice, which the servant will reveal to all nations.

The New Testament and the early church saw in the servant passages a unique prophecy concerning Christ, remarkably fulfilled in the person of Jesus. Most Jewish and liberal Christian scholars have generally applied all these passages to national Israel. However, this interpretation does violence to the obvious sense of the text.

**5-7 Thus says God who is Jehovah**

With majestic solemnity Jehovah, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, introduces His servant declaring that He has appointed Him to be a covenant to the people Israel and for a light to the nations. The servant of this passage is to be a covenant to the people. This is “the covenant of peace” mentioned in Isaiah 54:10 and “the eternal covenant” of 61:8. It is also the new covenant promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 16:60. The servant will heal Israel from spiritual blindness. The personal character of the servant is clear, and presents a sharp contrast to national Israel who is still blind, and dwells in darkness in a spiritual dungeon (v. 7).” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, pages 343-345).

John A. Martin, also comments:

42:1–4. Some Bible students say My Servant here refers to Israel, which is clearly the case in verse 19. True, Israel was upheld and chosen by the Lord, and was His delight. However, the statements in verses 1b–4 suggest that here the Servant is the Messiah. This One has the Spirit of God on Him (cf. 11:2), and He will bring justice to the nations (cf. 9:7; 11:3–4; 16:5). He will be gentle (42:2–3a)—most people would break a weak, useless reed, but He will not do so—and He will be faithful (v. 3b) and not … discouraged (v. 4). He gave the Law in which the islands (i.e., people in remote parts; cf. 41:1) will … hope. Matthew 12:18–21 quotes Isaiah 42:1–4 with some minor variations, relating it to Jesus and His ministry in Israel. As God’s Servant, Jesus did what Israel could never do. He perfectly carried out the will of the father so that people everywhere may believe in the Holy One of Israel. (John A. Martin, Isaiah, page 1095, © 1985 John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck. The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament is published by David C Cook. All rights reserved).
42:1: Behold My Servant, whom I uphold;  
My chosen one in whom My soul delights.  
I have put My Spirit upon Him;  
He will bring forth justice to the nations. (NASB)

Isaiah begins the first Messianic servant message with these most beautiful and affectionate words from God:

“Behold My Servant” (NASB)  
The NASB rightly interprets the Hebrew hen in 41:29 and the next verse 42:1 as a call to seriously consider the contrast between the worthless works and worship of the heathen nations and the One who is God’s Servant. There is a divine reason for this call of God for serious consideration of His Servant. God is heralding the future ministry of this Servant to all nations. The nations have just been found totally unable to give counsel regarding past or future events or to pronounce any good news. The idols of these nations have also been declared in God’s court of justice to be nothing but an empty wind, 41:29. What God was looking for among the nations, a counsellor, was not to be found so He now abruptly announces to these same nations that they behold His Servant. This is strikingly similar to the words of the returning warrior king (the Messiah) as recorded in Isaiah 63:5:

I looked, but there was no one to help;  
I was shocked that there was no one to lend support.  
Therefore my own arm brought me salvation,  
and my wrath sustained me.

The words of Isaiah 42:1 describe an earlier portion of the earthly work of the Servant of God while the words of Isaiah 63:5 describe a much later earthly work of this same Servant. Both of these prophetic passages were still far in the future for Isaiah and his contemporaries. The Isaiah 63:5 passage may be yet far but perhaps close in future time for the modern reader of the book of Isaiah.


“Whom I support”  
God promises to support (uphold or hold fast) His Servant. God had previously stated that he would uphold (hold fast, keep for Himself) His people (41:10). The idea is similar in meaning to the psalmist’s words in Psalm 41:12:

As for me, you uphold me because of my integrity;  
you set me in your presence forever.
There will be no release or relaxing of God’s hold on His Servant (the Messiah, the Son of God). God keeps a “grip” on His Son so that everything God has required of His Servant will be accomplished. No one can or will ever thwart or ambush God’s divine plans for His Servant because God keeps Him held fast to Himself. See also the words of Jesus: John 5:36 and 14:10. J Alec Motyer, comments on the intent of God’s “holding fast” of His Servant in Isaiah 42:1:

“There will be no release or relaxing of God’s hold on His Servant (the Messiah, the Son of God). God keeps a “grip” on His Son so that everything God has required of His Servant will be accomplished. No one can or will ever thwart or ambush God’s divine plans for His Servant because God keeps Him held fast to Himself. See also the words of Jesus: John 5:36 and 14:10. J Alec Motyer, comments on the intent of God’s “holding fast” of His Servant in Isaiah 42:1:

“My chosen one” (NASB)
The Messiah, the Servant, is also God’s Son. There is a unique eternal relationship between the Father and the Son. When God declares that the Servant is His chosen one, it has a deeper and greater significance than God stating that He has chosen any other servant (i.e. Moses: Psalm 106:23; David: 2 Chronicles 6:6; Solomon: 1 Chronicles 29:1 or Israel/Jacob: Isaiah 44:1). The plan of God from all eternity (it always was His plan) was to have His chosen One, who is His Son, the Messiah, to accomplish His great act of love for the world (John 3:16) so that whosoever would believe in His Son would have eternal life with God (Father and Spirit). The Servant (Messiah) was chosen by the Father to accomplish an act of grace (by His death) that was so infinitely superior and eternally significant than was or could be accomplished by any other servant of God. The intimate relationship between God as Father and as Son is of such glorious magnificence in its holiness and beauty that for God to describe the Servant (His Son) as His “chosen one” is for God to say “We have by our divine decree and holiness of design elected to perform a work of love beyond that which anyone else (spirit or flesh) could ever imagine, devise or accomplish.” God the Father chose to have God the Son accomplish this work as His chosen One. What it cost the Son to complete His work as a Servant of the Father is revealed in the New Testament. (i.e. Philippians 2:5-11 and Hebrews 12:3). A glimpse of this cost was prophesied in the Old Testament. (i.e. Psalm 22; Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12). See also Luke 9:35 which record the words of the Father from heaven regarding His Son: “This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to him!” (ESV)

“in whom my soul delights”
God is speaking about His unique relationship between Himself and the chosen Servant whom He upholds. There is no greater, no holier, more intimate relationship than between the individual members of the Godhead. Indeed they (the plural singularity that defines the Trinune God) can never be separated nor have any disagreement. God states that His soul delights in the Servant (the Messiah, His Son, Jesus Christ). God is declaring that he delights (favours, accepts, approves, has pleasure) in the Servant with His whole being for in reality He is delighting in Himself as the triune God. This special relationship is witnessed in the New Testament. At the baptism of Jesus Christ, the words of the Father are heard from heaven as recorded in Matthew 3:17: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” The words of the Father are heard again from heaven on the mount of transfiguration as recorded in Matthew 17:5: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him.” Matthew 17:5 See also Mark 1:11; 9:7; Luke 3:22 and 9:35.

“I have put My Spirit upon Him”
Isaiah earlier had declared this blessed prophesy in 11:1-2 and would later state it in 61:1. (see notes on these verses). The purpose of the placement (anointing) of the Spirit upon this Servant is for the purposes of accomplishing the mission and task assigned to the Son by the Father. At the beginning of the Messiah’s public ministry, at His baptism, this placement of the Spirit on the Son was witnessed by those present. Matthew records: “After Jesus was baptized, when he came up out of the water, suddenly, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon him.” Matthew 3:16.
See also Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22 and John 1:32-34. The Servant, Jesus Christ, the Messiah was anointed by the Spirit to carry out His divine work, perform miracles, endure earthly temptations and sufferings and to rise from death.

He will bring forth justice to the nations.”

One of these tasks of the Servant (after having the Spirit descend upon Him) that Isaiah highlights is the establishing of justice (Hebrew mishpat) to the world. This work of establishing justice is mentioned three times in this passage: vs. 1, 3 and 4 which is highly significant. That God is One who righteously dispenses justice is a major theme of the Scriptures. The first mention of justice occurs in Genesis 18:19 in the context of a discussion God holds with Himself regarding Abraham: “For I have chosen him, so that he may instruct his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice; so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what he has promised him. During another conversation, Abraham challenges God to be just, as recorded in Genesis 18:25: “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” The justice of God is an important theological theme of the Psalms: 25:9; 33:5; 37:28; 89:14; 97:2; 99:4; 101:1; 111:7; 140:12 and 146:7. God’s justice is also a significant theological theme of Isaiah: 1:27; 9:7; 16:5; 28:6, 17; 30:18; 32:1, 16; 33:5; 40:14; 42:1, 3, 4; 51:4; 58:2 and 61:8. The prophet Jeremiah considers the justice of God worthy of boasting about in 9:24. Jeremiah also declares the justice of the Messiah during His millennial reign in 23:5 and 33:15. The justice of God is declared in Daniel 4:37 and in the Minor Prophets: Hosea 2:19; Micah 7:9 and Zephaniah 3:5. In the New Testament see Matthew 12:18-21 (quoting from Isaiah 42:1-4) and Luke 7:29. Refer also to Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, pages 161-162 for an extended discussion.

42:2-4 He will not cry out,
   or raise his voice,
   or make his voice heard in the street.
3 A bruised reed he will not break,
   and a faintly burning wick will he not extinguish.
   He will bring forth justice with faithfulness.
4 He will not grow faint or be discouraged
   until he has established justice on earth;
   the coastlands will expectantly wait for his teaching.

Following the great introductory verse (42:1) of the person and role of God’s unique Servant (the Messiah), Isaiah provides more personal details about the Servant’s character when He will carry out the work of establishing justice to the nations (see also Isaiah 32:1) by the literary device of seven negative phrases in verses 2-4. The Servant (1) will not cry out; (2) nor raise His voice; (3) will not make His voice heard in the street; (4) will not break a bruised reed; (5) will not extinguish a faintly burning wick; (6) will not grow faint (be disheartened); (7) nor will He be discouraged crushed (until He has established justice in the earth). There are also two similar positive statements in these verses: He will bring forth justice with faithfulness and until he has established justice on the earth which refer to the second advent of the Messiah.

(1)He will not cry out (2) or raise his voice (3) or make his voice heard in the street
The Servant will not be seeking personal attention and fame (vs. 2) by loudly crying out or proclaiming Himself in public. The words “cry out” (Hebrew za’aq) depict a cry of anguish during a time of distress. Isaiah uses this Hebrew word in similar situations as recorded in 19:20; 30:19; 33:7; 46:7; and 65:14. See also Exodus 2:23; Judges 3:9, 15; 6:6-7; 1 Samuel 7:8-9; 8:18; 15:11; 1 Chronicles 5:20; 2 Chronicles 32:20; Psalm 22:5; 107:13, 19; 142:5; Jeremiah 11:11; 30:15; Lamentations 3:8; Ezekiel 9:8; Joel 1:14; and Micah
3:4. The prophecy that God’s Servant will not cry out was fulfilled in Messiah first advent when He suffered indignity before Roman rulers Luke 23:9 and at the hands of cruel Roman soldiers who beat him severely. See Matthew 27: 26-34; Mark 15:16-21; John 19:1-16; Hebrews 12:3 and 1 Peter 2:23.

(4) A bruised reed he will not break (5) and a faintly burning wick will he not extinguish (6) He will not grow faint and (7) He will not be discouraged
The Messiah emphatically declared that he came down from heaven not to do His Own will but the will of Him who sent Him, (John 6:38). See also John 4:34 and 5:30. The Servant will tenderly care for the weak and broken (the bruised reed and dimly burning wick, vs. 3). He will be a gentle shepherd to those whom He came to save. Matthew describes the ministry of Jesus and particularly the healing and caring aspect of this ministry without public fame by quoting from this passage in Isaiah. Matthew 12:15-21. See also Isaiah 40:11; 50:4; 61:1 and John 10:11).

The two positive statements in verses 3 and 4 have to do with establishing justice on the earth by bringing forth justice with faithfulness (or by faithfully establishing justice on the earth). The farthest part of the earth, described by Isaiah as the coastlands “will expectantly wait for His teaching” (vs. 4) or as Matthew states it: “until he brings justice to victory. And in his name shall the Gentiles hope.” (Matthew 12:20-21). One of the most significant works of the Servant will be to bring justice not only to His people Israel but to the Gentiles from all nations of the earth. Justice will only be accomplished in the earth when the Messiah returns (His second advent) to demolish the rebellion of the nations against Israel (Isaiah 42:13, Psalm 2; Joel 3:2-4; Zechariah 14:1-3; Revelation 16:14-16 – the battle of Armageddon) and by the establishment of the His earthly kingdom.

42:5 This is what the sovereign LORD says,
he who created the heavens,
and stretched them out;
who spread out the earth
and everything that lives on it;
who gives breath to the people upon it,
and spirit to those who walk in it.

In verses 1-4 the Lord talks about His Servant and in verses 5-7 He talks to His Servant. To begin His declaration to His Servant the Lord describes His name and creative and sustaining power to underscore His sovereign authority over His creation. There is no doubt Who is speaking and what He has accomplished. This is a statement to the nations and to His people that there is a supreme being who is the true God who has unimaginable powers in comparison to the idols of Israel and the nations who are worthless and can accomplish nothing. These worthless idols (images) are mentioned in vs. 8. They can predict nothing but God can declare new things as He has proved that the former things He has predicted have occurred.

Isaiah introduces this passage with a description of God as “the sovereign LORD” as or literally: God Yhwh. See also Psalm 85:8. God is the Hebrew word el meaning mighty or almighty denoting in the context of vs. 5 His power in creation. Coupled with el is the word LORD which is the Hebrew word Yhwh or with the vowels added, Yahweh. Yhwh is the Jewish national name for God. God described His name to Moses (Exodus 3:14) as “I AM WHO I AM” which has the meaning of being self-existent and eternal.
With this introduction of Himself, God declares that He is the (great transcendent) One who was the creator of the heavens and stretched them out and spread out the earth. Along with His creative powers, God declares it is He who gives breath (Hebrew: nesama) and spirit (Hebrew: ruah) to the people of the earth. To the first person created, Adam, God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and Adam became a living being. Genesis 2:7. Along with breath God gave each of His created human beings a spirit (or soul) which differentiated them from all other living creatures. Upon the death of a human, their spirit returns to God who gave it (their spirit) to them (Ecclesiastes 12:7). God alone gives, maintains and takes life. He is in absolute control of His created universe, earth and those who live in and on the earth. It is this God, this supreme Creator that is introduced as having all authority who talks to His Servant in the following verses.

**42:6 I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness;**  
*I will take you by the hand*  
*and protect you.*  
*I will give you as a covenant for the people,*  
*and a light for the nations.*

The LORD reiterates His self identification as “I the LORD” or “I am the Lord” in some English versions. See also Isaiah 41:13; 42:8; 43:3, 11, 15; 45:5, 6, 7, 18; 48:17; 49:23; and 51:15. There should be no doubt as to the identification of the One who has done the calling and now no doubt who it is that is “the called” It is His Servant (see 42:1: My chosen one). The calling of this Servant, who is His chosen One, was much different than the calling of other servants whom are human. From all eternity and within the divine counsels of the intimacy of the Godhead, the LORD has elected (chosen) by divine decree to select One whom will complete the greatest mission ever conceived to be undertaken in all creation. No other servant can compare, nor is there any scale of comparison, between this Servant and His divine task. As the prophecy of Isaiah now unfolds, more details regarding this marvellous mission is provided. This first and the other great Messages of the Servant, Isaiah 49:1-13; 50:4-11; and 52:13-53:12, are the key disclosures by God regarding this divine mission without which no one would escape the penalty of death they deserve for their sinful actions.

**I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness**

This calling in righteousness has at least two major meanings: (1) the One that does the calling is righteous and has a righteous work or mission and (2) the One being called is righteous and has a calling to a righteous work or mission. Both meanings are correct and they should be taken together to be understood as one combined righteous calling. The righteousness of God and the Son has deep Biblical roots. See notes on Isaiah 41:10 for a definition of righteousness as related to the nature of God. See also the definition of God’s righteousness and justice by Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Revised Edition, 1979, page 85.

Among many wonderful passages speaking of the righteousness of God (the Father) and the Son throughout the Scriptures these selected verses in Isaiah are worthy of the student’s attention and study: The righteousness of God and His works: Isaiah 5:16; 24:16; 33:5; 41:10; 42:21; 45:19, 21, 23, 24; 46:13; 48:18; 51: 5, 6, 8; 54:14; 56:1: 59:16 and 17. The righteousness of the Son (the Servant) and His works: Isaiah 9:7; 11:4, 5; 16:5; 32:1, 16, 17; 53:11 and 63:1. See also (as a special mention): Jeremiah 23:1-6 and 33:14-18 and Zechariah 8:1-8. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul explains that the righteous of God (the Son) is imputed (credited, reckoned) to the believer through faith in the Son, Jesus Christ. Romans 3:21-26 and 4:1-25. This crediting of righteousness is also seen in Old Testament in the case of Abraham as recorded in Genesis 15:6: “And Abram believed the LORD; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness.” and is mentioned in Habakkuk: “the righteous will live by his faithfulness.” Habakkuk 2:4. This verse is the theme of Romans, see Romans 1:16-17.
I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You
This is a tender promise of the Father to the Son. The Father promises to hold the Servant “by the hand” during the Servant’s earthly ministry. This is a most precious complement to the Father’s earlier promise (vs. 1) that He upholds (grips firmly) the Servant. By holding the Servant by the hand, the Father promises never to leave Him or desert Him. The Servant has the assurance of His Father’s continual presence, support and strength. Nothing can prevent the Servant from accomplishing His ministry and great mission while being held by the hand by His Father. The Father also promises to watch over the Servant. His gaze will never leave Him nor will His caring love ever be absent from the Servant. As students of Scripture will discover, this great care and love from the Father to the Servant (His Son) is also promised to those who believe in the Son. Wonderful passages of Scripture such as Ephesians chapter 1 are replete with precious promises to the Christian who have been adopted as sons. Believers are also called fellow heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17). See extended notes by John MacArthur, NASB, on Romans 8:17. Isaiah had previously declared that the people of God had the assurance that they also would be upheld by God’s righteous hand (41:10) and that He would uphold their hand (41:13). By this assurance God was saying to His people, just as He had said to His chosen Servant, that He would help and strengthen them and never forsake them.

I will give you as a covenant for the people
Many suggestions have been made by scholars as to the identification of this “covenant.” For examples of this, refer to J. Alec Motyer, Isaiah, pages 261-262; John MacArthur, NASB, page 997; and Robert B. Chisholm, Handbook on the Prophets, pages 100-101. Victor Buksbazen states:

“The servant of this passage is to be a covenant to the people. This is “the covenant of peace” mentioned in Isaiah 54:10 and “the eternal covenant” of 61:8. It is also the new covenant promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 16:60.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 345). (bold added for emphasis).

Thomas Constable adds:

The Servant would fulfill the covenant requirements and promises that God had given His people, becoming a covenant to them in that sense, and so bring them into intimate fellowship with Himself (cf. 49:6-8). Thus this Servant cannot be all of Israel or even saved Israel or the prophets. Some commentators view this covenant as the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34), which Christ would ratify with His blood.

I think both the Old and the New Covenants may be in view, since Christ ended the Old and inaugurated the New. Still others believe that this is a reference to the "covenant of grace" that Christ made available to people by dying on the Cross. The coming conqueror would drive the nations further into idolatry (41:5-7), but the Servant would lead them to God by serving as "a light to the nations" who sit in darkness (cf. Luke 2:32; John 14:6). The Lord Himself would do all this through His Servant (cf. Exod. 3:15; 6:3). (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, pages 200-201).

Isaiah would later state, regarding this same chosen Servant, in 49:8:

I will give you as a covenant for the people,
to restore the land,
to re-establish their desolate inheritances.

As there are so many possible understandings of the precise meaning of the word “covenant” in Isaiah 42:6, it is difficult to be dogmatic about which approach from which scholar is “correct.” It is helpful to understand the concept of the Messiah as the “covenant” from the viewpoint of the complete Scriptures. For example, for those who understand that the Servant is the Messiah, Jesus Christ will know that Jesus as recorded in 1 Corinthians 11:25 stated: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood.” Jesus, the author of salvation (Hebrews 2:10), is the mediator of the new covenant (Hebrews 8:6-13; 9:15-22; 12:24). Does this mean that the other
covenants (ie. Abrahamic and Davidic) have been replaced by the new covenant? Not in the least! The New Covenant replaces only the old conditional Mosaic covenant. The other covenants God made with Israel are unconditional and God will keep His promises to Israel made by His oath by these covenants. These covenants will see their complete fulfillment during the glorious days of the millennial kingdom to come. For an excellent discussion on the new covenant and its complete fulfillment in the millennial kingdom, see R. Bruce Compton, Dispensationalism, The Church, and The New Covenant, Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal, DBSJ 8 (Fall 2003): 3–48. See also notes on Isaiah 49:8 for a listing of this and other resources.

As a light for the nations
The Lord promises to uphold the Servant as He undertakes two identified tasks (in vs. 6): as a covenant to the people and as a light to the nations. Only this Servant (the Messiah) could accomplish both of these tasks. The other “servant” (Israel) identified in verses 14-25 is blind and deaf and Israel itself is in need of the mediatorial and light bearing work of the Messiah. The word light in Isaiah 42:6 is the Hebrew word ‘or and is the word first introduced in Scriptures in Genesis 1:3: Let there be light. Isaiah often referred to the significance of light in his prophecy. See 2:5; 5:20, 30, 9:2; 10:17; 13:10; 30:26; 42:6, 16; 45:7; 49:6; 51:4; 58:8, 10; 59:9; 60: 1, 3, 19, and 20. Isaiah would again reference this ministry of the Messiah as a light to the nations in 49:6. The New Testament reveals that the Messiah would be a light to the Gentiles (nations) in Luke 2:32 and Acts 26:23. He referred to Himself as the light of the world in John 8:12; 9:5; and 12:46. The people of God are also to be a light to the nations as Isaiah declared in 60:3 and as the New Testament confirms as recorded in Matthew 5:14; Acts 13:47 and Philippians 2:15.

The Messiah as light is a beautiful metaphor of His ministry to the world. (Luke 2:32; John 1:4-5; 1 John 1:5-7). In contrast to the darkness of sin and its grasp on the world Jesus, as a light to the nations, overcomes (exposes, overwhelms, conquers) the darkness so that the people of the world can see the glorious light of the gospel of Christ. Paul eloquently describes this contrast in what undoubtedly is one of the most hope-filled passages in all of the Scriptures as recorded in 2 Corinthians 4:1-6:

1 Therefore seeing we have this ministry, by God's mercy, we do not lose heart. 2 We have renounced the hidden shameful deeds and underhanded practices, and handling God's word deceitfully, but by the open declaration of the truth we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. 3 But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. 4 In whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For it is God who said, "Let there be light shining out of darkness," who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

42:7 to open the eyes of the blind,
   to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
   and those who sit in darkness out of the prison.

More specifics of the task God has given His Servant are revealed in vs. 7: to open blind eyes and to release prisoners from prisons who sit in darkness.

To open the eyes of the blind
If there was any inclination to understand the identity of the Servant in these verses (1-13) as being Israel this phrase, “to open the eyes of the blind” should remove any consideration of identification of God’s chosen people as this Servant. The people of God are declared a few verses later (vs. 19) to be both blind and deaf and it would be impossible for those who are blind and deaf to open blind eyes. Indeed, they are the ones
who need to have their blind eyes opened. The only One who could possibly open their eyes is God who will do so through the ministry of the Servant He has chosen (vs. 1). The opening of blind eyes certainly has to be understood as a spiritual opening for the people of Israel and the nations would have physical eyes that are open but they would be blind to the spiritual truths God is declaring to them through His Servant. This Servant, who will be a light to the nations, (vs. 6), will enlighten the people of the earth by shining His light in their hearts so that their eyes will be open: *to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.* (2 Corinthians 4:6). See full quotation of 2 Corinthians 4:1-6 above under notes for vs. 6.

During His first earthly ministry, Jesus opened physical eyes, made the lame walk, cleansed (cured) lepers, gave hearing to the deaf, raised those who were dead and preached the gospel to those who were poor (Matthew 11:4-5). Jesus declared His spiritual ministry regarding “seeing” Him as recorded in John 12:46: “*I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in the darkness.*” Isaiah had earlier referred to the ministry of God (God as Messiah) as opening blind eyes and deaf ears. See notes on Isaiah 9:2 and 35:5. It is only the Messiah as the Servant as introduced in these verses (Isaiah 42:1-13) who could perform both a physical healing of opening blind eyes and of opening blind spiritual eyes. Those who have had their physical eyes opened have only a temporary healing (perhaps until death). But those who have had their spiritual eyes opened have an eternal healing as they see Christ as their saviour is and believe in Him.

*To bring out the prisoners from the dungeon and those who sit in darkness out of the prison*

These words could refer to a physical release of certain individuals from dungeons and from the darkness of prisons but there is no evidence from later revelation that the Servant had such a widespread ministry of releasing captives. Peter’s release from prison (Acts 12:6-19) and the earthquake that resulted in the release of Paul and Silas from a jail in Philippi (Acts 16:16-36) were isolated incidents that happened after Jesus Christ had completed His earthly ministry. Indeed if physical release from prisons is the intent of the latter part of Isaiah 42:7, why would Christ not have caused His cousin John to be released from prison before Herod had ordered John to be killed (Matthew 14:3-12; Mark 6:14-29; Luke 9:7-9). The best sense of releasing prisoners from dark dungeons and prisons is to understand this as referring to the ministry of the Servant (as the Messiah) Who, during His earthly ministry, opened blinded eyes and released people from spiritual dungeons of darkness so that the glorious light of the gospel could be seen. The Apostle Paul also had this ministry which he received directly from Christ (Acts 26:12-18). This spiritual ministry has not ceased to this day and will continue until Christ returns for it is implicit in the great commission that Christ has given to all who believe in Him and are His disciples (Matthew 28:16-20).

42:8 *I am the LORD, that is my name; and my glory I will not give to another, or my praise to carved idols.*

Following the message of God about the Servant (verses 1-4) and His message to the Servant (verses 5-7), God again makes a great declaration about Himself. See also vs. 5. God surrounds His message to His Servant (His Son) with a statement of His (the Fathers) authority and glory. God declares his great name as the covenant keeping LORD who is faithful and true to His covenants with Israel. He is the only God and there is no other god and therefore He will allow His glory to be given to another. There is no other! It is only right and holy for God to both glorify Himself and expect and accept that His creatures will glorify Him. It is the same with praise for Himself and the praise His creatures give to Him. God can glorify and praise Himself for there is no one higher, more worthy, or more excellent deserving of this glory and praise. The song of heaven is one of praise and glory for both the Father and the Son. (Revelation 4:11; 5:9-14).
The Lord will not allow any glory and praise rightfully belonging to Him to be given to carved or graven images. This statement by God emphasizes by repetition Isaiah’s most recent message regarding idols in chapter 40:15-20 and chapter 41 regarding worthless idols. In 42:17 God also addressed His people’s trust in idols and molten images as a summary of His hatred for idol worship within this current passage on the Servant of the Lord. See notes on Isaiah 2:8, 18-20; 10:10-11; 19:1-3; 21:9; 30:22; 31:7; 40:15-20; 41:7-8, 23-29; 42:17; 44:9-20; 45:16, 20-21; 46:1-7; 48:5; 57:13 and 66:3.

The zeal of God in jealously guarding His glory and praise is boldly emphasized in 42:8 (See also 48:11). God demands that His created beings recognize His greatness and power by devoting their worship to Him alone. To give any of this worship of praise and glory due to God to another is rebellion and anarchy. It is a statement that there is someone else more worthy of human’s devotion. God will not long endure this rebellion. The Scriptures declare that God is to be worshiped. It is evidenced from the earliest record of man’s existence, the worship of Cain and Abel in bringing offerings to God, Genesis 4:4-5; to the worship of God in heaven, Revelation 4:11, 5:9-14; and 22:9. The Apostle Paul gives a brief explanation as recorded in 1 Timothy 6:15-16: “which he, who is the blessed and only ruler, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, will reveal at just the right time. 16 He alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light; whom no human has seen, nor can see. To him be honor and power, forever! Amen.” Also, Paul in Romans 11:33-36, summarizes his doctrinal teaching to the church at Rome by this magnificent statement of worship:

33 O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are his judgments,
and how unfathomable are his ways!
34 For who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counselor?
35 Or who has first given to God,
so that he is obligated to repay him?
36 For from him, and through him, and to him, are all things.
To him be the glory forever. Amen.


42:9 Look, the earlier predictions have come to pass,
and now I prophesy new things;
before they spring forth I tell you about them.

God declares a second “Behold” (“Look” in the DASV) to serve as a maker between the first and last parts of the narrative of this first Messianic Servant Message recorded in Isaiah. Verses 10-13 are a praise song to God that the prophet requests his people sing in worship of Israel’s great covenant Lord and Creator. In vs. 9 God declares to His people and to the nations that what He had promised in times past have come to pass (happened just as God said they would). These “former things” that God had promised are not stated and it would be pure speculation to try to identify the things God was referencing. The point of the first part of vs. 9 is that God alone can predict the future with absolute accuracy because He sees and experiences the future just as He sees and experiences the past and present. God’s chosen people and the nations can have assurance that whatever God declares to happen will happen. This is in contrast with the earlier discussion regarding idols in chapters 40 and 41 and specifically 41:21-24. Idols can predict nothing for they see nothing because they are nothing.
In the latter half of vs. 9 God advances the narrative in contrast to the worthless idols by stating that He will declare and proclaim new things to His audience, before they “spring forth.” Thomas Constable comments:

This is the first of six times, God claimed to predict the future in Isaiah (cf. 44:7-8; 45:1-4, 21; 46:10; 48:3-6). (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 201).

The choice of words “spring forth” is highly significant as Gary v. Smith observes:

“The new events surrounding the coming of the servant of God are presented as another new way for God to demonstrate his divinity, for God states “I” (implying no one else) “am declaring” to the people on the earth what will spring forth in the future. The idea of “springing up” (ṣmḥ) is used of plants growing (55:10), of people springing up like grass (44:4), the sudden appearance of righteousness/salvation in God’s people (45:8; 58:8), and the surprising springing up of the praise from the nations (61:11). In each case the idea is associated with the sudden introduction of something new (43:19) that is connected to God’s eschatological work of transforming humanity and nature. The use of “spring forth” in association with this servant’s role suggests that his work is connected with these future events. It may not be accidental that the noun form derived from this root (ṣmḥ) refers to the “Branch” of the Lord (4:2; Jer 23:5; 33:15; Zech 3:8), a messianic term for the Davidic Messiah. The “new things” refer to what God will do through his servant, but the ultimate purpose in sending this servant is not just to open people’s eyes and free them from the darkness of their ignorance. The ultimate purpose is for these enlightened people to glorify God, for now they know for certain that he alone has the power to accomplish what he has foretold. These factors demonstrate to every reader that all praise and honor should be lifted up to honor this glorious God. He can open the eyes of the blind to experience the reality of his power by transforming the hearts and minds of all people through the revelation and accomplishment of his words and through the work of his servant.” (Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, pages 170-171).

42:10-13 Sing to the LORD a new song,
and his praise from the end of the earth.
You who go down to the sea,
and all that is in it,
the distant coastlands and those who live there.
11 Let the desert and its towns lift up their voices,
the villages that Kedar inhabits.
Let the inhabitants of Sela sing;
let them shout from the mountain tops.
12 Let them give glory to the LORD,
and declare his praise in the coastal regions.
13 The LORD goes out like a war hero;
he will stir up his zeal like a warrior.
He gives the battle cry, yes, he shouts out loud;
he shows his might against his enemies.

Verses 10-13 are a song of praise proclaimed by Isaiah in response to the revelation of the future ministry of God’s Messianic Servant. It is not unusual that Isaiah completes a dramatic passage of his writings with a song of praise: 12:1-6; 44:23; 49:13; and 55:12-13. See also in the Old Testament: Psalm 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; and in the New Testament: Revelation 5:9; and 14:3. Because this revelation from God about His Messianic Servant is new and spectacular to Isaiah and his contemporaries. Isaiah declares that a new song of praise needs to be sung not just in Jerusalem but also is to be sung in all of the earth as Isaiah defines, as those who traverse the sea, all creatures of the sea, all those who live in distant coastlands (or islands) (vs.
Isaiah Chapters 40-48: Page 55

10); to all who live in the desert, the villages of Kedar and inhabitants of Sela and it is to be shouted from the mountain tops (vs. 11). Also, peoples are to give God glory and declare His praise in the coastal regions which would include all areas of the world (vs. 12).

Isaiah, as recorded in vs. 13 extends the song of praise with a prophecy of the future that Israel’s covenant making and covenant keeping God (the LORD) will go forth as a zealous “war hero” and a warrior who will raise His voice with a shout as a cry of battle and He will be victorious over His enemies. This is undoubtedly a prophecy of the second coming of the Messiah when He returns as a warrior to defeat the enemies of His people. (Isaiah 63:1-6; Zephaniah 3:17; Zechariah 9:11-17; 12:6-9; 14:3-5; Revelation 19:11-21). Isaiah therefore exalts the people of Israel/Judah to sing a joyful song of praise for not what the Lord has done but what He will accomplish for them in the far future. This is not a song of praise which the returning exiles from Babylon would be expected to sing but a song of the great day of the Lord when the Lord will return to conqueror the armies of those nations who have set out to destroy God’s chosen people and to establish His messianic kingdom of justice and peace.


Included in the greater section of verses 14-25, verses 14-17 are placed as a bridge between the first Servant Message, and Isaiah’s song of praise, verses 1-13 and the prophet’s discussion of Israel as the blind and deaf servant of God, verses 18-25 and continuing into chapter 43. Some scholars suggest that verses 14-17 describe God’s provision for the Jewish travelers who are returning to Jerusalem after their long exile in Babylon but there is no indication in the text that this is the intended meaning of God’s words. These verses are set within the greater context of chapter 42 are better understood to fit the time of the future ministry of God’s great Servant (Messiah). The message of verses 14-17 is about God’s wonderful care for His people who are obedient to Him and His contempt for those who reject Him and trust in worthless idols. God’s description of leading the blind and making darkness into light (vs. 16) serves as a vivid introduction of the message regarding God’s blind and deaf servant, His people Israel.

David L. Cooper provides a brief comment on verses 14-17:

In the next paragraph (vss. 14-17) the prophet again drops into his method of impersonation. On this occasion he plays the role of King Messiah who, at the psychological moment, when these evangelists have performed their world-wide task of proclaiming the gospel, will declare, “I have long holden my peace; I have been still, and refrained myself: now will I cry out like a woman in labor; I will gasp and pant together ...” Thus at the end of the Tribulation Messiah will come forth as a mighty warrior and He will bring judgment and destruction upon all the wicked and ungodly. (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – April 1945).

42:14 I have held my peace for a long time;
   I have been still, and restrained myself.
Now I will cry out like a woman in labor;
   I will gasp and pant.

The transition between the two messages of God’s servants in chapter 42 is dramatically introduced in vs. 14. God states that He has kept silent (held his peace) for a long time. There is no discernable marker in the verse to indicate the historical period of His silence. If it is correct to understand this period of silence as pertaining to the future ministry of God’s greater Servant, then this period could be either the years of silence between the writings of Malachi and Matthew (preceding the first advent of Christ) or the period of the Tribulation in the last days (preceding the second advent of Christ) as David L. Cooper suggests. The years preceding the
first advent of Christ, were certainly fraught with much upheaval and distress including the days of the Maccabean revolt. However, as there is no historical record of the geographic upheaval described in vs. 15 in the period preceding the first advent of Christ, it is more likely that this period pertains to the period preceding the second advent of Christ. God states that He will break His silence not with words of a stately and dignified discourse but with groaning, gasping and panting, like a woman who is in labor, and with climatic actions as vs. 15 graphically details. The reference to a woman in labor may be understood as describing a new era birthed by God which will mark a great transition for God’s covenant people of which Isaiah will later describe in 66:7-9.

42:15 I will lay waste mountains and hills,  
and dry up all their vegetation. 
I will turn rivers into islands,  
and dry up the pools.

The actions of God, crying out, gasping and panting (vs. 14) include catastrophic upheaval to unidentified geographic locations. Although unidentified, it may be best to understand these locations within the context of His purposes with His people. It could be the area surrounding Israel that is being so dramatically affected or lands from which the scattered remnant will be gathered. Some may suggest that the words of vs. 15 should not to be taken literally but there is nothing in the text that would support such a conclusion. When God says, He will lay waste (reduce in height) the mountains and hills and wither the vegetation upon them, and make coastlands of rivers and dry up waters such as ponds, it is best to take literally. He will do these things for the purpose of leading and guiding His people (vs. 16). Isaiah will later expand on this work of God in the second Servant Message, Isaiah 49:1-13. See also Isaiah 11:11-16; 19:23; 35:8-10; 40:1-5; and 62:10-12.

42:16 I will lead the blind by a way they do not know;  
in unknown paths I will guide them.  
I will turn the darkness into light before them,  
and level the rough places. 
These things I will do,  
and I will not forsake them.

The reasons for God’s dramatic works of upheaval are explained in vs. 16. God states that He will lead the blind by a way that is not known to them. This reference to the blind in the context of this passage most likely refers to His blind servants of whom the prophet will discuss in verses 18-25 of chapter 42. Verses 14-17 act as a transition between His greater Servant, the Messiah, verses 1-13 and His lesser servants, His people Israel. It is these blind servants that God will guide on paths they as yet do not know. See chapter 35:1-10 and 51:4-11. This will occur in the period known as the day of the Lord when He will gather His remnant people from all parts of the earth and guide them to Jerusalem and Mount Zion. See notes on chapter 35 for an extended discussion on these days.

God further states in vs. 16 that He will make darkness into light before them (His faithful remnant). The description of God changing darkness into light and bringing His people from the darkness into light is one of the great themes of the Scriptures. Selected verses: Psalm 18:28; 112:4; Isaiah 9:2; 58:10; Micah 7:8; Matthew 4:16; John 1:1-14; 8:12; 12:46; Acts 26:18; 2 Corinthians 4:1-6; Ephesians 5:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:5; 1 Peter 2:9; 1 John 1:5 and 2:8.
In the last phrase of vs. 16, God states that He will (make) the rugged places into plains. This is a further elaboration of vs. 15 and the thought of the first part of vs. 16 in which God states He will lead the blind. By making the rugged places into plains, it will be easier for God’s faithful remnant to make the journey from the remote parts of the earth (Isaiah 41:8-9) to God’s beloved Jerusalem (Ariel: the hearth of God). God adds, “I have chosen you and (will) not cast you away,” which means He will not forsake them nor abandon them. This last phrase concludes (42:16) what God will do for His people who have been scattered to the remote parts of the earth. This prophetic message would have been a source of comfort for all who heard or read Isaiah’s declarations in his day and for all who are the faithful remnant of God today who await their call to be restored to their God in His holy city. This day will come in the midst of great turmoil when all seems lost and when God seems to have forgotten them. But as God states (vs. 14), He will break His long silence and prepare the earth for the calling of His people to be guided in their journey to Israel (verses 15-16).

42:17 Those who trust in carved idols,
will be turned back,
and be utterly put to shame;
those who say to metal images,
"You are our gods."

In contrast to the faithful remnant who trust solely in God, those who reject God and put their trust in idols will not be guided by Him and they will not make the journey to God’s beloved city. God will ensure that these rebellious people will be put to shame because they have rejected Him and replaced their knowledge about God with trust in worthless things. The Apostle Paul, in Romans 1: 18-32, discusses their (and all humanity’s) descent into total depravity, where this is no escape. See also Psalm 97:7; Isaiah 1:28; 44:9-20; and 45:16.

Verses 18-25 Israel: The Blind Servant

In verses 1-13, God reveals (Behold vs. 1) His beloved Servant and in verses 18-25 God discusses His blind servant. Verses 14-17 act as a bridge between these two segments. In verses 18-25, God issues a declaration of judgment against His blind servant if they will not obey His word. Yet there is hope. Following God’s threat of judgment against His blind servant, He offers a message of hope and salvation for them in 43:1-7. The blind servant of 42:18-25 cannot be the same Servant as God reveals in verses 1-13. Later revelation in the Scriptures leave no doubt as to the identification of God’s beloved Servant who is the Messiah, who is called Jesus is the New Testament. The blind servant of 42:18-25 is called a people in vs. 22 and must refer to the people of Israel whom God has called to serve Him.

How were God’s chosen people to serve Him? The following is a very brief discussion with selected O.T. Scriptures as suggested partial responses to this question. This is not the definitive response to this question. For an extended discussion refer to Walter C. Kaiser Jr. Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations. Baker Academic: 2nd Edition, 2012. God’s covenant with Abraham contained a blessing to the nations as recorded in Genesis 12:3: “Through you all the families of the earth will be blessed.” The nations would be blessed as the descendants of Abraham, the chosen people of God served God by declaring His name to all peoples of the earth. See also Genesis 18:18-19; 22:18; 26:2-4; and 28:14. Israel was also to serve God by being a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, Exodus 19:4-6. During Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple, he expressed an understanding of Israel’s role as the servant of God. 1 Kings 8:41-43. A very clear understanding of Israel as God’s servant is recorded in Psalm 67:1-2:
May God be gracious to us, and bless us,  
and cause his face to shine upon us;  

then your way will be known on earth,  
your salvation among all nations.

See also Psalms 96 and 117. Although Israel, as the people of God, knew all this from the writings of Moses and others, they did not fulfill God’s purposes for them and later profaned His name among the nations where they had been sent, Ezekiel 36:20-23. God therefore, gave the mission of proclaiming His name as a light to the nations to His beloved Servant, the Messiah, Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6.

42:18-20 Listen, you who are deaf;  
look, you who are blind,  
that you may see.  
Who is blind but my servant?  
Who is deaf but my messenger who I send?  
Who is blind as my covenant partner,  
and blind like the LORD’s servant?  
You see many things,  
but you do not comprehend them;  
your ears are open,  
but you do not hear.

God demands that His blind and deaf servant look and see and hear Him. God had previously told Isaiah that his mission to God’s people would result in their eyes being dim; their ears dull; and their hearts insensitive to God’s desire for them, Isaiah 6:8-13. It is not that God’s people could not see or hear but that they refused to look upon His great and glorious law (vs. 21) nor to hear God’s word as delivered by His messengers including His prophet Isaiah. Although the people had witnessed (seen) God’s marvellous works among them they failed to observe them in a way that brought them to trust in Him. The people had been sent by God to be His servant and messenger to the nations (see above discussion). Although His people were at peace with Him because of His covenants with them, they willingly became blind and deaf to His calls to serve Him in truth and trust.

42:21 It pleased the LORD for his righteousness’ sake,  
to magnify the law and make it glorious.

Among the declarations of God regarding Israel as His blind and deaf servant who failed to serve or trust Him is a beautiful declaration by the prophet regarding God’s word. Isaiah states that it the Lord was pleased for the sake of His righteousness to magnify (gadal in the Hebrew) the law. Isaiah often used the word gadal in several contexts: 1:2 (to bring up); 9:3 (increased); 10:15 (exalt); 23:4 (brought up); 28:29 (excellent); 44:14 (nourish) 49:21 (raise up); and 51:18 (brought up). See also Psalm 34:3; 35:27; 40:16; 55:12; 69:30; 70:4; 92:5; 104:1; and 126:2-3. The Lord will also make the law glorious, (adar in the Hebrew). This word adar, only occurs in Isaiah 42:21 and in Exodus 16 verses 6 and 11. The KJV translates this word as “honorable.”

Victor Buksbazen’s comments are worthy of consideration:

“In spite of Israel’s blindness and unfaithfulness, the Lord is determined to accomplish His purpose to make His law glorious and supreme in the eyes of all mankind. What Israel, as a people, has failed to accomplish, the
faithful Servant, the Messiah will. In this very chapter (v. 18-21) where the servant Israel is portrayed as blind, deaf and disobedient to God, the personal Servant of God is portrayed as completely obedient and well pleasing to Jehovah (v. 1-6). The distinction between the two servants is clear and beyond the possibility of confusion.

And yet there is an umbilical cord between both types of “the servant.” Both are rooted in God’s choice of Israel as His people, and in His covenant with them. In the final analysis Christ, the Servant of Jehovah, is the perfect representative of Israel who restores the broken covenant relationship between Jehovah and His people. In this sense Israel and her Messiah are one.” (Victor Bubsbazen, Isaiah, page 348).

42:22 But this is a people robbed and plundered;
they are all trapped in holes,
and hid in prisons.
They have become plunder with no one to rescue them,
carried off as spoil with no one to say, "Bring them back."

In spite of the wondrous revelation of God’s word (v. 21), and God’s works on their behalf (v. 20), and in spite of God’s covenant with His people through their Messiah (v. 6), the blind and deaf servant find themselves robbed and plundered, trapped in holes (caves) and hidden in prisons. They also find themselves a victim of those who prey upon them and a spoil of war and most importantly they find themselves without a defender or champion who will cry “bring them back”. Why are they in this dire predicament? Isaiah in verses 23-25 records the answer and it is not an answer the people would expect. The Lord paid out upon His people His anger because of the reprehensible sins of His people.

Many scholars suggest that Isaiah’s message is directed to those who have endured a seventy-year exile in Babylon. While this explanation may seem plausible, there is no record of the Jews hiding in caves during their sojourn in Babylon. Also, this verse begins in the present tense: “But this is a people robbed and plundered.” It was the Lord’s intention to preserve His people during this period and for His people who were sent to Babylon it was arguably the safest place on earth for them. A possible setting for this declaration of judgment upon His people was the most recent Assyrian assault on the towns and cities of Israel and Judah. The destruction and suffering inflicted by the Assyrians would still be sorely felt by the people of Judah living outside of Jerusalem. Many were taken captive with no one to rescue them. Many were carried away to prisons and many hid in caves. The Lord spared the city of Jerusalem but allowed the nation of Judah to be plundered and despoiled by the Assyrian army. Isaiah had earlier prophesized about the infliction of God’s anger upon His people by Assyria, His selected agent. Isaiah 10:1-11. The judgment of God was also upon the northern kingdom of Israel which was completely overrun by the Assyrians with no help or defence from God.

Another possible setting, which fits with the context of verses 14 and following, is the horrible days of the Tribulation which is the time of Jacob’s trouble (or distress), Jeremiah 30:7. During these days, just prior to the second advent of the Messiah, the people of Israel will suffer with a great loss of property, freedom, jobs, and many will suffer the ultimate loss of their lives. Because of their rejection of the Lord during His first advent, Israel will face God’s fierce anger and the fierceness of battle which will surround them and burn them up (42:25). Only upon their repentance and calling on their Messiah to return and save them will He descend to rescue His people and lead them in triumph to Zion where He will reign as their righteous, just and peaceful Sovereign. (Selected passages only: Isaiah 2:2-4; 4:2-6; Hosea 5:15-6:3; Micah 2:12-13; 4:1-7; Zechariah 9:11-17; 10:6-12; 12:1-14; 14:1-21)
42:23-25 Who is there among you who will listen to this? Who will pay attention and hear in the time to come?
24 Who gave Jacob up for spoil, and Israel to the robbers?
   Was it not the LORD against whom we have sinned?
   In whose ways they refused to walk, and whose law they would not obey.
25 Therefore he poured on them his fierce anger, and the fierceness of battle.
   It surrounded them with fire, yet they did not understand;
   it burned them up, yet they did not take it to heart.

The Lord demands a response from His people in vs. 23. Who was able among His blind and deaf servants to give an ear to His judgments? Who among these sinful and rebellious people would be able to heed God’s words and listen to Him? The obvious answer to these rhetorical questions is no one! The Lord in vs. 24 continues His questions with a devastating blow to the pride of His people. Who gave Jacob and Israel (God’s chosen people) to suffer plundering and despoilment at the hands of those who were assaulting them? This time the answer is not rhetorical. God promptly gives the response: “Was it not the LORD against whom we have sinned?” Two additional questions in vs. 24 quickly emerge from God: (1) “In whose ways they refused to walk;” and (2) “and whose law they would not obey.” These last two questions did not need a response for the guilty party was obvious.

As a result of God’s people rebellion against God in refusing to obey Him and to willingly walk in their own way in defiance of Him, God (vs. 25) declares His judgment upon them. His judgment was poured out as the heat of His anger and resulted in His people being conquered by their enemies in the fierceness of battle and in being “set aflame all around.” Even though God’s people were afflicted with the burning of God’s judgment, they did not recognize it as His judgment and they paid no attention. The words “he” and “his” in vs. 25 refer to God who will bring judgment upon the unrepentant people of Israel in the terrifying days of the Tribulation. The words “them” and “they” in vs. 25 refer to Israel as the blind and deaf and sin laden servant of God as a singularity. All of God’s people were as one in receiving the fierceness of God’s wrath.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 42:
42:1-13 The Beloved Servant
   1-4 God talks about His Servant
   5-9 God talks to His Servant
   10-13 Praising God for His Servant
42:14-17 The Blind Saved
42:18-25 The Blind Servant
   18-20 The Blind Servant Described
   21 The Beauty of God’s Word
   23-25 The Blind Servant Defeated
5. God’s Promise to Redeem Jacob: 43:1-7

Biblical scholars have understood these verses from several different viewpoints. Many scholars including Gleason L. Archer and Thomas L. Constable, suggest that chapter 43 is a continuation of Isaiah’s prophetic message in chapters 40-42 to the returning Jewish exiles who are travelling from Babylon to Jerusalem. Gary V. Smith suggests that the context of these verses may best fit the Assyrian invasion of Judah. Geoffrey W. Grogan and J. Alec Motyer suggest that these verses point to the historical past where God delivered His people from bondage in Egypt. While others, such as David L. Cooper, posit a viewpoint that these verses are prophetic of the far future where God will rescue His faithful remnant during the days just before the second advent of Christ.

David L. Cooper comments:

“In the first seven verses of chapter 43 is a special message which God will send to the nation as she lies prostrate in helplessness before the Lord. He begins this special message by calling attention, through the prophet, to the fact that He created the Jewish nation for a purpose and that He has redeemed her. When Abraham and Sarah were past the age of parenthood, God performed a biological miracle which made possible the birth of Isaac. Not only has He created the Jewish nation and preserved it, but He has wrought redemption for it. This salvation was worked out at Calvary nineteen hundred years ago.

According to verses 2-4 those of Israel at that time who heed His message are not to fear anything regardless of what may come into their lives; for the Lord assures her that He will be with her in her experience; that is He will be with those who accept the message and bring them safely to the other side of the Tribulation.

In verses 5-7 is a vision of the regathering of the faithful remnant through whom God will be glorified throughout the entire Millennial Age, for He has created them for His glory.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly-April 1945).

This Messianic study of Isaiah suggests that in verses 4-7 Isaiah is prophesying of the days of the far future when He will gather His people, the faithful remnant, from all nations of the earth and bring them safely to the Jewish national homeland. In making this prophetic declaration, Isaiah is bringing a message of hope and comfort to the people of Judah who have just faced the devastating assault on the cities and towns of Judah and the unsuccessful siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrians. This message was also written in the great scroll of Isaiah so that future generations of God’s people could face with confidence that God will still be with them even during national tragedies such as the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, Romans and the attempted annihilations of the Jewish people in more modern times. Verses 1-3 are words of comfort that alternate between the past (“I have”) and the present and near future (“I will”).

43:1 But now this is what the LORD says,  
the one who created you, O Jacob,  
he who formed you, O Israel:  
"Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you;  
I have called you by your name;  
you are mine.

The link to the previous message in chapter 42 is made with the emphatic “But now.” Even though God has declared that He will bring judgment on His chosen people who are blind and deaf to His instructions and teachings, He will not desert them. God addresses His people as the LORD (Israel’s covenant God) and as
Isaiah Chapters 40-48: Page 62

their Creator. As their Covenant-God and Creator, He will not desert them but provide His redemptive care for them and He states that He has redeemed them and called them by His name for they are His possession. The grammatical setting of this verse is in the past. God has already “formed them” as their Creator. He also has redeemed them as their covenant God. This redemption points to past glorious miraculous acts of God such as the exodus from Egypt in the distant past and more recently the sparing of Jerusalem from the Assyrian army. By calling them by name, God asserts that they are his possession for it is the right of parents to name their offspring. This verse ends with the emphatic declaration by God: you are Mine!

As noted above, some scholars suggest that the first seven verses of chapter 43 as well as many passages from the early chapters of the greater section of Isaiah 40-66 refer to the return of the exiles from Babylon, however there is no direct evidence of this from these verses. So, students of Scripture must look at vs. 1 within the context of the verses that follow and precede it to understand the correct interpretation of God’s declaration.

43:2 When you pass through the waters,
   I will be with you;
   and cross through the rivers,
   they will not overwhelm you.
When you walk through the fire,
   you will not be burned,
   nor will the flame consume you.

God promises to be with His people in the present (and foreseeable future) when trials and suffering come upon them. He does not prevent these incidents of testing but assures them that He will be with them so that these occasions will not destroy them. See notes on Isaiah 41:10 for a discussion on the implications of God’s promises to be with them. God promises to be with His people when they pass through waters and rivers as they will not overflow them. This may have reminded Isaiah’s audience of events long ago: the parting of the Red Sea at the beginning of the exodus experience and the Jordan River when entering Canaan. However, the promise is for the future and God’s people are not to fear troublesome times for their God is with them. The same applies for the picture of walking through fire which will not burn or scorch them.

J.Alec Motyer has a brief but important observation about the mention of fire in vs. 2:

“With great drama, Isaiah moves from the Lord’s people in the Lord’s fire (42:25) to the Lord who will not allow the fire to burn them (43:2).” (J. Alec Motyer, Isaiah, page 267).

Thomas Constable also provides a short comment:

"Water" and "fire" are traditional symbols for testing that suggest totality when used together (cf. Ps. 32:6; 42:7; 66:12; James 1:2). God promised to protect His people from total destruction when they underwent their various trials. He had done this in the past, and He would do it in the future because He would be with His special people (cf. Dan. 3; Rom. 8:31-39).” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 205).

43:3-4 3 For I am the LORD your God,
   the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.
I have given Egypt as your ransom,
   Ethiopia and Seba in return for you.
4 Since you have been precious and special in my sight, 
and I love you, 
therefore I will give other people in return for you, 
and nations instead of your life.

God, as He has often done and will do again in the writing of Isaiah, asserts His great name and reminds His people of Who He is. The titles or names God ascribes to Himself are significant reminders of God’s covenant promises, His power, holiness and redemptive work. “LORD” is Yahweh: (Israel’s covenant making and keeping God). “God” is Elohim: (Israel’s great and powerful God Who is above all other gods. The name Elohim is plural suggesting singularity within a plurality ie. the great Triune God). “Holy One of Israel” is a compound name indicating God’s unique relationship with His chosen people Israel as “their God” Who is described and should be understood as “holy.” This is descriptive of God being set apart or wholly other from His creation. There is no comparative marker or level of comparison that His creatures can conceive that would contain or adequately explain the fullness of meaning for this name as the Holy One. “Savior” is a beloved title describing His past, present and future work of redemption on behalf of His people. A similar title is “Redeemer” which often describes His work of redemption as “kinsmen redeemer” for His people to whom He has loved and chosen them as a “Father.” The saving work of God in the Old Testament is not always spiritual or eternal and often relates to saving His people from danger and harm as God states in vs. 2 above.

These rich compound names for God are found often in Isaiah’s prophecy. For example, the compound names for God including the word “Redeemer” are found in Isaiah 41:14, 43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 59:20; 60:16; and 63:16. See notes on these verses. This Messianic study of Isaiah will provide comment on other compound names, including “the Holy One of Israel” and “Lord God of Hosts” and many others in the context of the verses in which these names occur. It is these wonderful compound names in which God has chosen to reveal Himself that make a study of Isaiah so inspiring for the student of God’s Word. Refer also to notes on Isaiah 9:6-7 for a short discussion of some of the most beautiful names for the Messiah, the Son of God, recorded in all of Scripture. When God refers to Himself with these names (or titles), He is allowing His people to understand great truths and attributes about Himself. He also is assuring His people that they can completely trust in Him and have faith in His plans and purposes for them.

The action of God in having gave “Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in return for you” has been the source of much speculation by Biblical scholars. Many suggest that God is referring to an event in the future for Isaiah and his contemporaries in which God will hand over Egypt, Cush and Seba to Cyrus to conquer. However, the verb tense is a past reference and it is something God has already done and there is no historical record of Cyrus conquering these nations. This past event may refer to the defeat of Egypt at the time of the exodus, although neither Cush nor Seba is mentioned in the Biblical record for the exodus event. Also, it may refer to the more recent (in Isaiah’s time) of Egypt’s defeat at the hands of the Assyrian army. As God, through the writing of the prophet Isaiah does not reveal any historical details, Biblical scholars can only suggest some possible events, past or future that may apply to these words. Refer to J. Alec Motyer, Isaiah, page 268 for a discussion on the ransom in vs. 4 as applying to ancient Egypt Micah 6:4 is helpful in understanding Egypt as a ransom:

“For I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, 
redeemed you out of the house of bondage; 
I sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam before you.”
The word “ransom” in vs 3 is kopher in the Hebrew and it refers to the price of a life and can also refer to a bribe. Selected verses where this word is found in the Old Testament: Exodus 21:30 (ransom, KJV: sum of money); Exodus 30:12 (ransom); Numbers 35:31 and 32 (ransom, KJV: satisfaction); 1 Samuel 12:3 (bribe, KJV margin note: ransom); Job 33:24 (ransom, KJV margin note: atonement); Job 36:18 (ransom); Psalm 49:7 (ransom); Proverbs 6:35 (ransom); Proverbs 13:8 (ransom); Proverbs 21:18 (ransom); and Amos 5:12 (bribes, KJV margin note: ransom). The English word “ransom” in Isaiah 50:2 is the Hebrew word peduth and is also found Exodus 8:23 (put a division or set a ransom); Psalm 111:9 (redemption); and Psalm 130:7 (redemption). The past tense “ransomed” is the Hebrew word padah and is found more frequently in the Old Testament and is most often translated as redeemed. Padah is found in Isaiah 1:27 (redeemed) 29:22 (redeemed); 35:10 (ransomed); (Refer to notes on Isaiah 35:10 in this study); and 51:11 (ransomed). The above is not an exhaustive listing of the occurrences of the word “ransom” in the Old Testament, but representative of the importance of this word. See also Psalm 31:5; 69:18; Jeremiah 31:11, Hosea 13:14 and Micah 6:4 (see above). A Biblical explanation of the use of the word ransom in Isaiah 43:3 is found in Proverbs 21:18: “The wicked is a ransom for the righteous, and the treacherous is in the place of the upright.” (NASB). See also the KJV, NKJV, NIV, and the ESV. The DASV has “The wicked is punished in place of the righteous, and the traitor instead of the upright.” The word ransom in Proverbs 21:18 is the Hebrew word kopher, which is the same word for ransom in Isaiah 43:3.

The salvific significance of the word “ransom” is prophesied later in Isaiah 52:13 - 53:1-12 regarding the redeeming/ransoming role God’s beloved Servant (His Son) will have for God’s people and all mankind which will be fully developed (or completed) in the New Testament as it applies to the cross-work of the Messiah on behalf of those who trust in Him. See Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45; 2 Corinthians 5:21 and 1 Timothy 2:6. See also, Thomas Constable’s Matthew Commentary on Matthew 20:28 for an expanded discussion on the meaning of ransom in the New Testament.

Verse 4 re-emphasizes the main idea of “ransom” stated in vs. 3 and adds the significant words: “Since you have been precious and special in my sight, and I love you, therefore I will give other people in return for you.” This reads like an affectionate letter from a loving Father to His children for this is exactly what it is! The word “precious” is the Hebrew word yaqar and has the meaning of valuable, precious, prized, and costly. The word yaqar occurs 11 times in the Old Testament: 1 Samuel 18:30; 26:21; 2 Kings 1:13, 14; Psalm 49:8; 72:14; 139:17; Proverbs 25:17; Isaiah 13:12; 43:4; and Zechariah 11:13. Psalm 72 is a recognized as messianic and vs. 14 of this Psalm states: “He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence; and precious shall their blood be in His sight.” (KJV) The word “He” in Psalm 72:14 is the Messiah.

The word “special” in Isaiah 43:4 is the Hebrew word kabad or kabed and has the meaning of honored, heavy, weighty or burdensome. It occurs several times in Isaiah, translated with different English words in th DASV: 3:5 (honorable); 6:10 (deaf); 9:1 (glorious); 23:8 (honored); 23:9 (honored); 24:15 (glorify); 24:20 (heavy); 25:3 (respect); 26:15 (glorified); 29:13 (honor); 43:4 (special); 43:20 (honor); 43:23 (honored); 47:6 (heavy); 49:5 honored) 58:13 (honorable); 58:13 (honorable); 59:1 (deaf); 60:13 (glorious); and 66:5 (glorified). Isaiah will later state, as recorded in 49:5, regarding God’s beloved Servant: “For I will be honoured in the eyes of the LORD.” Many verses speak of honor to God, for example: Leviticus 10:3 and Deuteronomy 28:58. Also one of the most beloved commandments is stated in Exodus 20:12: “Honor your father and mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you.” So, it is a very loving God who desires honor from His creation to say to His chosen people that they are honoured by Him.
43:5-6 Do not be afraid, for I am with you. I will bring your descendants from the east, and gather you from the west. I will tell the north, 'Give them up,' and to the south, 'Do not keep any of them back;' bring my sons from afar, and my daughters from the end of the earth,

Moving from past and present considerations of God’s protective and loving care for His people to a future calling of His people from all points of the earth, God links these considerations in vs. 5 with a reminder to His covenant people that He is with them and they should have no fear (of whatever issues or danger they face). God had just encouraged them not to fear for He has redeemed them (vs. 1). The comforting message of “do not be afraid” is often spoken by God in the writings of Isaiah: 10:24; 40:9; 41:10, 13, 14; 43:1, 5; 44:2; and 51:7. The bringing of the offspring of His people from all points of the earth is best understood as a reference to the days just preceding the millennial kingdom and thus this message of having no fear would be just as relevant today as it was in Isaiah’s day for all of God’s people who await the fulfillment of God’s kingdom promises to them.

43:7 everyone who is called by my name, and whom I have created for my glory, whom I have formed, yes, whom I have made.

Vs. 7 is linked closely with verses 5-6. In the NASB there is no period at the end of the verse signifying that the “everyone” (beginning of vs. 7) refers to God’s people whom He will call from all areas of the earth to gather in Zion to begin the messianic kingdom of the Messiah. It is His own people whom He has created, who have been formed and made for His glory. See also Isaiah 44:23. Someone may ask, what is the meaning of God’s glory? The word “glory” in vs. 7 is the Hebrew word kabod which is the most used Hebrew word for glory among many others in the Old Testament. The meaning of glory is “weight,” “heaviness,” “worthiness,” “reputation,” and “honor.” Therefore, when God states that He has created His people for his glory, He means to say for His reputation, honor and worthiness for glory is “heavy” upon Him. God cannot ascribe, give or exalt anyone or anything’s glory above His own glory. To do so would be idolatry for God’s glory is the highest, most exalted and most to be praised glory of the universe. To say that God in seeking His own glory and praise is selfishness is entirely in error. God cannot seek any glory or praise or honor or reputation above that which rightfully belongs to Him. To whom could God give glory and praise other than Himself? There is no one greater, more exalted, more worthy of praise and glory than God Himself and it is entirely within His holiness and righteousness for Him to seek the highest source of glory to ascribe, praise, and honor – His own worthiness. Glory in one sense is an abstract concept and not physical. To understand glory one must transcend the physical and sense the spiritual and eternal essence of God. That is why when Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James and John, Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36, the words used to describe Him are full of superlatives: “His face shone like the sun and His garments became as white as light.” Matthew 17:2. It would not be wrong to understand glory as “luminous brilliance” for glory attracts the eye and the attention of all around it. In the eternal state, there will be no need of the sun or the moon for God will illuminate the people who inhabit eternity. Revelation 22:5. God’s
glory can also be understood as His name or reputation which He jealously guards and protects. See Isaiah 48:11 and 52:5 as representative examples of many in the Old Testament.


This passage of Scripture can be divided into three sections:

Verses 8-13: The Witness of God’s Blind Servants
Verses 14-21: The Lord to Redeem God’s Servants
Verses 22-28: The Sinful Condition of God’s Servants

The Witness of God’s Blind Servants: 43:8-13

Victor Buksbazen provides an overview of these verses:

“There are striking similarities between the servant of Jehovah as a nation and the servant of Jehovah as a person. Both are chosen of God (42:1, 43:10). Both are beloved (42:1; 43:4). Yet the differences between the two are basic. Obedient or disobedient, “the servant” Israel is a witness to the faithfulness of God and the fact that there is no other God who is like Jehovah. Collectively Israel is a blind (v. 8) and essentially passive servant (v. 10). By contrast the individual Servant of Jehovah is God’s active agent to accomplish His divine purpose for mankind. The individual Servant of the LORD, the Messiah, is the absolutely obedient messenger of God who delights to do His will (42:4).” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 351).

43:8 Bring out the people who have blind eyes,
and those deaf who have ears.

God calls for the people who are blind and deaf to be brought out. The identification of these people in the context of chapters 42 and 43 must be the people of God who are called His blind servant and His deaf messenger even though they have eyes and ears (42:16-20). The blindness and deafness of God’s people is a common theme in Isaiah’s writings: 6:9-10; 29:9; 42:16-20; 56:10 and 59:10. The purpose for these blind and deaf people to be brought out is to witness that God is the one true God before the nations and to witness that God is also the world’s only savior (verses 10-13). It is ironic that only God can call those who are “blind” and “deaf” to be a witness of His greatness to the nations of the earth.

43:9 Let all the nations be gathered together,
and let the peoples assemble.
Who among them reported this?
Who foretold us earlier things?
Let them bring in their witnesses,
so that they may be proven right.
and let them hear and confirm, “It is truth.”

God states that Let all the nations be gathered together and assembled. The reason that this gathering of the nations has been called is for them to give account to God regarding their ability to declare beforehand what will take place. This charge to the nations is a re-emphasis of the former charge against them and their worthless idols: 41:1-7, 21-24. God has called His witnesses (verses 8 and 10), who are His blind and deaf servant Israel and now God is calling the nations to present their witnesses (who are blind and deaf idols: 41:21-14), to justify if they can accurately state what past events they have accurately predicted.
43:10 "You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me, and understand that I am he. Before me there was no other God formed, neither will there be after me.

In the presence of the assembled nations, God declares that His chosen servant (His blind and deaf people), are witnesses to His greatness for the purpose that they will believe Him and know and understand that God is unique and that no God has ever existed besides Him. He alone is God: “I am he.” God announces to the assembled nations and to His own people that He is the One who made His great name known to Moses (and to His captive people in Egypt). His great name is “I AM WHO I AM” or shortened as “I AM.” God declared that this was His eternal and memorial name which is to be known to all generations. (Exodus 3:13-16). As God’s servants, His people are called to be His witness before the nations (Exodus 19:4-6; 1 Chronicles 16:23-24; Psalm 67:1-7; 96:1-13). Since they have failed to do this, God has assembled the nations to make this declaration before them in the presence of His servant nation as His witness. These verses (10-13) point to the ministry of God’s beloved Servant, His Son, the Messiah. What His chosen blind and deaf servants (His people) have failed to do in proclaiming God’s greatness and His great name to the world, God Himself will accomplish (through the ministry of His beloved Servant). In this sense, these verses are a summary of the entire prophecy of Isaiah. Following the earthly ministry of God’s beloved Servant, the Servant Himself will call another group of servants (who are indwelt by His Spirit) to be His witnesses to all the earth (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8).

43:11-13 I, even I, am the LORD, besides me there is no savior.
12 I have declared, delivered, and proclaimed; and there was no foreign god among you.
You are my witnesses," says the LORD, "that I am God.
13 Yes, from eternity I am he.
There is no one who can deliver out of my hand.
I act and who can undo it?"

In the final three verses of this summoning by God of the nations and His people to be witnesses of His greatness, He emphasizes that He alone is the world’s savior. He alone is the only God who can with divine authority make declarations and proclamations and He has been their savior. The assembled peoples are witnesses that He is God and He has existed from eternity. They are also witnesses to God’s sovereign and omnipotent power for none can defeat Him (deliver out of His hand) and when God acts or performs anything, there is no one who can reverse His works. These declarations by God are likened to a classroom where God is teaching theology, the great truths about God, to those who have been called to attend these divine lectures.

Thomas Constable comments on these three verses:

Yahweh alone, among all the "gods," is the only real deliverer, the one who knows the future, and the sovereign. He is unique. None of the idols was Yahweh. The Israelites could bear witness to that, but they were blind and deaf. Therefore the Lord had to testify in His own behalf.
"In the first part of his book, Isaiah had demonstrated that God alone can be trusted, that all other resources, especially the nations, would fail. Now he is showing that when we have refused to trust and have reaped the logical results of our false dependencies, God alone can save."508

Yahweh was the only God from the very beginning. Since He is the only deliverer, no other god can deliver people from His hand or overrule His decisions. It was foolish, then, for the Israelites, as it is for all God's people, to look to anyone or anything else for salvation. Someone said, "In our world it's cool to search for God, but uncool to find him."509

In the future, God would use Israel to demonstrate to the world in a fresh way that He was the only Savior, as He had done in the past. He would make His people the evidence of His deity by delivering them from captivity in Babylon (43:14—21) and from their sins (44:1-5). His salvation would be in spite of their lack of righteousness (43:22-28). [Note 508: Oswalt, The Book…40-66, p.148. Note 509: Quoted by Ortlund, p. 283.] (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 207).

The Lord to Redeem God’s Servants: 43:14-21

Following the Lord’s declaration of His uniqueness and eternality as the earth’s only God and His omnipotent power and the only savior (verses 8-13), God illustrates His abilities to save His people in verses 14-21. God uses Babylon, as a near future reference, as an illustration to save His beloved people (verses 14-15) and He then points to the far future where He will once again redeem His chosen people (verses 14-15) by providing safe passage for them so that they will declare His praise (verses 15-21). There are as many suggestions as to the interpretation of these verses as there are interpreters or scholars. Some see only a reference to the return of the Jews to Jerusalem from their exile in Babylon. Others see a blended portrait of God redeeming His people from Babylon and a reference to the days just prior to the second advent of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Others see only a far future reference where God saves His people from a future restored Babylon and brings His people from all parts of the earth to participate in the beginnings of the messianic kingdom. This study sees merit in a blended view where God will use an historical incident (a near future event of the return of the exiles from Babylon) as an illustration of what He will do (redeem His people) in the far future just prior to the establishment of the messianic kingdom.

43:14-15 This is what the LORD says, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:
"For your sake I will send to Babylon,
and I will force them to become as fugitives;
the Chaldean’s shouts of celebration
will be turned to mourning.
15 I am the LORD, your Holy One,
the Creator of Israel, your King."

This passage, verses 14-21 begin with the imperative, “This is what the LORD says,” as a declaration of the authority of God to proclaim truth to His people and an imperative decree for them to listen to Him. Isaiah, once again describes God with majestic compound names (see notes verses 1 and 3 above). The “LORD” is Yahweh, Israel’s covenant making and keeping God who is also their “Redeemer,” Ga’al, who is their great Kinsman who redeems His “family” people as they are His beloved ones and who is also the “Holy One of Israel” who is intrinsically holy. To say God is holy is to describe who He is. (See notes on Isaiah 6:3).
Israel’s holy, sovereign and incomparable God as their savior describes (vs. 14) what He will do for the sake of His beloved people. It must be kept in mind that God had previously described His people as His blind servant and deaf messenger (42:19) See also Isaiah 6:8-13. It is not because they had done anything to deserve His saving works on their behalf but because of the sake of His great name: (selected verse only: Psalm 79:9; 106:8; Isaiah 48:9, 11; Jeremiah 14:7, 21; Ezekiel 9: 9, 14, 22, 44; and Ezekiel 36:22; 1 John 2:12).

The redemptive work of God on behalf of His chosen and beloved people on this occasion is described as “for your sake” (on their behalf) He will bring the Chaldeans, (the people of the kingdom of Babylon), down as fugitives in ships (KJV and other English versions). The Babylonians had a great love for their ships and it is in these ships that they will flee as fugitives from their conquerors. Just as God’s people would in a later day be “brought down” as fugitives and exiles from Jerusalem to Babylon, so God will make their captives (the Babylonians) fugitives and those who flee from an army who is conquering them. This may refer to the destruction of Babylon by the army of the Assyrians under Sennacherib in 689 B.C. which was in the near future to Isaiah’s day, (see Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, page 206), or to the defeat of the Babylonians by the Persians under King Cyrus in 539 B.C. (as many scholars suggest). It must be noted that this was not the first mention of Babylon by Isaiah: 13:1, 19; 14:4, 22; 21:9; 39:1, 3, 6, and 7 and it would not be the last: 47:1, 48: 14 and 20. Because of Isaiah’s frequent mention of Babylon in his prophecy, some scholars relate many passages in chapters 40-66 as having Babylon as the background to Isaiah’s messages. This relating to Babylon is seen by these scholars in the passages that mention God’s gathering of His people from various points of the earth. Thus, it is popular to describe Babylon as the place from which God will gather His people. This Messianic study of Isaiah does not understand many of these passages in this way. Each passage must be understood within its context and if Isaiah describes God’s people as being gathered from several points of the earth, this must not be a reference to Babylon but to a future time, not yet realized when God will gather His people from all nations to populate the coming messianic kingdom. Many conservative Biblical scholars, teachers and students may not so understand these passages in this manner. It is not the scope or intent of this study to engage, interact or refute with the positions held by others. Complex and intricate debates involving differing opinions on exegetical issues are best left to technical commentaries on Isaiah which are intended for the seminary classroom and scholarly review. See the Introduction section for additional comment.

In vs. 15 Isaiah again authenticates the message by another of these rich set of compound names of God. This message is from the One who is the “LORD”, Yahweh, the great I AM. He is also Israel’s “Holy One” to emphasize His “rightness” and His desire that His people also be holy (Leviticus 11:44-45). God is also Israel’s “Creator,” a title which He often reminds His people so that they will know they have been created for His glory (Isaiah 43:7). In this set of compound names, Isaiah declares that Israel’s God is also their “King.” Isaiah had previously seen this King when he was commissioned by God to proclaim His message to His obstinate people, (Isaiah 6:1-13). Other references in Isaiah to this glorious King, Israel’s Messiah, who is the beloved Servant of God are found in: 32:1; 33:17, 22; and 44:6. In a later day, some would make a great journey bearing presents fit for royalty and ask: “Where is he who is born King of the Jews? for we saw his star rising in the eastern sky, and are come to worship him.” Matthew 2:2. Those in Isaiah’s day and in the day of the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ and in our day as in all days must seek the Messiah in order to worship Him. It is the joyous occupation of the citizens of heaven, (Revelation 4:9-11 and 5:9-14) and should be for those on earth who belong to God’s holy family having believed by faith in His Son, who is God’s beloved Servant, the Messiah. In saying that we must seek the Messiah is not to say that His kingdom is established on the earth for it is not. For a brilliant defence of the truth that the messianic kingdom is yet in the future refer to: Andrew M. Woods, The Coming Kingdom: What is the Kingdom and How is Kingdom Now Theology Changing the Focus of the Church, Grace Gospel Press, 2016.
43:16-17 This is what the LORD says, who makes a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters, who brings forth the chariot and horse, the army and the warrior. They lie down, they cannot rise. They are extinguished, snuffed out like a wick.

God reminds His people of His credentials recorded by Isaiah in verses 16-17. This witness of His past works begins with the authoritative declaration, “Thus says the LORD.” God often in the Scriptures begins an important declaration with these words with which He demands the attention of His people to listen and obey what He has to tell them. This authoritative declaration of the LORD is recorded 38 times in Isaiah but even more frequently in Jeremiah: 151 times and Ezekiel: 126 times. Before stating the words that need to be obeyed (vs. 18), God reminds His people of His credentials. He is the One who “makes a way in the sea and a path in the mighty waters,” vs. 16. He also is the One who brings forth the chariots, the horse, the army and the warrior, to be quenched like a wick in these waters, (vs. 17). Most students of Scripture would understand these words to be a reminder of God’s great work on behalf of His people during the escape (exodus) from Egypt in which the waters of the Red Sea parted safely for the people of Israel to escape the pursuing Egyptian army. This army however, was led (brought forth) by God into these same waters only to be engulfed by them and to become their burial place. Exodus 14:23-30.

The miraculous parting of the waters of the Red Sea to provide a safe escape for the people of Israel from the Egyptian army is often cited by the writers of the Old Testament as a reminder of God’s divine care for His people as these few examples attest: Exodus 15:19; Psalm 77:19-20; Isaiah 51:10; 63:11-14. The prophet Isaiah uses this historical record of this miracle of God as a pictorial backdrop to predict what God will do in the future with a similar picture of God’s protective care as verses 19-22 indicate. Isaiah had previously discussed this future method (roadway in the wilderness) of God to provide a safe return to the capital of the coming messianic kingdom: Isaiah 11:16; 19:23; 35:8 and will discuss it again later in his prophecy: Isaiah 49:10-13; and 51:10-11.

43:18 Do not remember the former things, or focus on the past.

In what at first may seem incongruous or out of place for God to state that His people are not call to mind the former things, or ponder or focus on the things of the past. God is saying that they must not cling or hold fast to these former things as a means of current or future salvation. What God has done in the past was certainly miraculous and wonderful but to look upon them as one would look upon an idol is abhorrent to God. For an example of this refer to the story of the bronze serpent, which in the past was a device used by God for healing: Numbers 21:4-9 but had been kept for generations as a religious icon and the people had turned it into an idol: 2 Kings 18:4. The reason God does not want them to cling to the past is revealed in verses 19-21. The prophet Jeremiah makes a similar point regarding the contrast between God’s past work and His far future work: Jeremiah 23:7-8.
43:19-21 Look, I will do a new thing.
Now it springs forth.
Can't you see it?
I will even make a way in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert.

The wild animals of the fields will honor me,
the jackals and the ostriches;
because I provided waters in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert,
to give drink to my people, my chosen,

the people I formed for myself,
that they might declare my praise.

God reveals, that in contrast to what has happened in the past which He has requested that His people not ponder or call to mind (vs. 18), He will now do something new. God delights in declaring something new to His people as the context of Isaiah 42:9; 65:17; Jeremiah 31:31; Ezekiel 36:26; John 13:34; and Revelation 21:5 attest. The something “new” in Isaiah 43:19 will be God’s making of a roadway in the wilderness (see notes on vs. 17 above) and rivers in the desert. Both the new roadways and rivers are for the benefit of the faithful remnant of Israel who will be gathered from all nations of the world, in the far future following the terrifying days of the great tribulation, to be brought to Immanuel’s land to populate the messianic kingdom along side of their Messiah who will be reigning on the physical throne of David. Most commentators understand verses 19-21 as referring to the return of the exiles to Jerusalem from Babylon but there is nothing in the context of this passage to confirm this viewpoint.

The reason (vs. 20) God has provided (a prophetic perfect term): “waters in the wilderness and streams in the desert” is so that the animals will glorify Him (by their enjoyment of this sustenance) and that God’s chosen people, whom God has formed for Himself (see Isaiah 43:7) will have drink and will verbally declare His praise, (vs. 21). The Apostle Peter quotes from vs. 21 in 1 Peter 2:9. Following the awful days of the Tribulation in which the earth will be almost totally ruined, the establishment of the millennial kingdom will witness a refreshing re-creation of the earth’s bountiful resources to become as a new Eden. See also Jeremiah 16:14-15; 32: 37-44. For an extended discussion on the gathering of the faithful remnant from the nations of the earth to participate in the millennial kingdom, see Alva J. McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom, chapter XVI: The Establishment of the Prophetic Kingdom, pages 178-205.

David L. Cooper also understands these verses as applying to the far future:

According to verse 19 God promises to do a "new thing," something that He has never, in all the annals of human history, done before. Having his eyes focused upon this future time, the prophet declares: "Now shall it spring forth; shall ye not know it?" The works which the Lord will perform yet in the future in order to deliver Israel will be so very mighty and stupendous that the miracles which He performed at the time of the Exodus will seem as nothing in comparison--they will be overshadowed by the greatness and the power of these future delivering acts. On this point hear the Prophet Jeremiah: "Therefore, behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that they shall no more say, As Jehovah liveth, who brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; But, As Jehovah liveth, who brought up and who led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all the countries whither I had driven them. And they shall dwell in their own land" (Jer. 23:7,8).

The first of these future acts of the Lord is that He will "make a way in the wilderness." This way of which the prophet is speaking will not be something that man has constructed. It will be by divine power, just as the way which the Lord made through the Red Sea. It will be just as literal and as actual as the opening up of the Red
Sea. The second thing mentioned is that the Lord will make "rivers in the desert." Water is a great necessity. Without it no life would be possible. There are vast stretches of the earth's surface that are desolate, dreary wastes, impassable to man. Not so will it be at the time when God delivers His people, Israel. In a miraculous manner He will cause rivers of water to flow in the desert for them. The Lord provided food and water for Elijah, His faithful servant. He supplied water and manna for Israel when she was in the wilderness, and He will, for the chosen, faithful remnant again provide food and water. This promise is made in Isaiah 33:13-16--especially in verse 16: "... his bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure." This abundance of food and water will be especially provided, declared the Lord, "... to my people, my chosen." At the same time the beasts of the desert will enjoy refreshment from the water which the Lord, at that future time, will supply for His people.

Let us notice that God will meet the physical needs of His people Israel "... which I [Jehovah] formed for myself, that they might set forth my praise" (vs. 21). When the Lord created the Hebrew nation, He had a definite purpose in view, which is expressed in the words, "that they might set forth my praise." Israel's mission in the world is a spiritual one. She has never performed the task for which she was created. It is true that individuals of that race have done the will of God in a limited way and have thus glorified Him, but this passage speaks of the Lord's delivering the remnant of His people whom He has formed to set forth His glory and praise. God never will be praised and glorified in the proportion set forth in the prophetic word till this part of the nation, the remnant, is given the truth, turns to Him with all of its heart, and becomes an empty channel through which His power may flow every day and every hour. God created Israel for His glory and she shall yet fit into this international picture, passing on the divine blessings to the world. (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly-May 1945).

The Sinful Condition of God’s Servants: 43:22-28

As is so common in the prophetic writings of Isaiah, promises of salvation follow declarations of judgment and judgment passages follow directly after salvation promises. Verses 22-28 are no exception. After declaring that His people, whom He had formed for Himself, will declare His praise, (vs. 21), God proceeds to pronounce judgment upon His people for their unfaithful worship. He berates them for their failure to honor Him with the sacrifices that His law had required and for wearying Him with their iniquities (see Isaiah chapter 1). The words of God recorded in these verses are not addressed to exiles in Babylon as some would indicate. God is speaking to Isaiah’s audience in Jerusalem where the temple was the center of their worship. Not only had this generation continued in their sin but they had followed in the sinful footsteps of their forefather and past spokesmen. The consequence of the never-ending sinfulness of these people is that God will cause the pollution of the princes of the sanctuary (by implication polluting temple itself) and God will consign His people (Jacob/Israel) to be destroyed and reviled. These stunning words of judgment are then followed by comforting words of future restoration and blessing, 44:1-8. Although, God will punish His people for their sins, He never completely forsakes them and will ultimately establish a majestic peaceful kingdom upon the earth, ruled by their Messiah, which Revelation 20:1-6 states will endure for a thousand years.

43:22 But you did not call upon me, O Jacob; you have grown tired of me, O Israel.

God laments that His people have failed to call on Him, which could be understood as their lack of prayer in seeking forgiveness and guidance from their LOR D who is their Creator, Holy One and King (vs. 15). They also have become weary of God indicating that their worship of God was a mere formality without any heartfelt devotion to Him as the following verses testify. The problem of stale lifeless worship by those whose hearts are full of sin was common among the people of God during Old Testament days and continues to this day. Isaiah addressed this issue at the beginning of his prophecy: Isaiah 1:11-14. See also Isaiah 66:1-
4: Isaiah 40-48: Page 73

4; Jeremiah 7:1-15; Hosea 6:4-11; Amos 4:1-13; Micah 6:1-16. These are selected verses only as the lack of heartfelt worship to God by His people is an all too common complaint of God which leads to His just punishment and retribution.

43:23-24 You have not brought me your sheep for burnt offerings, or honored me with your sacrifices.
   I have not burdened you with offerings, or wearied you demanding frankincense.
24 You have bought me no sweet cane with money, nor have you satisfied me with the fat of your sacrifices.
   But you have burdened me with your sins, you have wearied me with your iniquities.

God claims that His people’s failure to worship Him with all their heart has led to their slackness in obeying the law by not bringing the required sheep for burnt offerings. Nor have they brought sacrifices which would honor Him. God has been gentle to His people by not overly demanding offerings and incense. This gentleness on God’s part may have been due to the destruction of the agricultural lands in Judah by the army of Assyria which would have destroyed crops and vegetation. God further laments that His people have not offered Him sweet cane (calamus) or money offerings (Exodus 30:22-33), nor have they sent up to Him the sweet smell of the fat which ascended from their required burnt offerings, (Exodus 29:10-25). Instead they have only “offered” God the stench of their sins and iniquities. See Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, pages 214-215 for a discussion of the purpose of the sacrificial system:

43:25 I, am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake; I will not remember your sins.

Following His lament about the heartless worship of His people in neglecting the requirements of the law regarding sacrifices and offerings, God delivers an astounding message of salvation. It is not that ritual worship in itself is the key to having sins forgiven but it is because God will forgive sins (wipes out your transgressions) and does not remember them for His own sake. Thomas Constable explains:

The Lord Himself (cf. v. 11) would forgive His people for His own sake, not because they had earned forgiveness with their worship. Forgiveness of sin is a divine prerogative (cf. Matt. 9:2-6). He pictured forgiveness as erasing something previously written on a record (cf. 44:22; 2 Kings 21:13; Ps. 51:1, 9).

Another figure, forgetting sins committed against Himself, strengthens the promise of forgiveness (cf. Jer. 31:34; Mic. 7:18-19). Since God is omniscient He never forgets anything, but in this promise He compared Himself to a person who does forget things (an anthropomorphism, cf. v. 24) to illustrate the fact that He would not hold their sins against them. He would not call their sins to mind with a view to punishing them. It was sin, not captivity, that was the root trouble that needed dealing with. Later, Isaiah revealed that God would deal with it through His Servant's ministry (53:10-12). (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 209).

43:26-27 Remind me;
   let us argue this out in court;
   present your case,
   so that you may prove your innocence.
27 Your first father sinned, and your spokespersons have rebelled against me.
In a courtroom setting, see also 41:21, God demands that His people remind Him by their argument (presentation of their witness) regarding their worthiness and righteousness and why they have seen fit not to honor God with the required offerings and sacrifices. This verse is reminiscent of the beginning of Isaiah’s prophecy where God called His people to reason together with Him: 1:18. In vs. 26, God calls upon His people to state their case. In the next verse, God states His position as the prosecutor of the case. God bluntly states that their “forefather” (marginal note: father) sinned. This could be a reference to Abraham or Jacob but it is not stated who God is referencing. God next avows that their spokesmen have rebelled against Him. These interpreters could have been false prophets, ungodly priests or rebellious princes or kings. The Scriptures do not hide the sins of the forefathers nor leaders of the Hebrew people. God has been dealing with these sins since calling them as His chosen people and continues to deal with them today. Man’s sinful inclinations have not changed and God has in His grace offered to forgive these sins and remember them no more as vs. 25 states. God continues to forgive sins today to any who will call upon Him: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9).

43:28 Therefore I defiled your princes of the sanctuary; I delivered Jacob over to destruction, and Israel to insults.

The KJV translates the second sentence in vs. 28 as “And have given Jacob to the curse.” The NASB has the word “ban” instead of “destruction” (DASV). The climax of this short courtroom drama is stated in vs. 28. God, now as the Judge, declares His verdict. Since there can be no defence to the people’s sinfulness in rebelling against Him, God declares His righteous judgment: He will pollute (pierce through) the princes (priests) of the sanctuary and consign His people to the ban (complete destruction) and to revilement.

Thomas Constable again explains:

God would also pollute the priests with guilt since they had for generations polluted His sacrifices with their guilt (cf. 2 Chron. 24:5). They, of all people, should have been holy since they dealt with the holy things connected with Israel’s worship (cf. 65:2-5; Lev. 10:3). God would consign the whole nation to the ban (Heb. herem), something devoted to destruction. Israel had become like Canaan (cf. 1:9-10; Josh. 6:17; 1 Sam. 15:21), and it would become the object of Gentile reviling as Canaan had been for the Israelites. (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 210).

J. Alec Motyer discusses the meaning of the ban as destruction:

Destruction (ḥērem) is not ‘destruction’ pure and simple but the utter ‘separation’ from the face of the earth of that which the Lord abhors (Josh. 6:17; 8:26). What a verdict!—not pardon (26) but the divine curse (28). (J. Alec Motyer, Isaiah, page 275).

But as terrifying and final as this judgement appears, all is not lost for as stated at the beginning of this short passage (verses 22-28), Isaiah frequently in his prophecy, follows a message of judgment and punishment with a declaration of salvation and hope. Verses 1-8 of chapter 44 are an excellent example of this pattern. In this next section, God tells His people to not fear for He has made wonderful provision for them for He is the LORD of hosts, their King, and their Redeemer who is the first and the last. He is also their Rock and there is no One like Him for He alone is God.
Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 43:
43:1-7: The Redemption of God’s People
43:8-13: The Reminder to God’s People
43:14-21: The Restoration of God’s People
43:22-28: The Rebellion of God’s People

Introduction to Isaiah Chapter 44

Chapter 44 of Isaiah is another beautiful declaration of God’s love, salvation and protective care for His people. The first eight verses contain promises of the blessings of God during the far future messianic kingdom. These verses also contain majestic compound names for God (vs. 6) and many terms describing His work on their behalf. The middle section of this chapter, verses 9-20, contain a lengthy discussion on the foolishness of crafting and then worshipping idols. Isaiah often inserts excurses on idolatry as it was such an impediment to the true worship of God as the Holy One of Israel and a practice in which God hated and would not tolerate. The final section of chapter 44, verses 21-28 contains two distinct sections. Verses 21-23 are a wonderful statement of God’s salvation and a call for His people to return to Him, likely referencing their previous evil practice of idol worship. Verses 24-28 contain a specific reference to Cyrus (vs. 28) and to the re-inhabitation of the cities of Judah including Jerusalem (vs. 26) and to the rebuilding of Jerusalem and its temple (vs. 28). As verses 26-28 of chapter 44 do contain specific references to the return of the exiles from Babylon and to Cyrus, it is fitting for students to interpret these verses literally and understand that only God could identify a person by name, Cyrus, over 160 years (701 – 538 B.C.) before this king would fulfill the role given to him by God.

7. Further Blessings to Israel: 44:1-8

44:1 Now listen, O Jacob my servant, and Israel, whom I have chosen.

This verse begins with an emphatic “Now listen” (but now) linking it to the previous message in 43:22-28. The ominous and devastating pronouncement of judgment by God on His people, including “the ban” 43:28, in the previous section (43:22-28) in which God’s judgment seems to be final, is immediately followed by a comforting message of God’s future salvation, 44:1-5. A survey of the messages of Isaiah contained in his prophecy will reveal that Isaiah often follows a declaration of judgment with a blessing of salvation. For example, the judgment of God upon His people in chapter 1 is followed with a declaration of hope and salvation in a future day as recorded in chapter 2:1-4. A closer example to chapter 44 is the contrast between judgment in 42:19-25 and future salvation in 43:1-7.

God calls his servant “Jacob/Israel” whom he has chosen to listen to him. The combination of Jacob and Israel is often used by Isaiah to refer collectively to God’s people: 9:8; 10:20; 14:1; 14:21; 14:27; 27:6; 29:23; 40:27; 41:8; 14; 42:21; 43:1, 22, 28; 44:1, 5, 21, 23; 45:4; 46:3; 48:1, 2; 49: 5, 6. A close parallel to 44:1-2 is found in 41:8; 43:1 and 44:21. God’s people are often designated in the Scriptures as the “sons of Israel” and “My people Israel” The reference to Jacob as a synonym of Israel is also appropriate for Jacob was the father and patriarchal head of the tribes of Israel. At his birth, he was given the name Jacob but God later decreed that his name was to be Israel, Genesis 35:10. God at that time declared that the covenant He had made with Abraham and Isaac was to be made with Jacob and his descendants, Genesis 35:11-12.

God often refers to Israel as His servant: 41:8; 9; 42:19; 43:10; 44:1, 2, 21, 26, 45:4; 48:20; and 50:10. See notes on the previous verses (41:8-9; 42:19; and 43:10) for further comment on the role of Israel as God’s servant. Another common expression of God for His people is “chosen,” see 41:8, 9; 43:10, 20; 44:1, 2; 45:4;
49:7; 65:15, and 22. God’s choice of the Jewish people was not because they were mighty in numbers or because of anything they had accomplished or because they were in any way deserving to be His chosen people. He chose them for His own name’s sake to declare His glory to the nations of the earth. 2 Samuel 7:23; Isaiah 43:7 and 44:23.

44:2 This is what the LORD says who made you, and formed you from the womb, who will help you:
Do not be afraid, O Jacob, my servant, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.

God authenticates His message with the imperative: “This is what the LORD says” which is intended for His people to listen and take notice of what He is about to declare to them. See note on Isaiah 43:16-17. He reminds His people that it was He who had formed them from the womb. See also 43:1, 7, 21; 44:21, and 24. God is stating that these sinful, obstinate, rebellious, blind and deaf people are His family whom He, in holy love, intimately cares for and protects. It is extremely exceptional that God makes the same statement about His most beloved Servant, His Son, the Messiah in Isaiah 49:5. This family relationship, Exodus 4:22, is further developed in the New Testament, not only between the Father and the Son, Jesus Christ (John 6:40) but also between the Father and all believers whom are called the children of God and fellow heirs with Christ, (Romans 8:16-17).

God again (vs. 1) calls His people His servant and the ones He has chosen. This repetitive description of the special relationship between God and these people is to assure them that He has not forsaken them and He has a plan and purpose for them. Following the statement of coming destruction upon them, 43:28 and the connecting “but now” of 44:1 these chosen servants of God can rest in the knowledge that it is not God’s intention to annihilate them but to discipline them and following this chastisement He will restore them. God calls Israel, “Jeshurun” which has the meaning of “upright” and “righteous” See also Deuteronomy 32:15; 33:5 and 26. By calling His people “upright” or “righteous”, God is not stating that they have this characteristic as an intrinsic attribute but that this is His purpose for them. He calls them to be holy: Exodus 19:5-6 and 22:31.

44:3 For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground. I will pour my Spirit upon your descendants, and my blessing upon your offspring.

The restorative work of God on behalf of his chosen servants is announced for a far future time when God will bring refreshment to the earth for He will: “pour water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground.” This work of God is a repeated promise in the prophecy of Isaiah. See: 12:3; 30:23-25; 32:1-2; 35:1-7; 41:17-20; 43:19-21; 44:4; 49:10; and 58:11. The earth will be restored and refreshed during the days of the messianic kingdom where nature, animals and humans will all benefit from the work and presence of God who is the Messiah who will reign in righteousness from Mount Zion. (Isaiah 61:11).

But there is more to this verse than the physical restoration of the earth and its inhabitants. God promised that, He will also “pour” His Spirit upon the descendants of His people and (pour out) His blessing on their offspring. This is a future promise that the generation of Isaiah’s day could invest their trust as the generation of our current day patiently hopes for its fulfillment.
Thomas constable rightly observes:

“The Lord promised to pour out His Spirit on the Israelites in the future. This gift would have the same effect for the nation as pouring water on dry ground would have for the landscape. It would bring refreshment and new life, indeed, a whole new spiritual attitude (cf. 32:15; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:26-27; 37:7-10; Joel 2:28-29). Blessing would come to the descendants of Isaiah's audience. Isaiah in this verse may have meant that God would bring both physical and spiritual refreshment. Other passages reveal that He will send physical refreshment (cf. 35:6-7; 41:18).

Since this is a promise specifically to the Israelites, they would be the special recipients of this outpouring. Thus it must still be future. The giving of the Spirit in the apostolic age, first on the day of Pentecost and then on several subsequent occasions, was not a gift to Israel but to the church, not to Jews uniquely but to Jews and Gentiles equally (cf. Acts 11:15). Both outpourings have the result of making the recipients witnesses.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, pages 210-211). (Italics added).

Victor Buksbazen adds:

“The primary sense of the passage is spiritual and speaks of the future regeneration of Israel which will bring blessing to all of mankind. Their turning to God will attract others to Jehovah and to the people of Jehovah. In contrast to Israel’s former state when they were delivered to the gentiles to be treated with contempt and as an object of blasphemings (Isa. 43:28), they will in the future become an honored people with whom non-Jews will seek to identify themselves and also with their God.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 355).

44:4 They will spring up among the grass, like willows by flowing streams.

God adds to the marvellous promise of the outpouring of the Spirit upon the future descendants of the Jews who were the recipients of Isaiah’s message. In a far future day these descendants will occupy the land in such numbers that they will “spring up” like grass or like popular trees by the water side. Isaiah will later declare the words of God, as recorded in 66:7-8 stating:

Before her labor pains began, she gave birth; before her pain came, she delivered a boy.
8 Who has heard of such a thing? Who has seen such things? Can a country be born in a single day? Will a nation be born in a second? Yet as soon as Zion went into labor, she gave birth to her children.

The faithful Jewish remnant who enter the messianic kingdom will rapidly populate the land and witness the replacement of the effects of devastation that were evident during the dreadful days of the Great Tribulation, with a land of restored nature, peace and longevity ruled by their Messiah.
44:5 One will say, 'I am the LORD's;  
another will call himself by the name of Jacob;  
yet another will write on his hand 'The LORD's,'  
and take the name 'Israel' as his own.

In that great messianic day described in verses 3-4, those who populate the land will belong to the Lord. They will call on the name of Jacob and give honor to the name of Israel. Some will even write on their hand as a visual display, “Belonging to the LORD.” The prophet Zechariah spoke of that day as recorded in Zechariah 14:20-21:

20 On that day, there will be inscribed on horses' bells, "Holy to the LORD." The pots in the LORD's house will be like the bowls in front of the altar.  
21 Yes, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holy to the LORD of hosts, so that everyone who sacrifices can come and take of them, and use them to boil their sacrifices in. On that day there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts.

David L. Cooper commented on these glorious days:

“Those who will take heed to the warning, will come and throw themselves upon His grace and mercy by accepting the long-rejected Messiah need not fear, because the Lord has chosen them. This assurance of protection is reiterated time and again throughout the second half of Isaiah.

In verse 3 the remnant of Israel is represented as thirsty ground, dry land, upon which God promises to pour water, and over which He assures the people that He will send streams of refreshing. That He is not talking about literal deserts is clear from the statement parallel to this one in the latter half of the verse: "I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring ..." This is the promise that God will pour out His Spirit upon the faithful remnant. On the last day of the Feast of the Tabernacles, the great day (six months before the crucifixion), our Lord Jesus called upon those who were thirsty to come to Him and drink (John 7:37f). The Apostle John explained that this language was not to be taken literally, but stated that Jesus was referring to the pouring out of the Spirit upon those who should believe on Him. The language is clearly an echo of this promise which the Lord makes to the nation of Israel in the passage under consideration. The individual now who accepts Jesus of Nazareth as Lord and Saviour receives the Spirit. When this prophecy is fulfilled, the entire nation of Israel living then will receive Him and thus upon each one the Spirit of God will come and satisfy the thirsty soul. At that time "One shall say, I am Jehovah's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto Jehovah, and surname himself by the name of Israel" (vs. 5). At that time anti-Semitism will have vanished from the earth. Every Hebrew living then will be rejoicing in the fact that he is of Jewish origin and will write with his own hand, "Unto Jehovah." The marginal reading of this quotation is write on his hand, unto Jehovah. Both renderings are possible. Everyone of Israel who survives to that time will become a consecrated, devout follower of Messiah and will have the name of God in some way connected with his name.

Isaiah, in 4:3, speaks of those who remain in Jerusalem after the Tribulation as being written among those who are living in Zion. A reference to this future register is found in Psalm 87:5,6.

Thus in Isaiah 44:1-5 we see an invitation to Israel to accept her Messiah. Here we get a glimpse of the great Millennial Era when our Lord shall reign in glory and splendor over the earth. At that time Jerusalem will be His capital.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly-May 1945).
8. The Futility of Idolatry and the Forgiveness of God: 44:6-28

44:6 This is what the LORD, the King of Israel,
and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts says,
"I am the first,
and I am the last;
besides me there is no other God.

The repetitive, “This is what the LORD.....says” (cf. vs. 2) is declared by God to assert His divine authoritative right to demand attention from His people. The compound names for God in vs. 6 are similar to many others within the prophecy of Isaiah. See previous notes on Isaiah: 19:20; 37:16, 21; 43:3, 11, 14-15. These magnificent compound names are also found here in 44:6 and 44:24; 45:21; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 60:16; and 63:16 (selected verses only). See also the Introduction for an listing of all the names for God in Isaiah.

There are four designated names for God in vs. 6 and two descriptive phrases: (1) The title LORD is Israel’s covenant making and keeping God, translated LORD from YHWH. Older commentaries and studies translated YHWH as Jehovah but this practice is mostly obsolete and has been replaced in more recent years with Yahweh with the vowels a and e added. (2) King of Israel is God’s designated title for His role as the theocratic ruler of Israel even though the people of Israel refused Him as King, hundreds of years earlier and demanded a human king. (1 Samuel 8:1-22; See also God’s prediction of Israel’s demand for a human king to rule over them: Deuteronomy 17:14-20; and 28:36-37. (3) Redeemer is a beloved title for God who acts as their kinsmen to redeem them from disaster both physical and spiritual. See also Isaiah 41:14, 43:14; 44:24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 69:20; 60:16 and 63:16. (4) LORD of hosts is a name designating YHWH as the commander of armies and the Lord of the hosts of heaven. As commander of armies God is completely sovereign in all dealings with corrupt mankind who can do nothing to thwart God’s purposes for His creation.

The first descriptive phrase: God describes Himself as the “first and the last.” Gary V. Smith comments on this this descriptive phrase for God:

“Finally, God announces that “I am the first and I am the last,” a phrase that is not just a title but also a description of his unique sovereignty over all events. He knows what happened in the past and has planned and revealed to his people some of the things that will happen in the future. This is not an abstract philosophical statement of his eternality but a reminder that his works span the whole scope of history from the beginning to the very end of time. This claim would give assurance to the audience that God knows all about their past problems and will be around to help them in the future. This point anticipates the argument that will be presented later in the narrative where a craftsman brings an idol-god into existence many years after he planted a seedling. When God claims to be the first (41:4; 48:12), it indicates that he preceded the first events of creation and will continue as the sovereign Ruler over creation until the very last events.” (Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, pages 225-226).

The second descriptive phrase: God states, as recorded at the end of vs. 6 that “besides me there is no other God.” This description of Himself sets up the following discussion on the futility of crafting and worshipping idols. God repeats this claim in vs. 8 and in 45:5, 6, 14, 21, 22; and 46:9. See also Isaiah 43:11 (besides me there is no savior). The plain truth of Scripture is that God alone is the Creator and Sustainer of the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1; Isaiah 42:5) and He alone is the only Savior of mankind (Acts 4:12) and again, as Isaiah states God’s word at the end of Isaiah 44:6 “besides me there is no other God.”
Those who refer to any other God are making a patently false claim. The only true God as revealed in the Scriptures has called the nations to make any claim that their so-called gods can do anything at all (Isaiah 41:22-24). The result of this claim is the same as that which Elijah encountered. (1 Kings 18:20-40). False gods cannot make any response or do anything. The most hideous and grievous sin of mankind has been the rejection of the One true God and the replacement worship of something mankind has created to become its God. Therefore, God has given mankind over to the futility and deadly consequence of their rebellion against God (allowed this sin to have its full impact). See Romans 1: 18-32.

44:7 Who is like me?

Let them announce it,
and let them declare it and set it before me,
since I established an ancient people.

Let them predict future things to come,
and let them explain what will come to pass.

God, in vs. 7 is challenging those who are described in vs. 9 as “All those who make idols are nothing.” Not only are their idols worthless and accounted as nothing but they are seen in God’s eyes as recorded in Isaiah 40:17: “All the nations are as nothing before him; they are accounted by him as less than nothing and worthless.” The subject of the pagan practice of making and worshiping idols and the worthlessness of idols is a common theme in Isaiah: See 2:8, 18, 20; 10:10-11; 19:1, 3; 21:9; 30:22; 31:7; 40:18-20; 41:21-29; 42:8, 17; 44:9-20; 45:16, 20; 48:5; 57:13 and 66:3. In 44:7 God challenges the makers of these worthless idols to have these idols announce declare, predict or explain anything that would compare them to God or to do anything that God can do. God had previously asked in 40:18 “To whom then will you compare God? What image will you equate him to? See also 40:25 and 41:26.

There are three issues of challenge in vs. 7 that God is addressing with the words “let them” as the basis of these challenges.

First, God asks: “Who is like me? Let them announce it.” This rhetorical question can only be answered with a resounding, “No one is like God.” The Scriptures often proclaim that there is no one like God nor is their anyone who can compare with God. Selected verses only: Exodus 8:10; 9:14; 15:11; Deuteronomy 33:26; 1 Samuel 2:2; 2 Samuel 7:22; 1 Kings 8:23; 1 Chronicles 17:20; 2 Chronicles 6:14; Job 36:22; Psalm 40:5; 71:19; 77:13; 86:8; 89:8; 113:5; Isaiah 40:18; 46:9; Micah 7:10 and 18. A similar declaration is that God is described as a rock and is incomparable: 1 Samuel 2:2; 2 Samuel 22:32; Psalm 18:31; Isaiah 17:10; 26:4; 44:8; and Habakkuk 1:12.

Second, God requests that let them declare things in the past. The NIV states in vs. 7: “Let him declare and lay out before me what has happened since I established my ancient people.” This question was asked previously of those who were called to present their case for trusting in idols as stated in 41:22: “Declare what things happened in the past, what they were, so that we may consider them, and check whether they actually happened.” The only answer possible to this request is that only God can declare what has happened in the past as He was the only One who made and arranged past events. They did no happen by chance.

Third, God requests: “Let them predict future things to come and let them explain things that will come to pass.” God had also requested previously, as recorded in 41:22: “tell us what things are to come.” There is no one but God who can perfectly predict or declare the future. Some may predict some things that may happen in a general sense. But no one but God can with precision and accuracy foretell what the future holds.
44:8 *Do not tremble, or be afraid.*
   *Have I not announced and foretold long ago?*
   *You are my witnesses.*
   *Is there any God besides me?*
   *There is no other Rock;*
   *I know of none.*

Before starting a lengthy discussion on the folly of idol making and worship, Isaiah completes the three-verse declaration by God of His uniqueness as recorded in 44:6-8. God lovingly requests that His people are not to be afraid or tremble as what the future holds for He has announced and foretold this future in days long past. See also Isaiah 45:21 and 48:5-7. Even though God has declared that His people as His servants are blind and deaf (Isaiah 42:18, 19 and 43:8) they are called His witnesses to what He has done in the past, what He is doing in the present and what He will accomplish in the future. God asks again: “*Is there any God besides me?*” The word for God in vs. 8 is *eloah* in the Hebrew with the meaning of being the single or sole God. There is no other God. This is the only occurrence of *eloah* in the book of Isaiah. God also declares that for His people: “*there is no other Rock.*” The comparative to a rock is often seen in Scripture (Selected verses only): 1 Samuel 2:2; 2 Samuel 22:32; Psalm 18:31; Isaiah 17:10; 26:4; 44:8; and Habakkuk 1:12. As an unmoving, enduring and strong rock that can be compared to a fortress: 2 Samuel 22:2; Psalm 18:2; 31:3 and 71:3 the sole God of the universe is a protective refuge for His people. They can with confidence and assurance depend on Him to provide safety even amid the storms and conflicts to come and more importantly gracefully give salvation to them so that they will be eternally safe and live with Him in peace and righteousness.

8. The Futility of Idolatry and the Forgiveness of God: 44:9-28

Verses 9-20: The Folly of Idol Making and Worship

In verses 9-20 of Isaiah chapter 40, Isaiah describes the worthless activity of making and crafting a worthless object. Those who craft idols will be put to shame (vs. 9) for there is no benefit derived from a god that is a cast metal object (vs. 10). All the companions of the idol craftsman will also be put to shame for those who make such a god are mere humans (vs. 11). Those who with human skill make an idol become weary and they make their god just like themselves, a weak human with no divine power (vss. 12-13). With the same wood that is used for fuel for heat for warmth and fuel for cooking, idols are crafted to become an object of worship (vss. 14-17). Idol worshippers have no understanding of the folly of their false hope in a man-made object that can offer them nothing but a lie (vss. 18-20).

The discussion of the folly of making and trusting in idols follows Isaiah’s magnificent recording of the dialog by God (vss. 1-8) which exalts the One true God. Vss. 1-8 are set in sharp contrast to vss. 9-20. There are several contrasts between the Lord and lowly worthless idols from this passage and from chapters 40-43.

*First*, instead of a weak and pagan human who chooses a piece of wood that is to be fashioned into an idol (vs. 14), God has chosen a people to Himself: Jacob/Israel (vs. 1).

*Second*, instead of a corruptible heathen who makes an idol (vss. 9-20) God has formed and made people (vs. 1) who have been made in His image (Genesis 1:27).

*Third*, instead of a man-made god who can be of no help to those who craft it (vss.18-20), God will give His people divine help (vs. 1).
Fourth, instead of a useless crafted god that cannot affect the natural or spiritual realms, God can re-shape nature to pour out soothing and healing waters and pour out His Spirit on His chosen people (vss. 3-4).

Fifth, instead of a man-made mark on a worthless idol, the people of God will write the name of the One true God on their hands (vs. 5).

Sixth, instead of a crafted idol that had a beginning and an ending and can offer no help or salvation, God exists eternally as the only One, their divine King who can redeem His kindred people (vs. 6).

Seventh, instead of a useless piece of crafted wood or a shaped molten metal who can offer no counsel or advice, God can declare the things that have come from ages ago and predict the future with precision and accuracy (vs. 7).

Eighth, instead of an idol that needs to be fastened by nails so it will not tip over (41:7), God is a secure and strong Rock whom His people can come to for shelter and refuge. (vs. 8)

44:9 All those who make idols are nothing; the things that they delight in are worthless; their own witnesses cannot see or know, so they are put to shame.

Not only are idols, the things that are delighted in are worthless, so are those who make them. Those who make blind and senseless idols are witnesses who themselves are ignorant and blind and therefore put to shame both by their creating of a useless object of worship and by being woefully without any knowledge of their acts. The word “nothing” is often translated as futile. It is the Hebrew word tohu which has the meaning of “emptiness,” “formless,” and “vain.” It is translated as “worthless” in 1 Samuel 12:21: “Do not turn aside after worthless idols which cannot profit or deliver, for they are worthless.” The word tohu first occurs in Scripture translated as “formless” in Genesis 1:2: “And the earth was formless and empty.” It occurs most often in Isaiah in the DASV: 24:10 (wasted); 29:21 (false); 34:11 (chaos); 40:17 (worthless); 40:23 (worthless); 41:29 (nothing); 44:9 (worthless); 45:18 (chaotic); 45:19 (vain); 49:4 (nothing); and 59:4 (empty). The witnesses (Hebrew: ed) to the crafting and delighting in idols are blind and without knowledge. This description of these pagan witnesses is certainly a purposeful contrast by Isaiah to the nations who are called to be witnesses who are blind and deaf (Isaiah 43:8-9) and to God’s chosen people, His servants who are also blind and deaf (Isaiah 42:19) and are His witnesses (Isaiah 43:10). These blind and unknowing witnesses are put to shame (Hebrew: bosh). The Hebrew word bosh occurs often in Isaiah: 1:29; 19:9; 20:5; 23:4; 24:23; 26:11; 29:22; 37:27; 41:11; 42:17; 44:9, 11; 45:16, 17, 24; 49:23; 50:7; 54:4; 65:13; and 66:5. It is repeated as “shame” for emphasis in 44:11. Those who make and trust in worthless idols are put to shame by the One who is the only true God.

44:10 Who has fashioned a god, or cast a metal idol that is of any benefit?

God asks a rhetorical question that can only be answered by the words “no one.” There has never been a god who has been formed or fashioned by a human that can have any benefit. The prophet Habakkuk, 2:18-19 declared that idols are good for nothing for they are without benefit and have no breath in them:
18 What benefit is an idol when a craftsman carved it? What good is a metal image, a teacher of lies? Why does even the one who makes them trust in speechless idols?

19 Woe to him that says to wood, 'Wake up,' To speechless stone, 'Arise!' Can it instruct? Look, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is absolutely no breath in it.

The word benefit in Isaiah 44:10, is often translated as “profit” in the Old Testament. It occurs in Isaiah in the DASV: 30:5 (benefit) 6 (help); 44:10 (benefit); 47:12 (succeed); 48:17 (good) and 57:12 (help).

44:11 Look, all his companions will be put to shame; its craftsmen are mere humans. Let them all be gathered together, let them stand up. They will be terrified and put to shame.

All who fashion an idol and all who worship them (their companions) will be “put to shame.” They are “mere humans” who Isaiah had earlier described in 40:17 as “all nations are as nothing before him; they are accounted by him as less than nothing and worthless.” The Apostle Paul, as recorded in Romans 1:21-25 also spoke of those who had rejected God and worshipped the things they had made. “For even though they knew God, they did not glorify him as God, or give thanks to him; but became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for images resembling corruptible man, birds, four-footed animals and creeping things. 24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to dishonor their own bodies among themselves. 25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.” God “gave them up,” (Romans 1:24) meaning that God allowed the natural result of their rebellion against Him to be their utter demise which would ultimately lead to their complete separation from God and an eternity in God’s ultimate solution for sinfulness, the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15). This ultimate solution by God for sinfulness is described by Isaiah in 44:11 as “they will be terrified and put to shame.” Just like fashioned wooden idols that are not secured by nails, those who fashion idols and worship them will not be able to stand up when summoned by God.

44:12 The blacksmith makes it with his tools, and shapes it in the coals. He fashions it with hammers, and forges it with his strong arm. He gets hungry and his strength weakens; he drinks no water and he becomes faint.

In contrast to God who has made and formed His people from the womb, (44:2) and will never tire nor grow weary for He is strong and enduring Rock (44:8), worthless idols are made by humans such as blacksmiths who spends all his efforts, making, shaping, fashioning and forging metal idols. The blacksmith becomes hungry and his strength weakens and because he works without stopping for a drink of water, becomes faint. Isaiah is depicting a picture that his audience could not fail to understand. Why would anyone trust in an idol made by weak and fallible human beings? Why would anyone exchange the true worship of the eternal
steadfast God for bowing down to an image that a blacksmith has fashioned? The answer should be obvious but the reality is that the “god” of this world has blinded the eyes of those who are perishing (2 Corinthians 4:3-4); so that they will worship created things rather than the Creator of all things.

44:13 The carpenter stretches out a line; 
he traces out its form with a pencil.
He shapes it with planes,
and he marks its outline with a compass.
He shapes it in the form of a human,
according to human beauty,
to dwell in a shrine.

Isaiah next describes another craftsman, a carpenter, who expends his energies in marking and shaping an idol (in wood) in the form of a human and the result of his handiwork will then reside in a shrine. The NKJV for vs 13 translates these words as:

“The craftsman stretches out his rule, 
He marks one out with a chalk;
He fashions it with a plane,
He marks it out with the compass,
And makes it like the figure of a man, 
According to the beauty of a man, 
That it may remain in the house.”

Isaiah must have had some knowledge of how a blacksmith and a carpenter perform their works. For the detail of the process of shaping and forming their works indicate familiarity with the skill necessary to produce a shape that is easily recognized. There is no shame in recognizing human beauty as long as it is beauty is ascribed to the Creator as the One who formed man. The great shame in these verses (9-20) is that the human form is to be worshipped in contrast to the only One deserving of worship who is the creator. The finished work of the human shaped idol will reside in a house (NKJV) or a shrine (DASV) where it will be worshipped in a place where it will not face the elements because those who shaped it know how fragile it was and that it would not last long without protection of a shelter. How vile is this reasoning. The idol, shaped by skilled craftsmen, is vulnerable and will deteriorate if not covered by another man-made structure. Only those blinded by their sin and by Satan will not recognize the futility of worshipping a fragile idol that cannot hear, see, reason or speak and can be of no benefit. See also Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, pages 231-232 for a comparison between Isaiah 44:13 and 40:12 and 22.

44:14 He cuts down cedars, 
or chooses a cypress and an oak.
He let it grow strong among the trees of the forest.
He plants a cedar, 
and the rain nourishes it.

Prior to fashioning an idol, the carpenter (vs. 13), had taken the time to plant a cedar, (and by implication a cypress and an oak), and lets the rain nourish it. When it is grown sufficiently, the carpenter cuts these trees down for multiple uses that Isaiah describes in verses 15-17. The care and time taken to prepare a tree should not be quickly glossed over by the student of Scripture. Why would a seemingly otherwise sensible human being take such care for these trees. Is it not that the carpenter places more value and treasure in created
things such as trees and nature than in the care and development of a life of devotion and faith in the Creator of these trees. Having considered the worship of something his hands has formed to be of great worth, he consciously rejects that which is of far greater worth, far beyond any comparison. The easily seen and made idol requires no faith but blind trust in a worthless object. Isaiah had earlier, in 40:18-20, commented on the selection of a tree for use as an idol.

"18 To whom then will you compare God? What image will you equate him to?
19 An idol? A workman casts it in a mold, and the goldsmith overlays it with gold, and fashions silver chains for it.
20 Or if someone is too poor for such a sacrifice they may choose wood that will not rot and then find a skilful craftsman to set up a carved idol that will not topple."

44:15-17 Then he uses it to make a fire; he takes some of it and warms himself; yes, he kindles a fire with it and bakes bread. Then he makes a god and worships it; he makes it into a carved idol and falls down in worship before it.

16 Half of it he burns in the fire; with this half he cooks meat; he roasts it and is satisfied. He also warms himself, and says, 'Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire.'

17 With the rest he makes a god, even his carved idol; he falls down in worship before it, and prays to it, and says, 'Rescue me, for you are my god.'

The carpenter, having taken care to plant trees and then ensuring that these trees will be well nourished by the rain that God alone provides, then harvests the trees for many uses. In vs. 15, Isaiah describes three things that the carpenter does with the tree he has chopped down. First, he uses the wood of the tree to make a fire for warmth. Second, he uses the fuel from the burning tree to bake his bread so he can eat to nourish himself. Third, the carpenter fashions an idol, a false god from the part of the tree that has not been used for warmth and for baking and cooking. Fourth, the carpenter then falls down before this carved piece of wood and worships before it. It seems incredulous that any sane person would not know that wood that has been used for fire for warmth and for baking and cooking could not also be a god that is worthy of worship and a god that one would expect to answer prayers and provide rescue, safety and security.

Isaiah seems so intent in making this rather obvious point that he repeats the details of the story of the pagan carpenter in verses 16 and 17. It seems that Isaiah is repeating the story because it is so incredible yet it depicts what actually happens. Isaiah may have repeated this story so that his audience could not possibly miss the point of the hopelessness of trusting in man-made idols that are made from wood that has a greater
value in being burned than in being worshipped. Yet, as Isaiah has written in several passages in his book, the people who have been chosen and cared for by God willingly reject Him and bow before worthless idols to seek rescue and salvation. To those who may miss the point for today, idols have not disappeared but have merely changed in their shape and content. Humans, as the Apostle Paul has so strikingly written in Romans 1:18-32, are still desirous to worship created things. Modern society is no different from Isaiah’s or Paul’s day. Idols may have changed from carved or crafted objects to other types of manufactured items or to humans that are put on pedestals or to intangible objects such as wealth, fame or any other desired thing that is placed higher in human hearts for affection than the worship of the true God. Isaiah may have been amazed at the level of idol worship in his day. What would he say if he could comment on the idolatry of this modern age? Thomas Constable cites a quotation from Calvin that is just as valid today as when Calvin wrote:

“…man’s nature, so to speak, is a perpetual factory of idols.”

[Note 517: Calvin, Institutes…, 1.11.8] (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 213)

44:18-19  They do not know or understand,
for their eyes are shut,
so that they cannot see;
their hearts closed,
so that they cannot understand.

No one calls to mind,
nor is there knowledge or understanding to say,
'I have burned half of it in the fire;
with its coals I have baked bread
and roasted meat and ate it.
Should I make an abomination with the rest of it?
Should I fall down and worship a block of wood?

Those who fashion and worship idols have no knowledge or understanding for their eyes are shut and their hearts are closed with the result that they cannot see with their eyes or comprehend with their hearts. The words in the DASV: “for their eyes are shut” are translated in the NKJV and the ESV as: “for He has shut their eyes,” which is similar to the KJV. The NIV has “their eyes are plastered over,” while the NASB has “for He has smeared over their eyes.” The differences in the translations reflect some of the difficulties in translating the Hebrew. The translation by Victor Buksbazen may be closer to the intent of the Hebrew: “for their eyes are glued together.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 357). As it is not clear to the exact meaning of this phrase, it is best to understand that Isaiah is simply stating that these pagan idol worshippers have their eyes shut either by their own sinfulness or as an judgment of God upon them for their sinful behaviour. They certainly would be those, described in 6:9-10 to whom Isaiah was to proclaim the message of God. God’s judgment will fall upon them as it would for a future generation as described in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-11. See also 2 Corinthians 4:3-6 for the influence of Satan on those who are perishing in their sins.

Those who fashion and worship idols do not know or understand and cannot understand that their actions are just blind ignorance for they fail to perceive that they worship a worthless image made of word as vs. 19 very clearly explains. In vs. 18, the word “know” is yada in the Hebrew. It is a very common word in the Old Testament and used quite often by Isaiah in the general sense of knowing and is a companion word to understand or understanding. The word “understand,” in the first line of vs. 18 is the Hebrew word bin which can be also translated as “consider,” “realize,” or “perceive” and is also occurs often in Isaiah’s writings. The word “understand,” which is the final word of vs. 18 in the DASV, is sakal in the Hebrew. It can also be
translated as “comprehend” or “discern.” In vs. 19, the word “knowledge” in the second line, is da’at in the Hebrew and is derived from the common word for “know” yada in the Hebrew. The word da’at is also translated as knowledge in Isaiah 5:13: “Therefore, my people will go into exile for lack of knowledge.” Isaiah also used the word da’at in 44:25 which speaks of an action of God which makes the knowledge of the wise foolish. Also in vs. 19, the word “understanding” in the second line, is tebunah in the Hebrew, and is most often translated as “understanding” in the Old Testament. Isaiah used tebunah in a positive sense in 40:14 and 28, and in a negative sense in 44:19 as did Moses, as recorded in Deuteronomy 32:28: “For they are a nation without sense, and there is no understanding in them.”

44:20 He feeds on ashes;
a deceived mind has led him astray.
He cannot save himself,
or say, 'Is not this idol I hold in my right hand a lie?'

Isaiah concludes his discussion in this passage on the folly of crafting and worshipping idols in vs. 20. Those who fashion an idol are like those who foolishly would use ashes from a fire for food. They would be considered less than stable in mind to eat ashes for it contains no nourishment or any value for food. They have a “deceived” mind which has led them astray. They also cannot save themselves or even comprehend that the idol they hold in their hand is nothing but a lie which cannot see, hear, reason, speak or do anything at all. The word “deceived” in vs. 22 is talal in the Hebrew. It occurs a few times in the Old Testament: Job 13:9; Judges 16:10, 13, 15; Isaiah 44:20 and Jeremiah 9:5. The word “astray” is natah in the Hebrew and occurs frequently in the Old Testament often translated as aside or astray. It occurs often with the word “turn” which is also translated from natah. Isaiah uses these words in 30:11 in which he records the derisive words of the people of Judah to those who are God’s spokesmen: “Get out of the way, turn aside from the path, let us hear no more of the Holy One of Israel.”

Jeremiah 10:6-16 is an excellent summary of the comparison between false idols and the One true God:

6 There is no one like you, O LORD;
you are great,
    and your name is great in power.
7 Who should not fear you, O King of the nations?
    This is what you deserve.
    For among all the wise men of the nations,
    and in all their kingdoms,
    there is no one like you.
8 But they are both stupid and foolish;
    the instruction of wooden idols is worthless.
9 They bring finely hammered silver for plating from Tarshish,
    and gold from Uphaz,
    the work of an artisan and the hands of a goldsmith;
    blue and purple for their clothing,
    they are all the work of a skilled craftsmen.
10 But the LORD is the true God;
    he is the living God and everlasting King.
The earth trembles at his wrath,
    and the nations cannot withstand his fury.
11 This is what you should say to them,  
"The gods who have not made the heavens and the earth,  
these will perish from the earth,  
and from under the heavens.

12 The LORD made the earth by his power;  
he has established the world by his wisdom,  
and by his understanding he has stretched out the heavens.

13 When his voice thunders,  
the rain roars from the heavens.  
He causes the clouds to ascend  
from the ends of the earth;  
he makes lightning in the rain,  
and brings the wind out of his storehouses.

14 Everyone is ignorant and without knowledge.  
Every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols,  
for his image is bogus;  
there is no breath in them.

15 They are worthless,  
a work of delusion;  
in the time of their punishment, they will perish.

16 He who is the portion of Jacob is not like these,  
for he is the creator of all things.  
Israel is the tribe of his inheritance:  
the LORD of hosts is his name.

Verses 21-28 The Redemption of the Lord

Verses 21-22 are often understood as the conclusion of a large section 42:10-44:22. These two verses summarize the message from the Lord, (remember these things,” vs. 21), that He alone is the only God and He has formed His people which is opposed to the pagan idea that mankind fashions a god. The people of God are also to remember that they are His servant and that He will not forget them. God reminds them, vs. 22, that their sins have been blotted out or swept away. God’s final statement for this section is a plea for His people to return to their Redeemer.

44:21-22 Remember these things, O Jacob, and Israel,  
for you are my servant.  
I have formed you;  
you are my servant, O Israel,  
I will not forget you.

22 I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud,  
and your sins like a mist;  
return to me, for I have redeemed you.
“Remember these things,” (vs. 21)
God calls upon His people to remember that He is the One who has chosen them to be His servant. He is their covenant-keeping, Sovereign who has created and formed them. He is the Holy One of Israel who demands that His people have no other gods before Him. He is their Rock they can trust for safety and refuge. He loves them and will not forsake them and He has redeemed them by causing their transgressions to be blotted out so they can have a right relationship with Him. See also 1 Chronicles 16: 8-36; Isaiah 46:8-9.

“for you are my servant.” (vs. 21)
God reminds His people of their unique relationship with Him. He has deemed that they are to be His servant. They are very poor servants for God has called them blind and deaf, Isaiah 42:18-19, yet in this condition they have been called to be witnesses (43:10-12; 44:8) of His glorious works for He has proclaimed the things that have happened in the past for He has ordained them and He has with accuracy and precision declared what will happen in the future. However, there is another Servant whom God has called. This Servant is not blind nor deaf and He will fulfill what God has requested, which His blind and deaf servants failed to do. God declares in Isaiah 49:6:

“It is too insignificant that you should be my servant
   to raise up the tribes of Jacob,
   and to restore the survivors of Israel.
   I will also make you a light to the nations,
   that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.”

“I have formed you.” (vs. 21)
God reminds His people that it is He who has formed them. He is the One who is the Potter who formed them, Isaiah 29:16. He Has created and formed His people, 43:1, for purposes of His glory, 43:7; they were formed for Himself to declare His praise, 43:21; who as their Redeemer has formed them from the womb, 44:2, 24. See also Psalm 139:13 and Jeremiah 1:5.

“I will not forget you.” (vs. 21)
God promises not to forget His people whom He has created and formed to be His servant. He will not abandon His people, 41:17 and in the future, will they will no be called “forsaken”, 62:4, 12. This promise by God is made to a people who have a history of forgetting the covenant relationship that God has established between Himself and His chosen people. They have rebelled against Him and have crafted worthless idols to worship which replaced their worship of the One true God. Their sins have ruined the relationship with their Holy God who calls upon them to he Holy. Yet in spite of their failure to trust in Him and obey Him, He will remember His covenant with them and never abandon nor forget them.

“I have blotted out your transgression like a cloud and your sins like a mist.” (vs. 22)
This declaration by God was also stated in Isaiah 43:25 (see notes on this verse) and is one of the most precious promises of God recorded in the Old Testament. The word “blotted out” is the Hebrew word mahah, which has the meaning to wipe away. Again (see notes on 43:25), Thomas Constable provides an excellent discussion on this action of God on behalf of His people.

“What Israel needed above all was forgiveness and cleansing from her sins (cf. 43:25). The Lord had taken the initiative to provide this for His people. He would blow their sin away as quickly and as easily as a wind blows a cloud or mist away.
"The clouds intervene between heaven and earth as sin and transgressions intervene between God and His people."  

"Jehovah has blotted out Israel's sin, inasmuch as He does not impute it any more, and thus has redeemed Israel."  

Yet God's people must respond to His initiative by returning to Him. He had provided redemption in the Exodus, but it was only the first of several redemptions that He would provide. He would redeem them from captivity by using His servant Cyrus (v. 28), and He would redeem them from sin by using His Servant Messiah at His first advent. He would also redeem them from captivity in the Tribulation by using His Servant Messiah at His second advent.

The summary reference to redemption in verse 22 (cf. 42:10—44:22) prepares the reader for the next section of Isaiah's prophecy.” [Note 522: Young, 3:183; Note 523: Delitzsch, 2:214] (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 215)

“return to me, for I have redeemed you.” (vs. 22)

God completes this summary of the section 42:10-44:22, by His call to return to Him. Although they have forsaken Him, He will never abandon or forget His covenant people. Even though, they have repeatedly walked away from His and have engaged in detestable pagan practices of the Canaanites including inter-marriage with these pagans, that He had warned them not to commit: Exodus 34:10-17; Deuteronomy 7:1-6 The people of God would also need future reminders, for following the return to Jerusalem after their long exile in Babylon, they again reverted to this evilness: Ezra 9:1-4; Nehemiah 13:23-27 and Malachi 2:13-16. It will only be in the millennial reign of the Messiah when all Canaanite influence will be finally removed: Zechariah 14:21.

God calls upon His people to return to Him which is a clear call for repentance for God states that He has redeemed them. They belong to Him in a divinely established covenant relationship. They also have been redeemed, for In His blotting out or wiping away of their sins, God has accepted their faith in Him as being counted as righteousness. See Genesis 15:6; Habakkuk 2:4. These who have been redeemed still needed to repent and return to God. Even Christians who have been redeemed by having faith in the shed blood of Christ on the cross need to return to Him in repentance, 1 John 1:8-9.

Isaiah 44:23-45:25

Some scholars understand vs. 23 either as the ending of a section beginning in 43:8 or the beginning of a section ending in 45:25. Whatever way it is understood in relation to a larger unified section of Isaiah, it is a wonderful hymn of praise to God for what God has done for His people resulting in His glory being revealed. This study will position vs. 23 as the beginning of a section, 44:23 to 45:25 which is a description of two periods of restoration for the people of God. David L. Cooper chose to begin this section with vs. 24. He writes:

This block of scripture constitutes a single literary unit in the Book of Isaiah. The prophet introduced his message by addressing Jehovah, who is the God of creation, of providence, and of performance (44:24-28). The forecast covers Israel's restoration from Babylonian Captivity under Cyrus (45:1-13); her final restoration to the land from her world-wide dispersion (45:14-19); and finally, the call for all nations to come and accept the salvation of God, which prediction will be fulfilled in the great evangelistic campaign that will be conducted by the 144,000 Jewish evangelists of whom we read in Revelation, chapter 7. (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly-July 1945).
This unit of Scripture, 44:3-45:25, contains many authoritative declarations by God: “This is what the Lord says” or in some versions “Thus says the Lord.” These declarations occur in 44: 24; 45:3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 18, 19 and 21. These repetitive statements are recorded by Isaiah to demonstrate the Lord’s grand purpose for His people whom He created for His glory. These declarations also highlight other repetitive statement of who God is and what He has done and will do for His people. He is the One who has and will redeem His people: 44:23, 24 including salvation 45:8, 15, 17, 21 and 22 He declares to His people that He is the only God and there is no other: 45:5, 6, 14, 18, 21, and 22. He is the creator who formed the heavens and the earth and the people upon it: 44:24; 45:8, 9, 11, 12, and 18. He frustrates false prophecy and makes foolish the advice of the wise, 44:25; and puts idol makers to shame 45:16. He fulfills the prophetic word of His prophets (messengers) 44:26; 45:21. He declares that Jerusalem and the towns of Judah will again be inhabited 44:26, 28; 45:13 and the temple will be rebuilt 44:28. He is the maker of light and darkness and peace and calamity 45:7. He declares that every knee will bow before Him and every tongue will swear loyalty to Him 45:24; and all descendants of Israel will be vindicated Him and will boast in Him 45:25.

44:23 Sing, O heavens, for the LORD has done it;
shout, you lower parts of the earth.
Break forth into singing, O mountains,
O forest, and every tree in it.
For the LORD has redeemed Jacob,
and will reveal his glory in Israel.

Because the Lord will restore His people to the land in the days of King Cyrus whom He will reveal by name in vs. 28 and will again restore them following the terrifying days of the Tribulation, God call upon His creation to sing and shout of His accomplishments. God states that He “has done it.” which is a “prophetic perfect tense verb that speaks of things in the future as though they had already happened in the past.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 216). The calling of God for His creation to praise Him occurs often in the Psalms and in Isaiah. See: Psalm 69:34; 96:11-12; 98:7-8; 148:7-13; Isaiah 42:10, 49:13; and 55:12. One reason that creation is rejoicing in what God has done is recorded by the Apostle Paul in Romans 8:19-22: “For the creation eagerly awaits the revealing of the children of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not by its own will, but by the will of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious freedom of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans with labor pains until now.” The other reason for the rejoicing of creation is revealed in the second half of vs. 23: “For the Lord has redeemed Jacob and will his glory in Israel.” The redemption of God’s people, Jacob is stated as a completed action and He is announcing it to the people of Isaiah’s day so that the faithful will have comfort and confidence in Him. In another generation, their descendants will face the destruction of Jerusalem including the temple and those who trust Him will look on these very words for comfort as they lean on Him for help.

It is obvious from Scripture that the reason the Lord will accomplish His great works in the earth and on behalf of His people is so that He will be glorified. The word “glory” in vs. 23 is the Hebrew pa’ar which occurs most often in Isaiah than in the rest of the Old Testament. See: 10:15; 44:23; 49:3; 55:5; 60:7, 9, 13, 21; and 61:3. The word for glory that is the most common in Isaiah and in the Old Testament is the Hebrew word kabod. One of the most beautiful expressions of “glory” occurs in Isaiah 46:13, which has the Hebrew word tiph’eret with meaning of royal splendor:

I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory.

Isaiah 44:24-28

The final five verses in Isaiah chapter 44 are marked by ten occurrences of the word “who” which introduce the acts of the Lord which He has accomplished or will accomplish to “reveal his glory in Israel” (vs. 23). The final “who” (vs. 28) introduces God’s act of calling by name, Cyrus, a person who will be His shepherd who will carry out God’s plans. See notes on vs. 28.

44:24-28 This is what the LORD says, your Redeemer,
he who formed you from the womb:
"I am the LORD, who makes all things,
who stretches forth the heavens alone,
who by myself spread out the earth,

who frustrates the omens of the liars,
and makes fools of fortune-tellers,
who reverses the advice of the wise,
and makes their knowledge foolish;

who fulfills the prophetic word of his servant,
and performs the prediction of his messengers,
who says of Jerusalem,
'She will be inhabited,'
and of the towns of Judah,
'They will be rebuilt,
and I will raise up her ruins,'

who says to the deep,
'Be dry, and I will dry up your rivers,'

who says of Cyrus,
'He is my shepherd, and will carry out all my plans,'
even saying of Jerusalem, 'She will be rebuilt,'

and of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid.'"

These five verses begin with the divine authoritative declaration: “This is what the LORD says,” or as other English versions state: “Thus says the Lord.” These declarations also occur in 45:3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 18, 19 and 21 of the section 44:23-45:25. The Lord has something important to declare in these five verses (24-28) and He wants His audience to pay attention to Him. Before stating the ten actions He has accomplished or will accomplish that begin with the identifying “who,” the Lord reminds his audience that He is their Redeemer. In chapter 44, Isaiah records that the Lord is the Redeemer (vss. 6, 24) who has redeemed His people (vss. 22, 23). The Hebrew word for “Redeemer” is ga’al which has the meaning of a “kinsmen redeemer” which is so prominent in the book of Ruth. The Lord is stating that the people of Judah are His chosen family and He has decided to redeem them spiritually (salvation: ransomed from the punishment of His wrath) and physically (safety: the faithful remnant will live in a future righteous and peaceful kingdom). The Hebrew word ga’al is translated as Redeemer in Isaiah 41:14; 43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 59:20; 60:16; and 63:16. This word ga’al is also translated as redeemed in Isaiah 35:9; 43:1; 44:22, 23; 48:20; 51:10; 52:3, 9; 62:12; 63:9 and 14. See notes on these verses.
“who formed you from the womb” (vs. 24)
Earlier in chapter 44 (vs. 2) Isaiah had recorded this magnificent truth that God is their Creator who fashions or forms humans from the womb. They are not thought of or considered once they are born but have great significance and worth from the time of conception. Since life begins at conception and not at birth, God states the involvement He has with life in the womb where He forms, fashions and shapes humans for their role in the world that He has ordained. Therefore, those who are faithful to God and His word should never condone abortion as an option by a parent who by doing so, decides to act like God determining who should be born into this world and who should not be born. See comments on 44:2 and 21.

“who makes all things” (vs. 24)
In Isaiah’s day, as is true today, there are competing religious and scientific beliefs about how the universe was formed and questions about if the universe even had a beginning. The Lord reminds His direct audience, the people of Judah by the proclamation of Isaiah and by the printed Scriptures that contain this verse, that He alone made “all things.” God was not a part of some mythical council that decided who would “create” various parts of the created order. He boldly states He was the One who made all things. The Apostle Paul stated this in a concluding benediction to the first eleven chapters of the letter to the Romans: “For from him, and through him, and to him, are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.” (Romans 11:36).

“who stretches forth the heavens alone” (vs. 24)
God further explains His creative works as it pertains to the cosmos, the heavens. The word “stretches” is the very common Hebrew word natah which is translated by several different words in the English versions of the Old Testament. Isaiah uses natah to describe God creating the heavens by stretching them out as recorded in 40:22; 42:5; 44:24; 45:12 and 51:13. See also Job 9:8; Psalm 104:2; Jeremiah 51:15 and Zechariah 12:1. The action of stretching out the heavens speaks of God’s infiniteness for the heavens are, as understood from human reasoning, to be limitless. God states He stretches the heavens out by Himself. This is an action He has done without any assistance or guidance by anyone or anything. See also the notes for the verses in Isaiah where natah has been used to describe God’s action in creating the cosmos.

“who by myself spread out the earth” (vs. 24)
This phrase, while similar to the preceding phrase, has some subtle differences. The works “spread forth” is the Hebrew word raqa and has the meaning of to “beat out,” “to spread out,” or “to stamp.” Isaiah used very similar words in 42:5 to describe the creative act of stretching out the heavens and spreading out the earth. Isaiah, as recorded in 40:19 uses raqa in the phrase: “and the goldsmith overlays it with gold.” The words “spread out” thus, can be understood as the creative act of God where He has beaten or fashioned the earth or stamped it with His “signature.” See also Job 37:18 and Psalm 136:6. Again, God states that His creative act of forming the earth was accomplished by Himself. God had no connection with any other so-called gods nor needed their help nor sought the assistance or guidance from anyone or anything for the simple reasons that, first: anyone or anything did not exist before God created the heavens and the earth and second: anything else or anyone else would be completely useless to God and could not offer Him anything of help in any way.

“who frustrates the omens of liars, and makes fools of fortune-tellers” (vs. 25)
The NKJV of this phrase is: “Who frustrates the signs of the babblers, and drives diviners mad.” God alone knows the end from the beginning. He knows perfectly what has happened in the past, what is happening in the present and what will happen in the future. Those who speak in terms of
omens or signs which they claim predict the future or explain a current or past event are called babblers and liars. Those who claim to know the future and speak about it are called fools and are driven to insanity for they have no power to predict anything with accuracy.

“who reverses the advice of the wise, and makes their knowledge foolish.” (vs. 25)

Even those who are considered “wise” in the ways of worldly wisdom will see that their counsel is turned backward and their understanding and knowledge will be proven to be only foolishness. How utterly foolish has the modern world, like the ancient world, clung to the words of those who are considered wise and by doing so have spurned the counsel and guidance of the One who truly knows the future and can offer absolutely true and divine wisdom. In 47:10, Isaiah speaks of the so-called wisdom of the Chaldeans and tells them that their wisdom and knowledge have misled them.

Ancient kings had so-called wise counsellors to offer advice, Exodus 7:11 and Daniel 2:27; and modern world leaders assemble a cabinet of learned and experienced people to assist them with decision making. Only God can provide true wisdom and guidance.

Thomas Constable comments on vs. 25:

God embarrasses astrologers, diviners, and fortunetellers by controlling history in ways that deviate from past patterns. Ancient and modern prognosticators usually base their predictions on the belief that things will work out in the future as they have in the past. But Yahweh can move future events in entirely new directions. Archaeologists have discovered many predictions of the future of the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires among Babylonian writings, but they are consistently optimistic; none are messages announcing the fall of these kingdoms. He can do things never before done. [Note 524: See C. Westermann, Isaiah 40-66, pp. 156-57]

Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 216).

“who fulfills the prophetic word of his servant, and performs the prediction of his messengers.” (vs. 26)

In contrast to those who seek the advice of finite humans or useless idols, God accurately and with precision, fulfills the prophetic words of those who are his servant and His messengers. Many different suggestions have been given for the identification of His “servant” and His “messengers: of God. Instead of speculating on suggestions it is best to let Scripture explain itself. In many passages of the Scriptures, God refers to those He has called to be His prophets as “my servants the prophets;” 2 Kings 9:7; 17:13; Jeremiah 7:25; 26:5; 29;19; 35:15; 44:4; Ezekiel 38:17; Zechariah 1:6 and Revelation 10:7. See also Hebrews 1:1. In this regard Isaiah would certainly be considered as one of his servants, yet as the word “servant” is singular, its ultimate meaning can be understood as referring to the Messiah, Jesus Christ who is God’s Son who is so majestically described in Hebrews 1:2-3.

“who says of Jerusalem, ‘She will be inhabited,’ and of the towns of Judah, “They will be rebuilt, and I will raise up her ruins.” (vs. 26)

God, who had been mainly addressing those who rely on human wisdom and useless idols, by speaking of His creative works and the truth of the prophetic words from His prophets, now turns His attention to a specific future event and prepares His audience for a most unique announcement. It is absolutely certain that Isaiah was delivering this prophetic message to those in Jerusalem who were inhabiting the city and those from the towns of Judah who had survived the Assyrian assault. To those within the secure walls of Jerusalem, this prophecy would have been difficult to understand. It would have more certainty to those in the towns of Judah who survived the advance of the Assyrians for it would seem as a near promise that God would cause their towns and their ruins to be rebuilt. However, God was not declaring a near-future prophecy.
Those in Jerusalem who heard this message, may have been puzzled by the words “she will be inhabited;” and Isaiah’s words as recorded in vs. 28: “even saying of Jerusalem, she will be rebuilt.” They were living securely in the walled city and had recently witnessed the miraculous act of God who destroyed the Assyrian army that was threatening the city. It is far easier for a modern audience to understand the meaning of this message and its implications. But for Isaiah’s audience, it would not have made much sense, unless some were perceptive enough to think that Isaiah was declaring a message from God about a future time when Jerusalem would not have been inhabited and would be in ruins. For those who were perceptive enough to understand the message, it would be unthinkable that God’s beloved City would or could be destroyed. Yet that was exactly the message the prophet was declaring to them.

This prophecy, combined with the naming of a future chosen figure in vs. 28, has led many liberal commentators to state that this message was not delivered by Isaiah in his lifetime but by some other prophet who lived after the days of the exile of the Jewish people in Babylon. Those who say such things have no regard for God who created the universe without any assistance or guidance and had repeatedly stated His ability to perform His creative works. For, If God can create the universe, it would be a small thing for Him to predict with accuracy and precision the events of the future. This is the same issue that these commentators had to face with the prophecy recorded in Isaiah 7:14. The issue is: Does God perform supernatural works? Did He actually create the universe? Can He infallibly predict the future? The answer anyone gives to these questions determines their belief or non-belief, not only in the first verse of the Scriptures, but in all of the verses of the Scriptures. This study of Isaiah confirms that God can do all that He claims. He has done so in the past, is continuing to do so in the present and will perform all He promises and claims without fail in the future. In short, God is a someone we can absolutely depend upon. This issue was the same that the audience of Isaiah had to face and God had told Isaiah of the outcome of His messages to his people as Isaiah 6:9-13 so graphically illustrates.

“who says to the deep, Be dry, and I will dry up your rivers,” (vs. 27)

At first glance, it may be difficult to understand how vs. 27 fits into the context of verses 24-28. Yet, upon some reflection, its purpose will be made plain. God had just declared a stunning announcement of a future rebuilding of Jerusalem and the towns of Judah. He then reminded His people that in the past He had performed the supernatural acts of drying up the deep (sea) which would have reminded His people of the escape of the ancient Israelites from the Egyptians by waking on dry ground through the backed-up waters of the Red Sea led by God’s servant Moses. Also, the reference of the rivers being dried up would have reminded them of the way the ancient Israelites marched into the promised land when the waters of the Jordan river were parted so they could walk on dry land. If God could perform these miraculous acts in the past, He could be relied upon to perform the works of restoration to Jerusalem and to the towns of Judah in the future.

“who says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd, and will carry out my plans,’ even saying of Jerusalem, ‘She will be rebuilt,’ and of the temple, ‘Your foundation will be laid.’” (vs. 28)

God completes this stunning announcement by declaring by name, Cyrus, one who will be His shepherd and who will carry out God’s plans for Jerusalem and its temple. As perplexing as the naming of a certain individual was to Isaiah’s audience, it would have been inconceivable to them to understand that not only would Jerusalem need to be rebuilt, but their precious temple would also need to have its foundation laid, implying that it too would be destroyed in the future. There is much confusion among scholars both of an older generation and those of today who have difficulty with believing that God could so accurately predict the future. For an extended discussion on the decree of Cyrus for both the temple and the city of Jerusalem to be rebuilt see David L. Cooper, *Commentary on Isaiah*, chapters 44:24-45:25, Biblical Research Monthly, July 1945. See also, Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah*, Vol. 2, pages 249-252.
Victor Buksbazen comments on vs. 28:

“Here is an unusual instance of a yet unborn king, mentioned by man about 150 years before the event….The name Cyrus in Hebrew, “Koresh,” appears on ancient Persian monuments as Kuru, which is also the name of a river in southern Persia. It is generally assumed that the name Cyrus was derived from the name of that river.

According to Josephus, 2 when this passage of Isaiah, which mentioned Cyrus, as the liberator of the Jews, was brought to the attention of the king, he promptly decreed the return of the Jews to Jerusalem and gave them permission to rebuild the temple.” [Note 2: Josephus, Antiquities, XI, 2.] (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 360).

Thomas Constable also comments:

God announced that Cyrus would be the person who would allow Jerusalem to be rebuilt and the temple foundations relaid. The mention of his name climaxes this prophecy (vv. 24-28). Cyrus would be the Lord's shepherd, the one who would lead the Israelites back into their land by permitting its restoration. He would carry out all God's desire (cf. 41:2-3, 25).

The title "My Shepherd" was one that God used of the Davidic kings (cf. 2 Sam. 5:2; 1 Kings 22:17; Ezek. 34:23). The fact that He used it here of a pagan monarch shows that God would use pagans to fulfill His wishes—since the Davidic kings had proved unreliable (cf. 7:13; 39:7). This was indeed a new thing that God had not done before (cf. 43:19).

"In a wonderfully ingenious way, just as the foreigner, Ruth, became an ancestress of David (Ruth 4:13-22), the foreigner Cyrus typifies the Davidic Messiah (Isa. 53:10; Zech. 11:4; 13:7; John 8:29; 10:11)."526

Cyrus (559-530 B.C.) issued his decree to allow the Jewish exiles to return and rebuild Jerusalem in 538 B.C. 527 This happened about 190 years after Isaiah announced this prophecy. Josephus recorded that Cyrus read Isaiah's prophecy predicting that he himself—Cyrus—would send the Israelites back to Palestine to rebuild the temple, and that he desired to fulfill this very prediction. 528 Josephus also dated Isaiah's prophecy 140 years before the destruction of the temple, namely, about 726 B.C. The Persian monarch had not even been born at this time. When Isaiah made this prophecy his hearers probably said to one another: "Who did he say would do this? Who is Cyrus?"

This prophecy is the primary reason that critics on the unity of Isaiah have insisted that Isaiah of Jerusalem could not possibly have written this prediction. It must have been written, they say, sometime after Cyrus issued his decree. 529 However, the point that Yahweh was making throughout this book was that He alone could predict and create the future. For a similar prophecy involving Josiah, who had not yet been born, see 1 Kings 13:2. [Note 526: Oswalt, The Book…40-66, p. 197. Note 527: See Finegan, pp. 230-33. Note 528: Josephus, Antiquities of…, 11:1:2. Note 529: See Allis, pp. 51-61, for refutation of this common viewpoint.] (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, pages 217-218).

David L. Cooper adds:

“Did Cyrus in fulfillment of this promise, issue a proclamation authorizing the rebuilding of both the Temple and the city of Jerusalem. Some sincere brethren say that he issued a decree only for the re-building of the Temple. As proof of this position they refer to Ezra 1:1-4, which gives the proclamation that was decreed by Cyrus for the rebuilding of the Temple. But nothing is said in this passage about the restoration of Jerusalem. Because of this fact, many sincere brethren say that the decree of Cyrus included only the Temple--and not the city. They take this position because they cannot harmonize the Ussher chronology, which is accepted today universally, with the position that Cyrus issued the decree for both the building of the Temple and the city. The year in the accepted chronology for the issuing of the decree by Cyrus is 536 B.C. In Daniel 9:25 we are told
that the beginning of the seventy weeks of years of this prophecy dates from the year of the issuing of the decree for the rebuilding of Jerusalem. According to Daniel, there would be 483 years from the issuance of the decree to rebuild the city to the cutting off of King Messiah. Cyrus issued the decree for the rebuilding of the Temple, according to the received chronology, in the year 536 B.C. Christ was crucified in the year 30 A.D. Then from the issuing of the decree to the crucifixion there were 565 years (one year is deducted in passing over from the B.C. dates to the A.D. dates.) But Daniel said that there would be 483 years from the issuing of the decree to rebuild the city to the crucifixion of the Messiah. There is an excess of 82 years in the received chronology. It is therefore concluded by these earnest, sincere scholars, that Cyrus did not do what God through Isaiah foretold that he would do, namely, to issue the decree for the rebuilding of the city.

When all the facts of the Book of Ezra are studied, one is driven to the conclusion that Cyrus did issue the decree for the building of both the Temple and the city. (For full proof of this position, see either of my volumes, The 70 Weeks of Daniel, or, Messiah: His first Coming Scheduled.)

When one makes an investigation of the chronology of the Old Testament and compares it with the received chronology, which we have accepted from Ptolemy, a heathen astronomer, one will see that Ptolemy guessed at the facts and gave us the wrong chronology. It is impossible to fit the scriptural facts into the false chronology which we inherited from a heathen chronologer. The B.C. dates are incorrect. Since God said that Cyrus would issue both decrees, we are confident that he did.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly, July 1945).

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 44:
44:1-5: God’s Chosen Servant – Israel
44:6-23: God Condemns Sinful Idolatry
   6-8: Incomparableness of God
   9-20: Idols are useless
   21-22: Invitation to Return to God
   23: Invitation to Praise God
44:24-28: God’s Chosen Shepherd - Cyrus
   24: God’s Creative Acts
   25: God Causes Words of False Prophets to Fail
   26: God Causes Words of True Prophets to Flourish
   27: God’s Consideration of Past Miracles
   28: God’s Choice of a Future Shepherd

Isaiah 45:1-8
For an introduction and summary of the contents of Isaiah 45, see above comment on section 44:23 – 45:25. In the first eight verses, Isaiah continues his introduction to the stunning announcement that God has chosen a pagan future king, whom He has named Cyrus to be His shepherd. It would not be the only time God would call a Gentile leader, His servant. In Jeremiah 25:9, 27:6 and 43:10, God calls Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon His servant because He will be used of God to accomplish His divine purposes for His chosen people. God has and will call upon any person or nation to accomplish His will and in that regard, both Assyria and Babylon were “servants” of God because He selected them for a specific purpose to bring judgment upon His people who had constantly rebelled against Him. In vs. 1, God calls this selected future person, His anointed indicating that He has divinely appointed Cyrus to carry out His purposes. In verses 2-5, God speaks directly to Cyrus and reveals God’s plan for him, even though Cyrus will not know God (by acknowledging or worshiping God). In verses 6-7, God reveals why He has chosen Cyrus, by stating that His purpose is so that everyone in the world would know God (even though Cyrus will not know God). In vs. 8, God summarizes His calling of Cyrus by calling upon the heavens and the skies to “pour down righteousness” so that “salvation and righteousness will sprout up.”
45:1 *This is what the LORD says to his anointed,*
   *to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held,*
   *to subdue nations before him,*
   *and to strip kings of their war belts;*
   *to open the doors before him,*
   *and the gates will not be shut.*

As is recorded 35 times in the prophecy of Isaiah, God introduces His declarations with the authoritative “*This is what the LORD says.*” In vs. 1, God introduces His revealed plan for a future pagan king. The time frame will be 190 years in the future. Cyrus ruled his kingdom from 559-530 B.C. The Lord calls Cyrus (Hebrew “Koresh”), His anointed. The word “anointed” is the Hebrew word *mashiah* (*mashiah* is the noun and *mashah* is the verb form) which has a rich meaning in the Old Testament. It applies to a person who has been specifically selected by God to accomplish His purpose. A related word, *mishhah*, refers to the use of oil for anointing. Those who were selected to be anointed were usually limited to prophets, priests and kings of Israel and Judah. An exception is recorded in 1 Kings 19:15-16, where Elijah was told by God to anoint Hazael king over Aram. Elijah was also to anoint Jehu king over Israel and Elisha was to be anointed to be a prophet replacing Elijah as God’s appointed prophet. Anointing was performed by the rubbing of grease or the pouring of oil upon an object or person. Olive oil was the most common oil used for these purposes. The anointing of Cyrus was non-typical in that this Gentile king would not have been ceremonially anointed by an official representative of God. It was God Himself who enacted this anointing by His sovereign decree.

The word “anointed” (*mashiah*) has a messianic meaning when it is applied to a future King who is understood as Israel’s Messiah. The direct English translation of *mashiah* is messiah. Although, the word messiah is not mentioned in 2 Samuel 7:13, the promise to David, points to this promised king whom God will forever establish the throne of His kingdom. The one who is God’s anointed (*mashiah*) is stated in Psalm 2:2 which many understand as a direct reference to the Son of God as the Messiah. For an extended treatment of the Messiah in the Old Testament, see Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?* NAC Studies in Bible & Theology. B & H Publishing Group, Nashville, 2010.

The Lord states of Cyrus, “*whose right hand I have held.*” The Lord had previously declared, as recorded in Isaiah 41:10, that He would uphold His people with His “*righteous right hand.*” Also like Cyrus, God’s people would have their right hand held by God (Isaiah 41:13). God also promised to take His people’s hand to protect them (Isaiah 42:6). See also Isaiah 62:8 and 63:12. As the right hand is often seen as the hand of strength, God promises to uphold the strength of those whom he chooses to accomplish His purposes. What is different in the prophecy concerning Cyrus is that this Gentile king will not know God (45:4-5).

The reason that God will hold the hand of Cyrus is so that this king will subdue kings, strip kings of their war belts and have doors and gates open before him that will not be shut. In a future reference, relating to the kingdom of Heaven, It is the Messiah who holds the keys to doors that He alone can open that no one can shut and He alone can shut that no one can open (Revelation 3:7-8). The success of the armies of Cyrus is well attested by the writings of historians, of which the most popularly known record is *The Histories* by Herodotus. As impressive as the acts of Cyrus were, it must be remembered that it is God who was the divine One who actually performed these acts on behalf of Cyrus. The word “I” referring to God is so prominent in vss. 2-7 indicating that the audience who is listening to God’s declaration in vs. 1 and His dialogue with Cyrus in vss. 2-7, should clearly understand who is the One who molds and controls history.
45:2 *I will go before you,*
*and level the rough places.*
*I will break the doors of bronze in pieces,*
*and cut through the bars of iron.*

In vss. 2-7 God holds a one-way dialogue with Cyrus, speaking directly to him, while Isaiah’s audience and those who read the prophecy of Isaiah witness the dialogue. As Victor Buksbazen has stated, see above under notes for 44:28, Cyrus when this passage was brought to his attention, promptly decreed that the Jews should return to Jerusalem with his permission to rebuild the temple. (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 360). The first sentence of vs. 2 is a reminder of the status of Cyrus as a “messianic figure.” God promises to go before Cyrus to “level the rough places.” The work of smoothing out or levelling rough places was an action that was given to the people of God and specifically to God’s prophet to prepare for the coming of the Messiah as stated by Isaiah in 40:3-4. See also Malachi 3:1. See also Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4 and John 1:23. In this first sentence of vs. 2, God is positioning Cyrus as a pre-figure or type of Christ although taking the “type” too far and identifying Cyrus with the promised Messiah must be cautioned against. God’s promise that He will “break the doors of bronze in pieces and cut through the bars of iron,” likely refer to the doors and barred gates of Babylon when the army of Cyrus entered the city in 539 B.C.

45:3 *I will give you the treasures of darkness,*
*and riches hidden in secret places,*
*that you may know that it is I, the LORD,*
*who call you by your name,*
*even the God of Israel.*

The repetition of the word ‘I” in verses 1-7 is a reminder that God is the primary actor in carrying out His plans for the end of the exile. God has selected a Gentile king to due His bidding and no one should exalt this pagan king to any higher place than God permits. It is not that Cyrus was such a brilliant king and noble commander, but that He was being led by God and carried out his responsibilities as God had directed. One of the benefits God gave this king was the “discovery” of treasures and riches which had been hidden in vaults and secret strongholds. These may have been in the dark recesses of Babylon and in other cities that the army of Cyrus had conquered. These riches may also have been a “payment” made to Cyrus from God for releasing the Jewish exiles and permitting them to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and the city, although there is no Scriptural proof for this gesture. See notes on Isaiah 43:3 and compare with Jeremiah 31:11. What is know for sure is that God had allowed the discovery of these riches so that Cyrus would know that it was the Lord, the God of Israel who had done this and had called Cyrus by name many years before this king was born.

45:4 *For Jacob my servant's sake,*
*and Israel my chosen,*
*I call you by your name.*
*I am giving you a special title,*
*though you do not know me.*

God has called Cyrus by name many years before his birth for the sake of Jacob His servant and Israel His chosen. This dual reference to His people was a reminder that they had come from their father Jacob and were called by Jacob’s new name “Israel.” They were given the title and responsibility of servants even
though earlier they were referred to as deaf and blind servants (Isaiah 42:19) and would not respond to Isaiah’s messages (Isaiah 6:9-13). They were referred to as God’s chosen people (Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2; 1 Chronicles 16:13; Psalm 105:6; 135:4; Isaiah 41:8-9; 43:10; 44:1-2; 49:7; 65:9, 15, 22; Ezekiel 20:5; and Amos 3:2). Because God always keeps His promises to His chosen people, He had called Cyrus by name with a special title (“shepherd” Isaiah 44:28 and “anointed” Isaiah 45:1) to accomplish God’s plans for the release of the Jewish exiles from Babylon so the temple and Jerusalem could be rebuilt as He had promised, (Isaiah 44:26-28). God would do these things for the sake of His chosen people and smooth the way for the success of Cyrus even though Cyrus would not know God. It is the prerogative of a sovereign God, who has created the cosmos and all that is in it, who rules over all that He has created, and who has created all things for Himself, to use a pagan Gentile ruler to accomplish any purpose God has solely intended. This must have been a shock to Isaiah’s audience for them to realize, first that the City of Jerusalem and its temple would one day be destroyed and second, that their covenant keeping God would use a pagan Gentile to be selected one to be instrumental in the release of their exiled descendants so the city and temple could be rebuilt. Some have likened this to a “second exodus” with a leader whom God has selected to lead the exodus. This analogy is somewhat contrived, however, because first, only a few, not the entire number of exiles, returned to Jerusalem and second, Cyrus issued a decree allowing the exiles to return. He did not lead “his” people to the land once promised to their forefathers.

45:5 I am the LORD, and there is no one else; besides me there is no God. I will prepare you for battle, though you do not know me;

The Lord again reminds His people who are listening to this prophetic dialogue between God and Cyrus, and instructs Cyrus that there is no God besides Him. He is the LORD, and there is no one else. The statement that the Lord alone is God and there is no other occurs often in the context of chapters 44-45: 44:8; 45:5, 6, 14, 21, 22 and also in 46:9. Earlier Hezekiah, when faced with the pending destruction of Jerusalem by the Assyrians also acknowledged that there was no other God but the Lord. God promises to prepare Cyrus for battle signifying that Cyrus will be successful even though this Persian king will not know and by implication not acknowledge God. See also notes on vs. 4 above.

45:6 so that they may know from the rising of the eastern sun, to its setting in the west, that there is no one besides me, I am the LORD, there is no other.

Even though Cyrus who will be God’s chosen shepherd whom He has called His anointed will not know God, the success he will have in battle, will cause the peoples of the world to know God. Thomas Constable comments on vs. 6:

God chose Cyrus so everyone would come to know that He is the only true God. Note the progression in the reasons for Yahweh's choice of Cyrus: that he might know, that Israel might know, and that the world might know who is the only true God. This is important, not because God has a huge ego, but because it is true and because only as people recognize Yahweh for who He is, that they will stop ruining their own lives with idolatry. God's use of Cyrus preserved the Israelites and thus made the Incarnation possible. That event, in turn, has made salvation available to the whole world. (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 220).
45:7 I form the light and create darkness;  
I make peace and create calamity.  
I am the LORD who does all these things.

In vs. 7 Isaiah records one of God’s greatest declarations of His creative powers. To accomplish His perfect will for the world, light and darkness along with peace and calamity all have their divine purposes. Darkness is contrasted with light not only in the physical sense of night and day but in the spiritual sense of the victory of light over the oppression of darkness. Earlier, Isaiah in 9:2, had written:

The people who walk in darkness have seen a great light; 
those who dwell in the land of the shadow of death,  
on them the light has shined.

This verse is quoted in Matthew 4:16 referring to the light bearing ministry of the Messiah. Luke, in Acts 26:18, records the words of the Apostle Paul regarding God’s mission for him to those whom he will bring the message of the gospel: “To open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in me.” Paul elaborates on the spiritual significance of light and darkness as recorded in 2 Corinthians 4:6: “For it is God who said, “Let there be light shining out of darkness," who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” There seems to be a correspondence between darkness and light. The glories of the light of the Messiah beams most brightly when contrasted with the gloom of darkness. His brilliant light is seen and understood when compared to the darkness. The Apostle John as recorded in John 1:4-5 stated that: “In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” There are some who suggest that the statement of God creating both light and darkness have an appropriate meaning for Cyrus as Victor Buksbazen explains:

“This verse is singularly appropriate for Cyrus, because the Persians believed that the world is ruled by two gods, Ahura Mazda, the god of light and goodness, and Ahriman, the god of darkness and evil. Over verse declares that Jehovah is the author of both, of light and darkness of peace and evil. The contrasting of evil as the opposite of peace is most significant for the prophetic mind. All the events of history and their strange convolutions are ultimately traceable to Jehovah.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 362).

Others, however are not as convinced that the reference to light and darkness was directly responding to the religion of Cyrus which became known as Zoroastrianism. With the full revelation of Scripture as our guide, it is best to understand God’s comments in vs. 7 as referring to both the physical and spiritual dimensions of light and darkness and the role of the Messiah in overcoming the darkness when He defeated the powers of darkness on the cross. See Colossians 2:8-15.

God also declares in vs. 7 that he created both peace and calamity. The word calamity is the Hebrew word ra which has the meaning in the Old Testament of evil (per the KJV), distress, misery and calamity. Biblical scholars have suggested a plethora of interpretations as to why God stated that He created calamity (or evil as some would translate the Hebrew word ra). God must be understood as absolutely sovereign in His creation and He will do with the world He created according to His purposes. The first two chapters of Job are illustrative of God’s divine right to do with His created people as He deems appropriate. Like darkness, evil or calamity have a purpose in God’s perfect plans for His world. The greater goodness of God seems to appear most awesome when seen against the backdrop of its opposite. God had considered this before the world was created as Revelation 13:8 reveals. God ends this stunning revelation with a reminder that He is the sovereign Lord who has done these things. Who are the created to argue with the Creator?
45:8 Rain, O heavens, from above, 
and let the skies pour down righteousness; 
let the earth open, 
so that salvation and righteousness may sprout up; 
I, the LORD, have created it.

This eighth verse could be understood either as a hymn of praise as some have suggested or a summarizing statement by God which reveals His ultimate purpose in selecting Cyrus to accomplish His will for those who will be exiled in Babylon in the future. God calls upon the heavens and the skies to rain or pour down righteousness and then calls upon the earth to open to accept the rain of righteousness so that both salvation and righteousness will sprout up. It is a magnificent transition verse between two restoring works of God as recorded in chapter 45. The first, in vss. 1-13 refers to the future return of the Jewish exiles to Jerusalem from Babylon where they have been “held captive”. The second, vss. 14-25, refers to the world-wide return of the Jews following the great tribulation where they will go to live in the millennial kingdom of the Messiah.

David L. Cooper comments on vs. 8:

In verse 8 of our passage the prophet, seeing the future by inspiration, was led to exclaim, "Distil, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, that it may bring forth salvation, and let it cause righteousness to spring up together; I, Jehovah, have created it." Here the restoration of Israel from Babylonian servitude furnished a kind of foretaste to the prophet of the great and final restoration of Israel in the future. He thought of the blessings that come to Israel and the world in terms of the showers and rains which produce fruitful seasons. He therefore called upon the skies to pour down righteousness. Moreover, he wanted the earth to open and receive the blessings sent from heaven. God's using Cyrus and various providential occurrences were to the prophet in this figure the showers from heaven; the fruit of these showers being that of salvation and righteousness with all their attendant blessings. (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – July 1945).

The words “righteousness and salvation” are often paired together. See Psalm 24:5; 40:10; 51:14; 65:5; 71:15; 98:2; Isaiah 45:8; 46:13; 51: 5, 6, 8; 56:1; 59:16; 17; 61:10; 62:1; and in the New Testament: Romans 10:10 and Hebrews 11:17. Psalm 98:2 beautifully expresses this correlation:

The LORD has made known his salvation; 
his righteousness he has revealed in the sight of the nations.

Isaiah 45:9-13: Introduction

Verses 9-13, which summarize God’s message to His people regarding His calling of Cyrus in the future, consists of two sections, vss. 9-10: presumptuous people and vss. 11-13: Sovereign Creator. In the previous verses, God wonderfully declared that the purpose for calling and enabling Cyrus to accomplish God’s will for him would result in righteousness falling from heaven like rain so that salvation and righteousness may sprout up. When the exiles in Babylon returned to Jerusalem they would establish a Jewish nation from whom would “spring” the Messiah who would by His death and resurrection bring righteousness and salvation to the earth. This most glorious result, would, however stem from a prior action that the people of Jerusalem and Judah in Isaiah’s day would not rejoice over. Their habitation and temple would be destroyed, with many being killed and many others being exiled against their will to Babylon. The realization of this terrifying future event may have prompted many to question God’s love for them. They also may have questioned how Israel’s covenant keeping Lord could abandon them to such a fate. They needed to be
reminded that the future belongs to God’s righteous and “rightful” prerogative. Who are they to argue against their Maker? To do so would bring God’s judgment upon them as is evident from Isaiah’s declaration of a message of woe in vss. 9-13. God would again declare His purposes for raising up and enabling Cyrus to accomplish His will in vs. 13 as a final response to His disobedient and rebellious people.

45:9 Woe to him who argues with his Maker!
He who is a mere potsherd among the potsherds of the earth!
Does the clay say to the one who shapes it,
'What do you think you are doing?'
or the work of your hands complain,
'He has no skill in his hands?'

Isaiah often introduced a statement of God’s judgment and purposes by the word “woe which is the Hebrew word hōy in vs. 9. For occurrences of “woe” in Isaiah see: 3:9,11; 5:8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22; 6:5, 10:1, 5; 24:16; 28:1; 29:1, 15; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1; 45:9, and10. Woe has the meaning of “alas” which introduces, in this instance, a strong rebuke from God. God rebukes those, whom He has created for His own divine purposes, for arguing against Him. Although the exact reason for this arguing (and by implication grumbling against) is not stated, it can be surmised from the context, that when Isaiah’s audience heard and comprehended the message that their city and temple would need to be rebuilt (Isaiah 44:26-28), they questioned God and complained about His future plans for them.

God’s response was to state that by their complaints against Him, they were in peril of judgment coming upon them. God says in essence: “Who do you think you are arguing with your Maker?” or “What right have you do question anything that your Creator does?” The response of God to their insolence against Him is stunning. God’s opinion of them is that they are merely common clay pots (potsherds) among all the other peoples (clay pots) of the earth. They have no voice or rights to speak against their Maker. God is their maker or shaper, like a potter who fashions clay. It is an act of hubris effrontery for “clay” to speak up and say to the potter, “what do you think you are doing?” It is even worse, and an act of vile blasphemy to say to God, “He has no skill in his hands.”

Isaiah had previously discussed the relationship between the potter and clay in Isaiah 29:16; 30:14; 41:25; and would again in 64:8 where in this final reference Isaiah would confess: “But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are the potter; and we all are the work of your hand.” See also Jeremiah 18:1-12; Lamentations 4:2; Romans 9:19-21; and Revelation 2:27.

45:10 Woe to him who says to a father,
'What is it you are trying to father?'
or to a woman,
'What is it you are in labor for?'

God uses another analogy in vs. 10 to describe His distain for the evil complaining of His people because He stated the future plans He has for them. It should be remembered that these future plans would result in the coming of the Messiah who would bring righteousness, peace and salvation to the earth. God’s rebuke of His people in vs. 10 was to declare another “woe” of judgement for His people. In their complaint against God, they are saying in effect: “What are you doing in giving birth?” or “What are you creating in giving birth?”
Their complaint is an insolent rebellion against their creator. It is implied that they have a “right” to determine what kind of person they will be before they are born. This complaint goes beyond the physical birth of children to parents. It is an attack on God’s prerogative in creating humans on the earth. In doing so, they have set themselves as God’s judge to question Him on His purposes in creating them. Isaiah is pointing out the sinfulness of God’s people as was stated by God as recorded in the first chapter of his prophecy, vs. 2: “I have reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me.” The people have not changed or repented of their evil acts. Their minds still have no understanding; their ears are still deaf; and their eyes are still blind and they will remain in this state “until (their) cities are “destroyed without inhabitant, and houses uninhabited, and the land becomes absolutely devastated, and the LORD has sent everyone far away.” (Isaiah 6:11-12). The people’s rebellious response to God for His stated plans for them has brought upon them God’s judgement. They will face the destruction of their cities and they will be removed from their land.

45:11 This is what the LORD says, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker. 
"Ask me about things to come!
Will you really question me concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands?

In response to the complaints of His people, (vss. 9-10), the Lord, as He often has in the context of chapters 44 and 45 begins a declaration with the authoritative, “This is what the LORD says” or as in other versions: “Thus says the Lord.” God declares that He is the Holy One of Israel (See notes on Isaiah 1:4) and Israel’s Maker. See also Isaiah 17:7; 27:11; 29:16; 44:24; 45:9; 51:13. The psalmist in Psalm 149:2 declares: “Let Israel rejoice in its Maker; let the children of Zion rejoice in their King.” The proper response of God’s people Israel is to rejoice in their Maker, yet these people blaspheme Him with their rebellious complaints and arguments. God responds to them with what appears to be sarcasm, “Ask me about things to come!” The NKJV translates the second part of this verse as: “Ask Me of things to come concerning My sons; and concerning the work of My hand, you command Me.” The Lord is saying: who do you think you are to command Me regarding My sons (whom He has created) and concerning My works? The sons of God refer specifically to the people of Israel and His work of His hands refer not only to His creative acts but to His future plans concerning Cyrus and the return of the exiles to Jerusalem. The Lord’s judgment on His people for their rebellion against Him and His plans is all the more severe because of the glorious results of these plans. They will result in the coming of God’s Son, the Messiah who will bring salvation and righteousness to the earth (Isaiah 45:8). God is most protective of His beloved Son and those who oppose the coming and ministry of the Son will face the fiery wrath of the Father. In the not-to-distant future, the people of Jerusalem and Judah will face the heat of this wrath when a pagan king from Babylon will send his army to completely destroy Judah and the city of Jerusalem and demolish the temple. It was evident that Isaiah’s audience and their descendants did not heed the word of the Lord and therefore God brought upon them all the acts of His judgment He had warned them about.

45:12 I made the earth, and created people on it. 
My own hands stretched out the heavens, and to all their host I gave orders.
The Holy One of Israel (vs. 11) is the One who “made the earth and created people on it.” The deaf ears of His people needed to hear repetitively that their God alone made the earth. See also vs. 8 and 18 and 42.5. God also had often reminded them that He was their Maker: Isaiah 17:7; 27:11; 29:16; 44:24; 45:9; 51:13; and their Creator: Isaiah 27:11; 40:28; 43:1 and 43:15. Not only did the Lord create the earth and its people but He stretched out the heavens: Isaiah 40:22; 42:5; 44:24 and 51:13; and gave the host of heavens their orders, for “He calls each one them by name.” Isaiah 40:26. The Lord’s reminder of His creative works stands opposed to the insolence of those whom He created (pots of clay vs. 9) who dare question Him about His divine plans. Although the repeated reminders of His glorious creative acts are necessary for the enlightenment of all who heard Isaiah’s message or who have or will read it in the Scriptures, the message in Isaiah’s day fell on deaf ears of people who had no understanding. The results were disastrous for them and their descendants. God’s message is still relevant to all who read the prophecy of Isaiah. God still seeks those who will repent and turn to Him for salvation and righteousness.

45:13 I raised him up in righteousness,  
and I will make all his ways straight.  
He will rebuild my city,  
and he will let my exiles go free,  
not for price or reward,“  
says the LORD of hosts.

God completes this specific message about His plans for Jerusalem to be rebuilt with a declaration that “I raised him up in righteousness.” While not mentioned by name, it is obvious from the context of 44:24-45:13 that God is describing Cyrus (44:18 and 45:1). God does not call Cyrus righteous but says that He (God) has acted in righteousness by selecting one not yet born to be raised up to accomplish God’s purposes. God will also prepare the way for Cyrus to fulfil God’s plan by making his ways straight. See notes on 45:2 “I will go before you and level the rough places.” God’s specific plans for Cyrus was to have the city of Jerusalem rebuilt and to release His people whom He calls My exiles. These exiles have been in captivity in Babylon and will in the future be released to return to rebuild the temple (and by implication the City) by a decree of Cyrus. See Ezra 1:1-4 and 4:1-4. Cyrus as king, did not literally rebuild Jerusalem. He did however, issue a decree (inscribed on the Cyrus Cylinder) to allow the exiles to return to their homelands. Cyrus also provided funds for the rebuilding of cities and sanctuaries such as temples. The inscription on the “Cyrus Cylinder” indicates that Cyrus decreed that those whom he released to their own lands would have the authority to rebuild their cities (dwelling places) and their sanctuaries. See James B. Pritchard, Ed., Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament, 3rd edition, with Supplement. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969, pages 315-316.

God stated that he (Cyrus) would let His exiles “go free, not for price or reward.” God did not need to bribe or provide payment to Cyrus to issue his decree to free the exiles from Babylon. Cyrus was obedient to the divine call of God. See notes on 44:28 and specifically the comments of Victor Buksbazen. Although no payment or reward was called for or provided, God was gracious to Cyrus and allowed his forces to uncover vaults where treasures and riches were hidden (see notes on 45:3). This declaration by the Lord completes the stated plans of God in this section of Isaiah’s writings, regarding the return of the exiles to Jerusalem by the decree of Cyrus. The next section of Isaiah chapter 45, verses 14-25, refers to another return to the beloved City in the far future at the time of the beginning of themillennial reign of the Messiah.
Isaiah 45:14-25 Introduction

Isaiah 45:14-25 is a separate section of Isaiah’s prophecy dealing with the return of the faithful remnant of the Lord, from the nations where they have been scattered, to Jerusalem (by implication because it is not directly stated where “the fugitives of the nations” vs. 20, are to return). This section is clearly eschatological in context as recorded first, in vs. 17: “Israel will be saved by the LORD with an everlasting salvation.” Second in vs. 20: “Assemble yourselves and come; come together, you fugitives of the nations.” Third in vs. 23: “Every knee will bow before me, every tongue will swear loyalty to me.” Fourth, in vs. 24: All who are angry against him will come to him and be put to shame.” Fifth, in vs. 25: In the LORD, will all the descendants of Israel be vindicated and will boast in him.”

45:14 This is what the LORD says,
"The labor of Egypt,
and the commerce of Cush,
and the Sabeans who are tall of stature,
will come over to you,
and they will be yours;
they will follow you,
in chains they will come over,
and they will bow down to you.
They will plead with you,
"Surely God is with you;
and there is no other,
there is no God besides him."

To authenticate this new message, Isaiah again as in several other verses, declares the authoritative: “This is what the LORD says.” Other English versions state: “Thus says the Lord.” See notes on Isaiah 43:16-17 for a brief discussion on this phrase. Many scholars interpret vs. 14 and following to the days of the return of the exiles to Jerusalem, however, as there is no direct or implied reference to Cyrus and his decree and as indicated in the introduction to vss. 14-25, the intention of these verses including vs. 14 is eschatological as Victor Buksbazen explains:

“To whom does Jehovah address Himself? A rather difficult question to answer. At first glance Israel would seem to be the addressee, but Israel never waged war against Egypt or Ethiopia. Cyrus would appear to be the more logical addressee. But neither did Cyrus himself conquer Egypt and Ethiopia. This conquest was left to Cambyses, the son of Cyrus. The only satisfactory answer is that this prophecy has an eschatological character. It is a vision of the ultimate things which will come to pass at the end of times. At that time the nations will voluntarily come over to the God of Israel. Verse 14 corresponds to the message of Isaiah 2:2-4. The history of redemption is telescoped to dramatize the ultimate purpose of God.” (Victory Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 364).

The return of the scattered fugitives, the faithful remnant of the Lord, from the nations of the world to Israel at the end of the great Tribulation and the beginning of the Messianic kingdom is a topic much beloved by Isaiah as he speaks of it often. See Isaiah 14:1-2; 43:1-6; 49:22-26; and 60:1-22. The Lord will protect His faithful remnant during the tribulation, Revelation 12:13-17. At the end of this terrible period, the faithful remnant will stream from the nations where they have found refuge. They will not be left to their own resources as they travel to Jerusalem and Mount Zion to meet the Messiah. As recorded in 18:7, 45:14 and 60:5-9, the proceeds from the labor of Egypt and the commerce of Cush (Ethiopia) will be given to the remnant to Finance both their travel and their establishment of their residences in the kingdom of their
Messiah. Not only will the Gentile nations bring them their wealth, they will assist them in their travels (49:22-23; 60:4) and once reaching Israel, the Gentiles who accompanied the faithful Jewish remnant will become servants to them, (14:2), and will rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (60:10), and will minister to the faithful remnant who have taken up residence in the kingdom (60:10).

Vs. 14 also states that the Gentile Sabeans will not only come to the financial aid of the faithful remnant but will bow down to them, as will other Gentile peoples, see Isaiah 60:14. Many of the Gentiles will have survived the horrors of the great Tribulation will still be in chains (vs. 14) and will seek out the faithful remnant whom God will esteem and the Gentiles will be totally subservient to them. The Gentiles will beg them to allow them (the Gentiles) to accompany the faithful remnant as they journey to Jerusalem. Following the judgment of God on the world, during the great Tribulation, those who remain alive will become believers of God and acknowledge that “Surely God is with you” (the faithful remnant), and they will avow that “there is no God besides him.” There will be no unbelievers among those who come to take residence in the Messianic kingdom. (Zechariah 14:21). Some of the Gentile nations that will come to worship in Jerusalem are mentioned in Isaiah 19:18-24.

The Apostle Paul quotes part of Isaiah 45:14 in his first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 14, vs. 25: “After the secrets of his heart are exposed, and so falling on his face he will worship God, declaring, God is really among you.” Although the context of Paul’s remarks to the believers in Corinth is not about the return of the faithful remnant to Jerusalem, Paul applies Isaiah’s words to suit his teaching that those who are faithfully proclaiming the word of God will witness unbelievers coming to faith in the Messiah and acknowledging that God is with them.

45:15 Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, Savior.

In contrast to idols (vs. 16) that can be seen but have no ability to do anything, God is invisible and transcendent, who is called “Spirit” (John 4:24). Yet Israel’s God who cannot be seen, is a Savior who provides salvation for Israel (vs. 17). Isaiah had earlier, as recorded in 8:17, stated God’s hiding: “I will wait expectantly for the LORD, who hides his face from the house of Jacob, but I will put my hope in him.” Isaiah had confidence in the Lord who “hides himself” because Isaiah had seen and talked with Him in a vision in the temple, Isaiah chapter 6. God also had revealed Himself to Isaiah many times by giving the prophet His words to declare to the people of Judah and Jerusalem. Isaiah states in a positive way that God hides Himself so that, even though people cannot see Him, they can have faith in Him for He is their God who is their Savior. See also John 20:29. Even though, people cannot physically see God, the evidence of His works and voice are everywhere. See: Psalm 8:1-9; 19:1-6; Romans 1:18-20; and Hebrews 1:1-3.

Isaiah’s hymn of praise to God comes after God’s revelation of the glories to come to Israel in the far future when God will finally restore Israel and cause the wealth of the nations to be brought to the faithful remnant who will be brought from the nations to reside in the kingdom ruled by Israel’s and the world’s Messiah. In the brief hymn of praise, vs 17, Isaiah mentions that the God of Israel is their Savior. He could have also added many other descriptive titles for God which he has done in many places in his prophetic writings. Isaiah also describes God as a Savior in 43:3; 11; 45:21; 49:26; 60:16; and 63:8. In Isaiah 19:20, the reference to Saviour (and Champion) is a clear prophecy of the Messiah who will rescue those in Egypt, in the far future who have faith in God and will cry to the Lord for deliverance from their enemies.
45:16 They will all be put to shame, and humiliated; they who make idols will go away disgraced.

Isaiah discusses the folly of making and worshiping idols throughout his prophecy: 2:8, 18-20; 10:10-11; 19:1-3; 31:7; 40:19-20; 21:9; 30:22; 41:29; 42:8, 17; 44:9-17; 45:20; 46:1; 48:5; 57:13; and 66:3. It was such an evil and detestable practice that the prophet had to continually speak out against those who had rejected the worship of the true God and replace devotion to Him with the inconceivable and blasphemous practice of attributing deity to an image made of wood or metal and trusting in the worthless image for protection from enemies and eternal salvation. Isaiah in vs. 16 states that those who make idols (and by implication worship them) will all be put to shame, they will all be humiliated and they will all go away disgraced. Idol worship by God’s people was one of the major reasons that God would bring forces from a pagan Gentile nation, Babylon, to destroy Judah, Jerusalem and the temple, in 586 B.C., just as He had done for the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C.

The act of not attributing to God the worthiness He deserves is most heinous to God. When anyone or any people choose to make and worship idols, they are stating that the One who made the heavens and the earth, and sustains all life and who is the only true God is not worthy of their worship. They degrade and disgrace themselves by giving their praise (worship of worthiness) to an useless object. The people of the earth are to worship God because there is no One more esteemed, no One more worthy, no One greater than the God who has identified Himself as the Holy One of Israel, the Lord. When Jesus, the Messiah walked among His people He constantly gave praise to God, for there was no One greater to praise or worthy of praise.

45:17 But Israel will be saved by the LORD with an everlasting salvation; you will never be put to shame or humiliated.

In contrast to worthless idols who cannot save anyone, Israel will be saved by the Lord. It is not just a temporal salvation from enemies or harm. It is an everlasting salvation. This is a very clear statement of God’s eternal purposes for His chosen people. It is not a universal claim that all peoples of Israel will automatically receive eternal salvation. Other statements by God help to clarify the prophet’s meaning in vs. 17. Beginning from chapter 1, vss. 18-20, Isaiah lays a foundation for understanding that those who trust in the Lord (willing vs. 19) and obey Him will have their sins forgiven. Isaiah makes clear, as recorded in 12:2, that trusting in God is the response that is necessary for salvation

God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid; for the LORD, yes the LORD, is my strength and song; he has become my salvation.

Those who trust in the Lord, will never be put to shame or humiliated, as will those who spurn God and put their trust in worthless idols (vs. 16). Eternal or everlasting salvation was understood from the writings of the Old Testament as Paul reminded young Timothy as recorded in 2 Timothy 3:16. Isaiah certainly understood that salvation was more than an earthly refuge from harm. He proclaimed the message of salvation from the
beginning to the end of his prophecy. Those who read and study the prophecy of Isaiah are invited to respond to God’s offer of eternal salvation by trusting in Him by faith.

45:18 For this is what the LORD says
who created the heavens,
the God who formed the earth and made it,
who established it and created it not chaotic,
who formed it to be inhabited.
"I am the LORD; there is no other.

To emphasize His purposes of salvation for all the earth, God reminds those who hear the message from the proclamation of Isaiah or read Isaiah’s writings, that he is the Lord who has the authority to deliver His message, “This is what the LORD says,” and He has the divine power to accomplish creative acts that no one has or could have done for He states, “I am the LORD; there is no other.” The authoritative statement, “For this is what the LORD says,” is repeated often by Isaiah in chapters 44 and 45: 44:1, 6, 24; 45:1, 11, 14, and 18. The statement at the end of vs. 18, “I am the LORD; there is no other,” is also repeated often by Isaiah in these two chapters: 44:6, 8; 45:5, 6, 14, 18, 21, and 22. The frequency of these two statements underscores the importance of what God is saying to His people and to the peoples of the world. God is speaking and His message must be heeded.

The statements of the Lord in vs. 18 reinforce His actions of Creator of the cosmos including the earth and all that is in it. Four words are used by God to describe His creative activities so that there will be no misunderstanding as to His power and authority and to emphasize that trusting in anyone else, especially idols (vss. 16 and 20) is disgraceful, shameful and worthless and those who trust in idols will be humiliated.

The first action of God described in vs. 18 is that He, “created” the heavens. The word ‘created” is the Hebrew word bara which occurs in Genesis 1:1: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” (KJV). It also occurs in Genesis 1:27 describing the creation of humans (male and female). This word occurs twice in vs. 18 and often in Isaiah: 40:26; 41:20; 42:5; 43:7; 45:8, 12, 18; 48:7; 54:16; 65:17 and 18.

The second action of God in vs. 18 is that He “formed” the earth and He “formed” it to be inhabited. The word, “formed” occurring twice in vs. 18 is the Hebrew word yatsar which also occurs frequently in Isaiah: 25:1; 29:16; 43:1, 7, 10, 21; 44:2, 21, 24; 45:18; 49:5 and 54:17. Like the other similar words in vs. 18, yatsar also occurs in the creation account of Genesis: 2:7-8. See also Psalm 95:5; Jeremiah 1:5 and 33:2.

The third action of God, described in vs. 18 is that He “made” the earth. The word “made” is the Hebrew word asah which also occurs often in Isaiah: 2: 8, 20; 17:8; 22:11; 28:15; 31:7; 37:16; 43:7; 44:2; 45:12, 18; 57:16 and 66:2. See also Jeremiah 10:12 and 51:15. It occurs in the creation account of Genesis chapters 1-3: Genesis 1:7, 16, 25, 31; 2:3, 4 and 3:1. It occurs frequently in the Psalms: 86:9; 95:5; 96:5; 100:3; 104:19, 24; 106:19; 111:4; 118:24; 119:73; 121:2; 124:8; 134:3; 136: 5, 7; and 146:6.

The fourth action of God described in vs. 18 is that He “established” the earth. The word “established” is the Hebrew word kun, which occurs less frequently in Isaiah: 2:2; 16:5; 54:14. See also Jeremiah 10:12 and 51:15. It occurs often in the Psalms: 9:7; 24:2; 37:23; 89:21, 37; 93:1, 2; 96:10; 99:4; 102:28; 103:19; 119:5, 90; and 140:11.

Another important word in vs. 18 is the Hebrew word tohu which is interpreted as “chaotic” in the DASV and “vain” in the KJV. The NIV may have the best likely translation as “empty,” due to the next sentence in
vs. 18: “who formed it to be inhabited.” This word occurs in Genesis 1:2: “And the earth was formless and empty; and darkness covered the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God hovered over the surface of the waters.” The word tohu is translated as “empty” in Genesis 1:2 (DASV). This word also occurs often in Isaiah: 24:10; 29:21; 34:11; 40:17, 23; 41:29; 44:9; 45:18, 19; 49:4 and 59:4. See also Jeremiah 4:23.

45:19  I have not spoken in secret,
in the land of darkness;
  I did not tell Jacob's descendants,
   'Seek me in vain.'
  I, the LORD, speak righteousness,
   I declare things that are right.

There are at least four ways that God has spoken as revealed in Scripture. First, in His created order, God “speaks” through what is seen in nature. King David, in Psalm 19:1-4 has stated:

1 The heavens declare the glory of God;
   the sky proclaims his handiwork.
2 Day to day utters speech,
   night to night reveals knowledge.
3 There is no speech nor are there words,
   their voice is not heard,
4 yet their voice is gone out through all the earth,
   their words to the end of the world.
  In them he has pitched a tent for the sun,
5 which is like a bridegroom coming out of his wedding chamber.

Although there is no audible speech, (vs. 4), from the sky and heavens, yet a voice goes out to all the earth which declares the glory of God. Second, God has audibly spoken to His servants from time to time: (not an exhaustive list): to Adam and Eve and to Satan, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to Moses and the elders of Israel, to Joshua, to David, to His servants, the prophets, to His Son, Jesus Christ, to the disciples, to Saul (later Paul), and to John on the island of Patmos. At times this speech was through a vision and at other times, humans directly heard the voice of God. Third, God, in these last days, has spoken to us in His Son (Hebrews 1:1-3). Fourth, God continually speaks to the people of the earth through the pages of Scripture. The words of Scripture are “God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21), and through the reading of God’s word or hearing it being ready, God speaks plainly for as Isaiah 45:19 states, God has not “spoken in secret.”

Some have understood the words in vs. 19, “the land of darkness” as referring to Babylon but there is nothing in the context of vss.18-19 that would indicate that Babylon is the place of darkness. The “land of darkness” is best seen within the greater context of vss. 14-25 where the far future time of the days of the great Tribulation and its aftermath are in view and during the time when as vs. 23 states, every knee will bow before God.

God also declares, as recorded in vs. 19, that Jacob’s descendants were not told (another reference to God speaking), to seek God in vain. Isaiah records that God is near. “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near.” Isaiah 55:6. Moses stated in Deuteronomy 4:7: “For what other great nation is there that has a god so near them, as the LORD our God is whenever we call on him?” See also Psalm 73:28
and Jeremiah 23:23. Jacob’s descendants who will live during the terrifying days of Jacob’s trouble (distress), (Jeremiah 30:7), will call upon God, who is near them, for refuge and strength.

The final sentence of vs. 19 states: “I, the LORD, speak righteousness, I declare things that are right.” Those who draw near to Him, have the confidence that God only “speaks” righteously and only “declares” things that are right. Moses stated, as recorded in Deuteronomy 32:3-4: “For I will proclaim the name of the LORD, ascribe greatness to our God. He is the Rock, his work is perfect; all his ways are just. A faithful God who does nothing wrong, Just and upright is he.” See also: (not an exhaustive list): Psalm 65:5; 71:19; Isaiah 5:16; 41:10; 45:8, 21; 56:1; 61:11; 63:1; Daniel 9:14; Zechariah 8:8; 2 Peter 1:1 and Revelation 15:3. In the context of Isaiah chapters 44 and 45 and specifically vs. 20-21 of chapter 45, God speaks righteousness and declares things that are right (true) in comparison to worthless idols who have no voice and cannot speak anything. God concludes in this context in vs. 21: “there is no one besides me.” God in vs. 19 is stating that His people and the people of the earth need to trust in Him for there is no other in whom anyone can confidently place their trust.

Isaiah 45:20-25

David L. Cooper comments on vss. 20-25

Invitation to the Lost

“... that unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.” In view of this time of universal recognition of God and homage to Him, the prophet for the Lord plead (in verse 22) for all to accept God's salvation.

There is salvation and righteousness only in Jehovah. He also has strength, for those who accept Him. From the New Testament we learn of the righteousness which He has provided for all who wish to accept. The most concise and fullest statement of this righteousness apart from the law is set forth in Romans 3:21-31. An examination of our passage in Isaiah and a comparison of it with Paul's statement in Romans reveals the fact that both the prophet and the Apostle were speaking of imputed righteousness which is given to all who believe.

"In Jehovah shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory" (vs. 25). Men cannot be justified by their good works or anything that they accomplish, have, or do. Only in Jehovah–Jehovah our righteousness, the Lord Jesus Christ–can the Seed of Israel be justified. Because of this fact, the truth of the gospel must be proclaimed, by those who have it and who know God's plan, to Israel now. May the Lord God stir our hearts and open our eyes to see His truth and may He give us moral and spiritual strength, power, and courage to put into practice now what we learn from His Word. The blessings of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob rest
Isaiah Chapters 40-48: Page 112


45:20-21 Assemble yourselves and come; come together, you fugitives of the nations.
They have no knowledge
those who carry the wood of their carved idols, and pray to a god who cannot save.
21 Declare and present your evidence; let them take counsel together.
Who predicted this long ago?
Who has declared this in the past?
Have not I, the LORD?
There is no other God besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is no one besides me.

As He had done previously to others, (41:1, 21-29; 43:8-9), God commands that the fugitive of the nations, those who will have endured the terrors of the Tribulation, to declare and present their evidence that their idols had predicted anything of the future. This is a purely rhetorical request for God, knowing that idols made of wood or any other substance could not speak, think, give counsel, let alone predict the future. God continues with the fact that He alone is the only God who can predict things that will surely happen, long before the predictions become reality. God again states that there is no other God besides Him, who is a righteous God and a Savior. See also 43:11; 44:6, 8; 45:6,14, 22. The peoples of the world will still craft and worship idols even in the future days of the great Tribulation. (Revelation 9:20-21). Those who have rejected God by supressing the truth they have known about Him, have exchanged God’s glory for vile images, and have exchanged the truth of God for a lie for they worship something created instead of worshiping the Creator (Romans 1:18-32). There is only one true God who is righteous and a Savior.

The Apostle Peter reveals that the One who is this Savior is the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter addresses his second letter: “to those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 1:1 NKJV). Isaiah often declared God as the Savior: 19:20; 43:3, 11; 45:15, 21; 49:26; 60:16 and 63:8. One of the most significant New Testament verses regarding the present role of the Savior, to Israel is Acts 5:31: “God exalted him at his right hand to be a Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.” God reminded those, whom He called to give account of their worthless worship of idols, that He alone is a righteous God, who can truthfully and accurately predict things to come, and that He is a Savior not only to Israel but to all nations of the earth.

45:22 Look to me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.

There is perhaps no clearer call for salvation in the Old Testament than is recorded in Isaiah 45:22. Victor Buksbazen comments:

“Here is one of the climatic points of prophecy. Jehovah’s love is not limited to Israel alone, God cares for all humanity and invites all men to “look unto me and be saved.” The text contradicts all those who maintain that
the God of the Old Testament is a cruel, narrowminded and narrowhearted God. The word of Isaiah brings to mind the words of Jesus: “Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Mt. 11:28).” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 366).

The ESV, NIV and NASB versions have translated “Look to me” as “Turn to me.” The word translated as look or turn is the Hebrew panah which occurs often in the Old Testament including Isaiah. In Isaiah, it occurs in: 8:21; 13:14; 40:3; 53:6; 56:11; 57:14; and 62:10. It is an imperative verb which occurs in the Psalms as a request for God to look upon the penitent: Psalm 25:16; 69:16; 86:16; and 119:132. However, in Isaiah 45:22 it is God who is requesting that the peoples of the world look upon Him.

In turning to God, there is a look of faith, implying that all who look to God in faith will be saved. In a remarkable event recorded in Numbers 21:6-9, God sent fiery serpents among the people as an act of judgment for their rebellious grumbling against Moses (and God). When Moses interceded for them after they had recognized their sin, God commanded Moses to make a bronze serpent and set it upon a pole and God said all who have been bitten who will look upon the bronze serpent will live. The Apostle John makes reference of this incident in John 3:14-15 as an type or symbol of those, who will look upon and believes in the Son of Man (the Messiah) when He is “lifted up,” will have eternal life. God is calling, “Look to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth.” It is a call not just to the people of Judah and Jerusalem but to all peoples of the earth. God has repeatedly declared that He alone is God of all the earth and the worthless idols of the peoples can do nothing to guide or counsel them or to accurately declare future events before they happen. He now makes a most startling announcement that if all peoples of the earth look to Him (faith is implied) they will be saved. This is a major theme of the Book of Isaiah, from chapter 1:18 (a call to reason together with God for salvation) to chapter 66:18 (people from all nations and tongues will come to Him).

It was God’s original plan, Genesis 12:3, that through Abram, all nations of the earth would be blessed. The ultimate expression of this blessing is that One who is from the seen of Abraham, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, would be crushed for the world’s sins, have the iniquities of the world to fall on Him and He would bear their sins Isaiah 53:5-12; and all who believe in Him will be saved, John 3:16, Acts 16:31. Included in this blessing, is that along with the Jews, the Gentiles would be saved by looking to God. God’s covenant people were to be “a light to the nations,” Isaiah 42:6. The covenant people did not fulfill this role. However, the great Servant of God, the Messiah who was to be the light of the nations would accomplish God’s purposes of bringing salvation to the ends of the earth, Isaiah 49:6. See also Isaiah 63:5. Thomas Constable notes that God used Isaiah 45:22 to bring this light of salvation to the great English preacher Charles Spurgeon. (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 224).

45:23 I have solemnly sworn by myself; the word gone forth from my mouth is righteous, and cannot be revoked. Every knee will bow before me, every tongue will swear loyalty to me.

God, who has called for all the ends of the earth to look or turn to Him and be saved, vs. 22, authenticates His call by a solemn oath sworn to Himself (Genesis 22:16, Psalm 89:35, Isaiah 62:8; Jeremiah 44:26; 49:13; 51:14; Amos 4:2; 6:8), because there is no One who is greater, more worthy, more important, or more exalted that Himself. God avows that the very word of His mouth is righteous. Every word that proceeds out of His mouth is righteous for He is holy in His essence and cannot do or say anything that is not true to His own holiness. See also Isaiah 5:16; 45:21; 56:1. Isaiah prophesizes, that the Messiah when He returns will state “I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.” (Isaiah 63:1 KJV). The righteous words that God speaks can never be revoked as Isaiah will later record in 55:9-11:
9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
   so my ways are higher than your ways,  
   and my thoughts than your thoughts.

10 For as the rain comes down and the snow from heaven,  
   and does not return there without watering the earth,  
   making it produce and sprout,  
   giving seed to the sower,  
   and bread to the eater;  
11 so will my word be that goes forth out of my mouth;  
   it will not return to me empty,  
   but it will accomplish what I desire it to,  
   and it will succeed in the matter for which I sent it.

God next declares that every knee will bow before Him and every tongue will swear allegiance or loyalty to Him. The contrast between God swearing an oath to Himself and every one in all the earth swearing loyalty to Him is deliberate for God desires that everyone will call upon Him for salvation, (Isaiah 45:22; 1 Timothy 2:4) and acknowledge Him as the sovereign Lord of all created things. The Apostle Paul applied Isaiah 45:23 in his letter to the Romans, (14:10-11) stating that all believers will one day stand before the judgment (bema) seat of God and will bow before their Messiah and give Him praise. Paul also applied Isaiah 45:23 in his letter to the Philippians, (2:10-11) stating that Jesus Christ, following His death and resurrection, will be highly exalted and before Him, (His exalted name); “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (NKJV). The New Testament application of God’s words in Isaiah 45:23 makes it plain that all peoples will acknowledge His Son as Lord. The N.T. does not imply that, by this acknowledgment, all peoples will be saved. Only those who look to the Savior in faith will be saved but they and all others (those who will not be saved) will bow before the Savior and confess that He is the Lord. The implication for Isaiah’s audience and those who read the prophetic writings of Isaiah is obvious. Do not wait to turn to God in faith for salvation. The call of God to come to Him for salvation is for all peoples of every tongue and nation. It is of the greatest importance. How much better to acknowledge the Messiah, Jesus Christ as Lord as a believer with great rejoicing, then to do so as an unbeliever with everlasting mourning and regret as Isaiah 45:24 so clearly states.

45:24-25 'Only in the LOR D,' it is said of me,  
   'is righteousness and strength.'"
   All who were angry against him will  
   come to him and be put to shame.
25 In the LOR D will all the descendants of Israel  
   be vindicated and will boast in him.

The first sentence of Isaiah 45:24 is a statement of praise that righteousness and strength is found only in the LORD. Because of His great works of creation and salvation, all peoples of the earth will acknowledge that His Son is Lord by bowing before Him and confessing loyalty to Him (vs. 23). The second sentence of vs. 24 describes the final destination of those who “are angry against him.” There will be no escape from God. Everyone will eventually appear before Him. Those who trust in Him for salvation will appear before the Messiah at the judgment (bema) seat, Romans 14:10-11; 1 Corinthians 3:13-15, 4:1-5; 2 Corinthians 5:10. Those who have refused to trust in Him for salvation will appear before Him at the great white throne judgment where there will be only punishment declared, Revelation, 20:11-15.
This great section of salvation concludes, vs. 25, with an encouraging word for the descendants of Israel. They will be vindicated for all that they have suffered and will boast (exalt) in Him. This will be when the Messiah returns to set up His millennial kingdom. The faithful remnant of God, those Jews who have remained true to Him, will be gathered from all nations of the earth and will come rejoicing to Zion to live peacefully and securely under the sovereign rule of their great King. Isaiah has often spoke about these days. See Chart of Israel’s Future Kingdom, by John MacArthur, NASB Study Bible, page 1032. The Apostle Paul in summation of his great defence of his people Israel, concludes in Romans 11:26-27: “And so all Israel will be saved, just as it is written, "There will come out of Zion the Deliverer; he will remove ungodliness from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins."

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 45:
45:1-7: The Selection of God
45:8-13: The Sovereignty of God
45:14-25: The Salvation of God


Some scholars group chapters 46-48 as one literary unit within Isaiah, but for purposes of this study, it is best to view chapters 46 and 47 as a unit which depicts the folly of Babylon’s people who worship worthless idols and the defeat of Babylon. Many scholars and students of the Scriptures see only the past historical destruction of Babylon which occurred in 539 B.C., while others see both an historical defeat of Babylon in 539 B.C. and a far future reference to the final destruction of Babylon as described in Revelation 18:1-19:6. For example, David L. Cooper explains:

As stated in former discussions in this series, Babylon, with all her might and power, lay in the background of the oracles found in Isaiah, chapters 40-48. Woven into the warp and woof of the revelation contained in chapters 41-46 is the deliverance of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity under the sovereignty of Cyrus, the Medo-Persian king. In chapters 47 and 48, however, the prophet was carried forward to the end of this age and saw Babylon the dominating world metropolis of this future time. But he was shown that it will be overthrown completely in one moment on a certain date. When this great catastrophe occurs, Israel's Messiah will save her. In anticipation, however, of this final deliverance, her expected but long-rejected Messiah issues a call for His people to leave Babylon before the overthrow and promises water and sustenance to them as they make their trek homeward across the barren deserts. A careful study of these two chapters reveals their unity and compactness. They therefore must be studied very carefully as a literary unit.

Along with these chapters one should carefully investigate Isaiah, chapters 13 and 14, and Jeremiah, chapters 50 and 51, which portions of scripture blend prophecies of the fall of Babylon under the Medes and Persians with a forecast of her future overthrow, giving the greater part of their attention to the final catastrophe in the end of the Tribulation. An examination of these passages will show that the major part of them has never been fulfilled. Since God's Word is infallible, we may be certain that He will literally carry out the plan announced and the threat made, as they appear on the sacred page. (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – August 1945).

Chapters 46 and 47 can easily be understood from an outline of its contents.
46:1-7: Pagan peoples carry their false gods vs. the true God who carries His people
46:8-13: The only real God who fulfills His purposes and brings salvation to His people
47: 1-15 Proud and Arrogant Babylon will fall with none to save it
46:1-7: Pagan peoples carry their false gods vs. the true God who carries His people

46:1 Bel bows down,
   Nebo stoops;
their idols are carried on beasts and cattle.
The images you carry around are
   a burden to the weary animals.

The discussion of idols by Isaiah, vss. 1-7, is an addition to previous discussions in his prophecy. See 2:8, 18-20; 10:10-11; 19:1-3; 31:7; 40:19-20; 21:9; 30:22; 40:18-24; 41:5-10, 21-24, 29; 42:8,14-17; 44:6-20; 45:16-20. Isaiah will also discuss the folly of idol worship in 48:5; 57:13; and 66:3. Isaiah, throughout his writings, declares a comparison between idols who cannot think, do, say, save and protect their worshippers, predict anything and the one true God who can do all these things and is the Creator of the cosmos and the world and alone can accurately predict the future for the future is the outworking of His plans and purposes. In vss. 1-2 of chapter 46, Isaiah adds another comparison. Idols that are fashioned by humans, cannot move themselves or do anything. They have to be carried by the people who have made them. The heavier the idol, the greater the burden it is to carry them. God, however, does not need to be carried, but in great contrast to idols, He carries those who believe in and worship Him.

Bel and Nebo were names of false gods of ancient Babylon. Victor Buksbazen comments about their status and influence in Babylonian religion:

Bel, the equivalent of the Hebrew baal (lord) was the generic name for any god. When uses as a proper name, it refers to Marduk, the supreme deity of Babylon. In Babylonian mythology he appears as the creator. The Greeks called him Zeus or Jupiter.

The magnificent and enormous temple of Bel stood on the banks of the Euphrates and is described by Herodotus:

The temple is a square building, two furlongs each way with bronze gates, which was still in existence in my time. It has a solid central tower on furlong square, with a second erected on top of it, then a third, and so on up to eight...On the summit stands a great temple...In the temple there is a second shrine lower down in which there is a great figure of Bel, all of gold on a golden throne, supported on a base of gold, with a golden table standing beside it. I was told by the Chaldeans that to make all this, more than twenty-two tons of gold were used. Outside the temple is a golden altar...The golden altar is reserved for sucklings only. 1

Nebo comes from the same root as the Hebrew word for prophet, nabi. In Babylonian mythology Nebo was the son of the supreme god Marduk and is presented as the spokesman of the gods, just like Mercury, mentioned in Acts 14:12. Nebo was also the supreme god of Nineveh and was supposed to be the god of learning and wisdom. At the approach of the victorious Persians, the worshippers of these gods sought to save them by loading them on beasts of burden (camels and elephants) and on cattle (horses, asses and oxen). [Note 1: Herodotus, Op. cit. 179-183]. (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, pages 367-368).

46:2 They stoop,
   they bow down together.
They could not save these burdens,
   but they themselves are taken into captivity.
The idols of Babylon stoop and bow down when they were carried by the Babylonians in an attempt to save their worthless false gods from the advancing Persian army. The result was obvious. Neither the Babylonians nor their idols would be saved. The Persians took the people and their idols captive in the sense of becoming the new lords of Babylon. The Persians however, under the leadership of Cyrus did not destroy these idols or those who worshipped them. Cyrus incorporated the idols into the pagan worship rituals of the Persians who added their own false worship to that already existing in Babylon. Gary V. Smith suggests that these verses may not be referencing the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus. He suggests:

Hypothetically, the defeat of Babylon that the prophet announced could relate to: (a) the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III who defeated the Babylonian king Nabu-shuma-ukin around 729 BC; (b) Sargon II taking control of Babylon around 710 BC when Merodach-baladan ruled Babylon; (c) Sennacherib’s defeat of Merodach-baladan around 703 BC and again in 689 BC when the city of Babylon was decimated; (d) Cyrus’s taking control of Babylon in 539 BC; or (e) Xerxes’ defeat of Babylon around 400 BC. Since Cyrus (Hb. Koresh) was mentioned in 44:28–45:1, many commentators believe this prophecy predicts this conquest of Babylon by Cyrus the Persian. This hypothesis is strengthened by the reference to God’s summoning a bird of prey from the east to carry out his purposes in 46:11, but almost any of the foreign kings mentioned above could fit this broad descriptive metaphor (10:5; 41:2). Although every piece of information is helpful, two major problems have developed because many interpreters have read later fulfillments into these prophecies. These are the problems of (a) the historicization of the prophecy and (b) the falsification of the prophecy. (Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, page 284).

46:3-4 Listen to me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, you who have been borne by me since birth, I have supported you from your conception. Even to your old age, I am he; even when your hair turns grey I will carry you. I have made you, and I will support you; I will carry you, and will deliver you.

God calls upon His people to listen to Him regarding the contrast between idols who have to be carried by their makers and the true God who carries, bears, supports and delivers His people. This declaration to listen is made to those of the “house of Jacob” and “all the remnant of the house of Israel”. This could be a reference to the audience of Isaiah who were living in Judah and Jerusalem just after the defeat of the Assyrian army by God in 701 B.C. (Isaiah 37:36), and to the remnant (those remaining) of the northern nation of Israel who had been defeated and had most of the people taken captive and deported by Assyria in 722 B.C. God punctuates His care for His people by six declarations of the word “I” in vss. 3-4. Prior to these six “I” statements, He declares that they had been borne by Him since they had been born. This can be understood as a reference to their individual births as Jews into the covenant people of God and to the corporate birth of the nation of Israel particularly from the days of the Exodus when God rescued His people from captivity in Egypt.

The six statements with “I” describing God’s actions are similar in meaning. First, God has “supported” (carried) them from their conception. Second, He has been with them continually from their birth to their old age. Third, He promises to keep carrying (bearing) them to old age, “even when your hair turns grey.” Fourth, He reminds them that He has made them, which is in contrast to the evil practice of making and worshiping idols which are worthless and can make nothing. Fifth, He will support them. They will have no
need to support Him as if He were an idol that needed to be held in position so as not to fall and they will also have no need to carry Him around like they do with their idols and carved images. Sixth, God will deliver, (save, rescue) them from all harm and from their enemies. God will keep His covenant with them and preserve them. They must in response trust in Him and turn to Him for salvation, Isaiah 45:22. For similar statement regarding God’s support for them by bearing them and carrying them see: Isaiah 40:11 and 63:9. See also Exodus 19:4; Deuteronomy 1:31; 32:11; Psalm 28:9, 71:6; and Hosea 11:3. Another way that God will carry them is through the death of the suffering Servant the Messiah, who will bear our griefs and carry our sorrows as stated in Isaiah 53:4.

46:5-7 To whom will you compare me or make my equal?
Who do you think is like me?
6 Those who pour gold out of the bag,
and weigh silver on the balance scales.
They hire a goldsmith,
and he makes it into a god.
Then they fall down,
and worship it.
7 They haul it on their shoulders;
they carry it.
They set it in its place,
and there it stays;
it does not move from its place.
If someone cries out to it,
it cannot answer,
nor is it able to save anyone out of their trouble.

God, as recorded in vs. 5, is speaking to His people directly (vs. 3) and to all peoples indirectly through the writings of the prophet. God challenges His listeners with three questions that are rhetorical: First, to whom will you compare me? Second, to whom will you make my equal? Third, who do you think is like me? The answers to these questions are similar: no one can compare with God, no one can be “made” His equal, and there is no one whom anyone could think of who is like God. God had addressed these and similar questions as recorded by Isaiah in 45:5-7; 14; 18, and 21. See also: Exodus 8:10; 9:14; 1 Samuel 2:2 and Psalm 86:8.

As recorded in vss. 6-7, God describes the practice of pagans who use valuable resources, gold and silver, and hire a goldsmith who fashions these riches into a worthless god. See also Isaiah 40:18-20; 41:7 and 44:9-20; and Jeremiah 10:14-15; 51:17-18. After the idol is formed, these pagans fall down and worship it and then they need to carry it on their shoulders and then set it in its place where it cannot move itself. When anyone cries out to it, the worthless, deaf, dumb and mindless idol cannot respond. It is not capable of helping or saving anyone from their troubles. Just as the massive Babylonian idols Bel and Nebo (vs. 1) have to be carried, for they cannot move themselves, the personal idols that have been made by humans also have to be carried. In contrast, (vss. 3-4), God who has created the earth and its people, hears all who cry out to Him. God can respond, and He can help and save those who trust in Him. He also carries those who put their faith in Him. He does not need anyone to carry Him and there is no place where He can be set into position. As in the many passages where idols are mentioned, the implication is clear. Why would anyone continue to worship a worthless idol or image? God desires that all people put their faith and trust in Him and worship Him.
The repetitive passages in Isaiah regarding the useless worship of idols compared to the worship of the one true God highlights the words of God to the prophet as recorded in Isaiah 6:9-13. The preaching of Isaiah would serve only to harden the minds, make deaf the ears and blind the eyes of the people of Judah and Jerusalem. God’s repeated call to them to turn from their evil practices of idol worship and worship Him only continually is ignored by His people. Isaiah would later record in 48:4:

*I know how obstinate you are;
and your neck muscles are like iron,
and your forehead like bronze.*

The good news, however, is that, although God called His people deaf and blind, Isaiah 42:18-19; there would be some who would respond as implied from the words “holy seed” in Isaiah 6:13 and “remnant” in Isaiah 10:20-22; 11:11, 16; 28:5; 37:31 and 46:3. God’s word will eventually come to fruition in the response and obedience of the remnant for His word will accomplish all that God desires, Isaiah 55:10-11.

**46:8-13: The only real God who fulfills His purposes and brings salvation to His people**

**46:8-9** Remember this and be assured; 
bring it again to mind, O rebels.  
9 Remember the former things of old; 
for I am God, and there is no other;  
*I am God, and there is no one like me.*

As recorded in vs. 8, God calls for His people to remember what He had just declared regarding the foolishness of forming, carrying and trusting in worthless idols and the benefit of trusting in the one true God who has created humans and can carry them even to their old age and can deliver them from harm. He also wants them to remember what He will say as recorded in the following verses, vv. 9-13. He calls His people rebels for they have on many occasions rebelled against Him and exchanged the worship due God for worship of idols which they have fashioned to resemble created things.

The sentence in the DASV, “*Remember this and be assured*” is translated very differently in the KJV as Victor Buksbazen advises:


The word “rebels” vs. 8 in the DASV is translated as transgressors in the KJV, NKJV, NASB, and ESV and as rebels in the NIV. It is the Hebrew word *pasha* which can be translated either as rebels or transgressors. *Pasha* also occurs in Isaiah, as translated in the DASV, in 1:2 (rebelled); 1:28 (rebellious); 43:27 (rebelled); 48:8 (rebell); 53:12 (twice: transgressors); 59:13 (rebelling); and 66:24 (rebelled). Similar Hebrew words in Isaiah are: (1): *marah* with the meaning of rebel or disobedience, and occurs in Isaiah in the DASV as: 1:20 (rebell); 3:8 (defying); 50:5 (rebellious); and 63:10 (rebelled); (2): *sarar* with the meaning rebel or stubborn, and occurs in Isaiah in the DASV as: 1:23 (rebellious); 30:1 (rebellious); and 65:2 (rebellious); (3): *sarah* with the meaning of rebel and occurs in Isaiah in the DASV as: 1:5 (rebell); 31:6 (rebell); and 59:13 (revolt); (4): *marad* with the meaning of rebelled and occurs once in the DASV as: 36:5 (rebelled); (5): *pesha* with the meaning of transgress and occurs in Isaiah in the DASV as: 24:20 (transgression); 43:25 (transgressions); 44:22 (transgressions); 50:1 (transgressions); 53:5 (transgressions); 53:8 (rebellion); 57:4 (sin); 58:1
Isaiah Chapters 40-48: Page 120

(transgression); 59:12 (twice: transgression); and 59:20 (sin); and (6): meri with the meaning of rebel or disobedience and occurs once in Isaiah in the DASV as: 30:9 (rebellious).

God again repeats his call to “remember” in vs. 9 and His rebellious people are commanded to remember “the former things of old;” which is in contrast to an earlier command recorded in 43:18 (see notes on this verse). This time, God commands them to recall by memory the things He had done for them so that they will acknowledge that He alone is God and there is no other and there is no one like Him. J. Alec Motyer comments on the two occurrences of God in vs. 9:

“God … God: the former is ‘ēl, God in his transcendent deity; the latter ’elōhîm, God in the fullness of his divine attributes. He is the only (no other) and unique (none like) God.” (J. Alec Motyer, Isaiah, page 294).

The reminder of God (Elohim) that there is no other occurs also in Isaiah in Deuteronomy 4:35, 39; Isaiah 44:8; 45:5, 14, 21, 22 and Joel 2:27. The corresponding statement that God states that “there is no one like me” occurs also in Exodus 8:10; 9:14; 1 Samuel 2:2 and Psalm 86:8. These repeated reminders in the Old Testament Scriptures and specifically in Isaiah were necessary for God to establish His unique existence, power, sovereignty, and His loving care for His creation, not only over the nations but particularly His chosen people. This is another call by God to His people to trust in Him for guidance, safety and salvation. No other god could provide any care for the idols that people create as their “gods” are completely worthless to provide anything that the one true God can provide.

46:10 I declare the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that have not yet happened; saying, "My purpose will stand, and I will fulfill what I have planned."

God’s omniscience is evident in His statement that “I declare the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that have not yet happened.” Only the Holy One of Israel, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, the One who is Elohim (vs. 9) can know how things will work out and unfold and then with divine confidence declare them long before they occur. The idols that the people of Judah and Jerusalem have crafted and then worshipped have no ability to talk, think, hear or do anything. The Lord of hosts, who alone rules the universe He has created, is absolutely trustworthy so that whatever He says can be counted on to be true. God had previously reminded His people, Isaiah 41:4, that “I, the LORD, and the first, and will be with the last of them, I am the one.” See also Revelation 1:8; 21:6, and 22:13.

God continues by stating, “My purpose will stand, and I will fulfill what I have planned.” Not only does God declare the end from the beginning but He plans (decrees) what will happen in the future and what He has decreed to happen will be fulfilled according to His good pleasure. The NASB translates vs. 10 as: “Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure.” As recorded in Lamentations 2;17, Jeremiah declares: “The LORD has done what he purposed; he has fulfilled his word that he commanded in the days of old.” The declaration of the Lord’s fulfilling what He has planned in vs. 10 sets the context for one of these plans that is revealed in vs. 11: the calling of someone “from the east” to accomplish His plan.
46:11 I call a bird of prey from the east, 
    a person to carry out my plan from a far country.
Yes, I have spoken,
    I will also bring it to pass.
I have planned it;
    I will also accomplish it.

Most scholars and commentators suggest that the person who is called the “bird of prey from the east,” is Cyrus who is mentioned by name in 44:28 and 45:1. Cyrus was called by God to conquer Babylon and release the captives of Judah so they could return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and the city. See notes on Isaiah 45:13. God can use anyone he desires to fulfill His purposes, even a pagan king who would not know Him, Isaiah 45:5. Cyrus ruled a combined Medo-Persian empire from 559-530 B.C. Upon assuming the throne of his father Cambyses 1, who ruled Anshan, which was a region of eastern Elam, he quickly established the dominance of his empire and captured all he faced including the Lydians who were ruled by its wealthy king, Croesus. In 539 B.C., the army of Cyrus captured Babylon and slew its king, Belshazzar. See Daniel chapter 5 for this a description of this event from the inside of Babylon’s walls.

God repeats what He had stated in vs. 10, that whatever He plans will be accomplished. No one can thwart God’s purposes and plans. There is no other deity who can declare the end from the beginning or accurately predict the future because He is the One who plans the future and His plans will succeed perfectly.

46:12-13 Listen to me, you stubborn-hearted, 
you who are far from righteousness.
13 I bring near my righteousness, 
it is not far off.
My salvation will not delay.
I will put salvation in Zion, 
for Israel my glory.

God calls upon His people to listen to Him. They were far from righteous as much of the writings of Isaiah, beginning from chapter 1 demonstrate. They were also stubborn-hearted as Isaiah was told at the time he was commissioned as a prophet as recorded in Isaiah chapter 6. God called them obstinate, with neck muscles like iron and with a forehead like bronze, Isaiah 48:4. To those who rebelled against Him and were continually disobeying Him, God promised to bring His righteousness and salvation to them.

David L. Cooper comments in vv. 12-13:

“Isaiah, in the two closing verses of chapter 46, declared, "Hearken unto me, ye stouthearted, that are far from righteousness: 13 I bring near my righteousness, it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry; and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory" (vss. 12,13).

Again addressing the transgressors, or the stouthearted, who were far from righteousness, the prophet announced that God would bring near His salvation, that it would not tarry, and that "... I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory." The marginal rendering of this passage in the Revised Version is give salvation in Zion, and my glory unto Israel. Both translations are grammatically correct and both convey the thought that was intended by the prophet. When this passage is viewed in the light of related ones, one immediately sees that the salvation of which the Lord was speaking and the glory which He foretold are those which will be brought to Israel at the second coming of our Lord. When the time arrives for Him to take the situation of
Israel in hand, He will not tarry. He will speed the tempo of events and accomplish His purposes in short order. Malachi was speaking of the same event—the second coming of the Messiah—in 3:1-6 of his prophecy. When the Lord thus comes, all Israel living at the time will be saved and glory will be placed in Zion for Israel His glory. Then the Chosen People will no longer be the tail of the nations as they are now; but, on the contrary, they will be the head.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – August 1945).

Victor Buksbazen adds:

“There was apparently a rebellious and stubborn group of men who discouraged the exiles, saying the God does not care about them. The term “tsedakah” which usually means righteousness, has in this context the meaning of vindication, Israel and their faith in Jehovah are both vindicated.

The prophet assures God’s people that their deliverance will not be long delayed. Departing from the historical situation the prophet sees Israel's glorious future. The Lord will place in Zion salvation and glory for His people Israel.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 370).

“I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory”

God, promises a future time when salvation will reside in Zion. This is a clear reference to the days of the kingdom of the Messiah who will be called (Isaiah 9:6), the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace who will reign in immaculate glory. The Messiah will be put to death for the sins of all peoples, Isaiah 52:13-53:12. He will bring salvation to the world by being gloriously resurrected so that all who believe in Him will be saved. At the appointed time of God’s own choosing, the Messiah will return to earth to rescue the faithful remnant and lead them to Zion where He will establish His kingdom. Israel will be seen by all peoples as the glory of the Lord. See Isaiah 2:1-4; 4:2-6; 11:1-16; 25:6-9; 35:1-10; 40:9-11; 41:8-20; 42:1-13; 43:1-7; 44:1-8; 49:1-26; 51:11; 52:7-12; 54:1-17; 55:1-13; 56:1-12; 60:1-22; 61:1-11; 62:1-12; 63:1-6; 65:17-25; Hosea 5:15-6:3; Joel 3:9-21; Amos 9:11-15; Micah 4:1-8; Obadiah vss. 17-21; Zechariah 12:1-14:21; Romans 11:25-27 and Revelation 20:1-6.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 46:
46:1-7 The wantonness of worshipping idols
46:8-13 The wisdom of worshipping God

Introduction to Isaiah Chapter 47

Thomas Constable provides an introduction of chapter 47:

The nation to be judged ch. 47

“This section of Isaiah on “The Lord's redemption of His servant [Israel]” (44:23—47:15) has so far included: an announcement of redemption (44:23-28), the identification of the instrument of redemption—Cyrus (45:1-13), and a reminder of the uniqueness of the God of redemption (45:14—46:13). It now concludes, by depicting Babylon—the nation from which the Lord would redeem His people from captivity—as a proud woman full of self-confidence. In her case, as in so many others, pride goes before a fall. This section is another oracle against a foreign nation (cf. chs. 13—23; Jer. 46—51; Ezek. 25—31) and an oracle of salvation for Zion (cf. 45:14—46:13). The main point of this chapter is not primarily to predict Babylon's fall, however, but to glorify the power and grace of Yahweh, using the destruction of Babylon as a backdrop.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 227).
47:1 Come down, and sit in the dust,
    O virgin daughter of Babylon;
sit on the ground without a throne,
    O daughter of the Chaldeans.
For you will no more be called tender and delicate.

As punishment for its mistreatment of the Jewish exiles, the Lord will bring judgment upon Babylon. The people of Babylon had become proud, arrogant and put blind trust in the massive walls of the capital city to shield them from any harm. They had thought of themselves as above all other peoples, and declared that they were the “Queen of Kingdoms,” vs. 5 and even above God, vs. 8. Their evil hubris had reached its end and God was about to bring them low, even to the dust of the earth. They were to be put into hard, manual labor, working in the dust of the fields. They were called “virgin daughter of Babylon” because they had not tasted the scars of warfare within the city’s walls. They would be cast out of their comfortable homes, where they lived in luxury (tender and delicate), and would be forced to live as slaves.

The actual occasion of this demise, while loosely fitting the defeat of Babylon by the army of Cyrus, is better seen as the final destruction of Babylon at the end of the Great Tribulation as described in Revelation chapters 17 and 18. As with many other prophecies in the book of Isaiah, there is a partial fulfillment to fit the historical setting of the days of Isaiah and even to the days of the Babylonian captivity many years later, and there is a far future fulfillment that completes the details of the prophecy more accurately.

47:2 Take the millstones,
    and grind grain;
remove your veil,
    strip off your robe;
uncover your legs,
    pass through the rivers.

The women (daughters) of Babylon, who had lived in luxury and self-exaltation will be forced to work as slaves grinding grain with millstones. They had been used to having meals prepared for them within the walls of the city and after its defeat, these women will know the hard and exhausting work of preparing meals for those who now rule over them. The reference to removing veils and robes and uncovering their legs is likely a necessity in their grain-grinding work and may also indicate that as slaves they were being deported to other countries where, during their journey, it was necessary to ford rivers. The daily tasks would also “grind” them down and remove any pride and arrogance they once exhibited in their previous life of luxury. Another possible meaning of the words, “pass through the rivers,” is that the women would have to ford a river or rivers to get to the fields where they would grind grain as slaves of a conquering nation.

47:3 Your nakedness will be uncovered,
    yes, your shame will be exposed.
I will take vengeance,
    and I will spare no one.
The Lord speaks indicating that it is His work of vengeance that has brought the women of Babylon to be put to shame for having their nakedness uncovered. This could be a scene of salves being forced to disrobe to perform their tasks or perhaps their disrobing was due to being ravished by conquering soldiers who often forced themselves on the women of the city or nation that had been defeated. The word “vengeance” is the Hebrew word \textit{naqam} (noun) which has the meaning of avenging for the wrongful actions of others. It is God’s righteous and “right” indignation to take vengeance upon those who have brought harm to His people or have sinned against Him. Isaiah often used \textit{naqam} to describe the vengeance of the Lord. See Isaiah 34:8; 35:4; 47:3; 59:17; 61:2 and 63:4. See also Deuteronomy 32:35, 41; 43; Psalm 58:10; Ezekiel 24:8; 25:12, 15; and Micah 5:15. Earlier Isaiah had declared in 34:8, regarding the punishment of Edom, that, \textit{“For it is the day of the LORD’s vengeance, the year of recompense for the cause of Zion.”} (NKJV). When the Lord (Messiah) returns to defeat His enemies, He will exclaim, as recorded in Isaiah 63:4, \textit{“For the day of vengeance was in my heart.”} The righteous will rejoice when they see the vengeance of the Lord. An interesting parallel exists between the vengeance described in Isaiah 63:3-4 and Psalm 58:10-11.

Isaiah 63:3-4

\begin{verbatim}
3 I have stomped in the winepress alone; 
    and none of the peoples joined with me.
    I stomped them in my anger, 
    and trampled them in my wrath.
    Their juice splattered on my garments, 
    and all my clothes are stained.
4 For the day of vengeance was in my heart, 
    and the year of my redeemed has come.
\end{verbatim}

Psalm 58:10-11

\begin{verbatim}
10 The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance; 
    he will wash his feet in the blood of the wicked.
11 So that people will say, 
    "Surely, there is a reward for the righteous; 
    surely there is a God that judges on earth."
\end{verbatim}

The last phrase of Isaiah 47:3 is translated in the DASV as \textit{“I will spare no one.”} Victor Buksbazen suggests an alternate translation:

\begin{verbatim}
“And will let no man intercede”
“Though the measure of Babylon’s wickedness is full to the brim, yet there is no man who is willing to intercede on her behalf, nor is the Lord willing to hear such intercession.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 373).
\end{verbatim}

\textit{47:4 Our Redeemer, the LORD of hosts is his name,}
\textit{the Holy One of Israel.}

Isaiah, after declaring the words of God for the demise of proud Babylon, pauses to give an exclamation of the God who will make this happen. Isaiah calls God, \textit{“Our Redeemer,”} The word \textit{“Redeemer”} is the Hebrew, \textit{ga’al} which refers to Israel’s kinsmen (family) redeemer. It is the word for redeemer in Ruth 4:14 (DASV): \textit{“Praise the LORD, who has not left you this day without a family redeemer. May his name be famous in Israel.”}

Isaiah continues his declaration with, “the LORD of hosts is his name.” The word LORD is Yahweh which has the meaning of the One who is changeless and self-existent (Exodus 3:14, John 8:58), who is present with His people as their covenant keeping God. The additive “of hosts” (Hebrew: tsaba in Isaiah 47:4) is also coupled with Yahweh in the Old Testament as the compound name, Yahweh Sabbaoth. (1 Samuel 1:3; 17:45) The word “hosts” refers to the Lord’s armies both in heaven and when He deems necessary, human armies that are amassed to fulfil His plans.

Isaiah completes this brief exclamation with his often-used description of God as “the Holy One of Israel,” which occurs 25 times in Isaiah (see notes on Isaiah 1:4). This compound name for God reminds Isaiah’s audience and those who read his prophecy that God is holy and has commanded His people to also be holy, Leviticus 11:44-45. The Apostle Peter would much later reference this command in Leviticus to exhort the Christian readers of his epistle to be holy, 1 Peter 1:15-16.

47:5 Sit silent, and hide in the darkness,
O daughter of the Chaldeans.
For you will no longer be called
"The Queen of Kingdoms."

Isaiah, in vs. 5, returns to the Lord’s declaration of judgment upon Babylon. Keeping with the theme of describing the Babylonians as a daughter, vs. 1 (twice), Isaiah records God’s stinging words that Babylon, described as the “daughter of the Chaldeans”, would no longer be called, “the Queen of kingdoms” for she is commanded by God to sit in silence and to hide in darkness. Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 373, suggests that the reference to sitting in silence and darkness, in the Hebrew mind is associated with deep mourning. These descriptive words for Babylon begin to formulate the final statement of judgment by God on the far future kingdom of Babylon whose complete demise is described by the Apostle John in Revelation chapters 17 and 18. The verses that follow in Isaiah chapter 47 best fit the eschatological judgment upon Babylon just prior to the return of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Just who has called Babylon, the Queen of Kingdoms is not stated by Isaiah but it may have been a title assigned to Babylon by those nations that she had conquered and from who received tribute payment. See notes on vs. 5 by Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, page 303.

47:6 I was angry with my people,
I defiled my inheritance,
and gave them into your hand.
You showed them no mercy;
even on the elderly you laid your heavy yoke.

The Lord explains, in vs. 6, why His people had been taken captive by Babylon. It was not that Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and Judah because it was stronger than the LORD of hosts who was the Holy One of Israel, but the people of God, His people and His inheritance was willingly given by God to the Babylonians as judgment upon His own people for He was angry with them for their continual rebellion against God. God was the divine power behind the movement of the Babylonians to conquer Jerusalem and Judah. They were not to think they had done this solely on their own but were instruments in the hand of God.
God had chosen Israel as his heritage (inheritance): Deut. 4:20-21, 38; 1 Samuel 10:1; 1 Kings 8:51-53; Isaiah 19:25; Jeremiah 2:7; 12:7-13. But the people of God had repeatedly sinned against Him and rejected His repeated calls for their repentance and for them to return to Him. (Isaiah 6:10; 44:22). Therefore, God explains in 47:6 that He has defiled (Hebrew word halal), or profaned His inheritance (His possession) by allowing Babylon, a pagan evil nation, to conquer His people and destroy the temple and the city of Jerusalem. However, Babylon had not treated God’s people with mercy and were particularly cruel on the elderly, upon whom they “laid your heavy yoke.”

47:7-9 You claimed, "I will be Queen forever."
So you did not think about these things in your heart,
nor did you reflect on the consequences.

8 Now therefore hear this, you lover of pleasures,
who sit securely,
who says in your heart,
'I am, and there is no one else besides me.
I will never sit as a widow,
nor will I experience the loss of children.'

9 But these two things will come on you in a moment
in one day:
the loss of children and widowhood.
They will come on you with full force,
in spite of your many sorceries,
and your numerous spells.

In their evil hubris, Babylon, (vs. 7) who was given freedom by God to conquer His covenant people and destroy God’s beloved possession, claimed that she would be a Queen (of all nations) for all time. See also vs. 5, and Revelation 18:7-8. God, knowing the intents of all hearts, even the prideful leaders of Babylon, brings an indictment against them, stating that these leaders did not give any consideration for mercy to God’s people, nor did they think about (reflect on) what would be the consequences for their cruelty to their Jewish captives.

Because the leaders of Babylon had not considered the wellbeing of God’s people and did not extend any mercy to them (vs. 6), and boasted that Babylon would be an eternal Queen of all nations, thereby ignoring God’s sovereign right to rule over His creation including the nations of the earth, God calls them to attention to hear his judgment (vs. 9). Prior to this statement of judgment, God brings another series of indictments against them (vs. 8). God calls them lovers of pleasure, (sensual) who think they are sitting securely without concern for any outside influence. Next, with the worst indictment, God states that they have said in their heart that “I am, and there is no one else besides me.” See also Isaiah 14:13-14. Assyria had made a similar claim as recorded in Zephaniah 2:15, as had the leader of Tyre, Ezekiel 28:2. It is evil enough for any nation to sit in false security and love pleasure far more than justice and mercy (vs. 6), but it is an entirely different matter for a nation’s leaders to avow that they are self-exalted above even God Himself. Only God could state with truthfulness that “I am Whom I am” Exodus 3:14. Isaiah had declared many statements of God’s uniqueness as the only God with no one equal to Him or like Him in any way: 44:8; 45:5, 6, 18, 22; 46:9. See also Deuteronomy 4:35, 39; 1 Samuel 2:2; and Joel 2:27. Any persons or nations that would exalt themselves above God are calling upon themselves God’s sure and swift judgment. God will not share His glory, praise or “worth” with anyone. Those who rebel against Him face wrath and scorn as Psalm 2 clearly indicates.
God also states, (vs. 8), that the leaders of Babylon, who think of themselves as the eternal Queen of all nations, also arrogantly claim that they will never be a widow or face the loss of children. By stating this, the leaders of Babylon boast that their kingdom is without any superior enemy and that they will continue forever in their sensual lifestyle without a thought of defeat or destruction. They forget to consider the God who had called them into His service and used them as His instrument of judgment upon His covenant people. Now this proud and Godless instrument would face its own judgment.

God declares (vs. 9), that both of the things the Babylonians had boasted about would befall them in one day. In that day, they would be left as widows, without the strength of their husbands (the warriors and defenders of Babylon), and without children (those who would continue their luxuriant lifestyle). God further states that even the sorceries and spells (cast by their astrologers and sorcerers), will not save them. See also Daniel 1:20 and 2:2, 27. The impotence of the astrologers and sorcerers are described further in verses 10-15. The “day” that is referenced in vs. 9, could not have been the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus as many commentators of Isaiah suggest. The armies of Cyrus were actually welcomed by the people of Babylon who were disillusioned by their pleasure-seeking leaders. A glimpse of the wantonness of these leaders is described in Daniel chapter 5. The sudden and complete fall of Babylon, prophesized in vs. 9, is described in Revelation 18:1-8 which specifically mentions the claim of Babylon that she sits as a Queen who will not be a widow or will never see sorrow (mourning), which is predicted so accurately in Isaiah 47:7-8.

David L. Cooper comments:

“The complacency and sense of security of Babylon when she becomes mistress of the kingdoms of the world are set forth in these verses. She will feel that everything is in her own hands and that no calamity will ever overtake her. In other words, she will be embued with the idea that she is living in the era when there is a permanent peace, and that she is powerful enough to dominate the entire world. She will have no idea that any reverses or fortune can overtake her. Thus she will say, "I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children." Nevertheless, the very thing which she says will never overtake her will come upon her suddenly-in a moment, in one day's time. That Babylon never did suffer such a fate as this is evident from her history. Though she was great and powerful in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, she had a gradual decline over a number of centuries and was in existence at the time when Peter wrote his epistles (I Pet. 5:13). Since no catastrophic judgment has ever overthrown her in the past and since the Word of God is infallibly inspired, we may be certain that she will rise again to the highest pinnacle of human power and authority and that suddenly, in a moment, on a given day this calamity here foretold will overtake her. When we read this prediction in the light of Revelation, chapter 18, we can understand our passage better. (One must not confound Revelation, chapter 17, with chapter 18. The former deals with the overthrow of Babylon the harlot--the ecclesiasticism of the end time--which occurs in the middle of the Tribulation, whereas chapter 18 foretells literal Babylon which will rise from the dust and be the dominating city of the world in the end time.)” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – August 1945).

47:10 For you have trusted in your wickedness;
you thought, 'No one can see me.'
Your wisdom and knowledge have misled you,
and you have said in your heart,
'I am, and there is no one else besides me.'
God further explains (vs. 10) why Babylon will face sudden and catastrophic destruction. No only did the rulers of Babylon trust (feel secure) in their wickedness, they had exchanged their knowledge of God’s existence (Psalm 19:1-3, Romans 1:18-32), for the wickedness of self-importance and self-exaltation. They were convinced in their evil hearts that there was “no one” who could look within their thick walls to witness their sinful rebellion against the God of the universe. They were proud of their so-called wisdom and knowledge gained by their astrologers and sorcerers. This pride led them to proclaim, as also recorded in vs. 8, “I am and there is no one else besides me.” See notes on vs. 8.

Thomas Constable comments:

Babylon felt secure in mistreating people because her great learning and wisdom in the magical arts had led her to conclude that she was superior and invulnerable. Knowledge puffs up, and one of the delusions it spawns is that people who know more are as morally and ethically responsible as everyone else, since they are not. A corollary is that if I can get away with something, it's all right. Such thinking forgets that there is a sovereign and righteous God in heaven to whom we are responsible. "Chaldean Babylon . . . combined the practical atheism of the freethinker with astrology, necromancy, and crass superstition.” 557 (Note 557: Archer, p. 642).

(Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 230).

47:11 Therefore evil will come on you;
you will not know how to charm it away.
Disaster will fall on you;
you will not be able to get rid of it for a price.
Calamity will come on you suddenly,
which you know nothing about.

As in vs. 9, God declares judgment upon Babylon. Three descriptions of judgment are decreed by God. First, evil will come upon them. The Hebrew word for evil is raah which has the meaning of misery, distress and disaster. In Isaiah raah occurs in the DASV as: “disaster” in 3:9; “evil” in 13:11; and “evil” in 57:1. This judgement of evil will not be “charmed away” by the sorcerers of Babylon. The word “charm” is the Hebrew word shahar which has the base meaning dawn or morning. The KJV translates the first sentence of vs. 11 as: “Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know from whence it riseth.” The marginal note in the KJV has “its morning.” This word also occurs in Isaiah (DASV): in 8:20 as “dawn;” in 14:12 as “morning;” in 58:8 as “dawn.” In Amos 4:13 shahar is translated as “dawn: “For, look here, he who forms the mountains, and creates the wind, and reveals his thoughts to humans; who makes the morning darkness, and treads on the high places of the earth -- the LORD, the God of hosts, is his name.” So the sense of the words “charm it away” in Isaiah 47:11 is that no spell or charm from any sorcerer of Babylon will be effective for evil (disaster) will come and no one in Babylon will know where it came from (like the dawn that rises in the morning).

Second, disaster will fall upon Babylon. The word “disaster” is the Hebrew word hovah with the meaning of ruin or disaster. It is translated as trouble in the NKJV and mischief in the KJV. It also is found in Ezekiel 7:26 (DASV), where it occurs twice: “Disaster upon disaster will come.” Once this disaster comes, those in Babylon, “will not be able to get rid of it for a price.” The words “for a price” is the English translation of the Hebrew word kaphar which has the meaning of “to make atonement.” It also occurs in Isaiah (DASV), in 6:7 as “and you sin forgiven;” in 22:14 as “this iniquity will not be forgiven;” in 27:9 as “Jacob’s iniquity will be forgiven;” and in 28:18 as “your covenant with death will be annulled.” The NKJV translates this phrase in Isaiah 47:11 as: “You will not be able to put it off” with the marginal note “to cover it or atone for it.” There is no price or atonement available to the Babylonians that will remove or avert the disaster that is coming upon them.
Third, calamity will come suddenly upon the Babylonians. “Calamity” is the Hebrew word shoah which has the meaning of devastation, destruction, and waste. It occurs also in Isaiah 10:3 as “devastation.” The Babylonians will have no prior knowledge: “which you know nothing about.” The calamity (devastation) that will come upon the Babylonians as judgement from God will be sudden and certain. There is no hope of atonement for their sins against God whom they had ignored and refused to acknowledge as the only unique and sovereign deity. There is no other God besides Him but the Babylonians thought they were exalted above Him. They were also judged by God for their cruel treatment of the Jewish exiles, (vs. 6).

47:12-13 Stand firm trusting your enchantments, 
and the multitude of your sorceries, 
in which you have labored from your youth. 
Maybe you will succeed, 
maybe you will scare someone. 
13 You are tired out from all the advice; 
let now the astrologers, the star-gazers, 
the monthly prognosticators, stand up 
and save you from the things that will come on you.

These verses (12-13) as recorded by Isaiah, appear as a taunt from God for the Babylonians to trust in their sorcerers, astrologers and magicians who will keep on issuing sorceries and chants to disseminate wisdom and counsel to the people of Babylon. God was sarcastically prodding them to keep trusting in their source of wisdom and guidance because they have steadfastly refused to trust in God in whom is the only one that can truly help and save them. The word “enchantments” is the Hebrew word cheber and has the meaning of spell and also can be translated as company or association. The word also occurs in vs. 9 above translated as spells. A related word, in both vs. 9 and vs. 12 is “sorceries” which is the Hebrew word kesheph and has the meaning of sorceries. The KJV also translates kesheph in vss. 9 and 12 as “sorceries” but as “witchcrafts” in the other occurrences in the Old Testament: 2 Kings 9:22; Micah 5:12 and Nahum 3:4. The Babylonians had “labored” in their spells and sorceries since their youth (the beginning of Babylonian society). God taunts them to continue in these evil practices and sarcastically suggests that their spells may even succeed in their intent (be profitable) and may even cause other nations to be terrified of the magical arts of the Babylonians.

In vs. 13, the first sentence can be understood as a question, “are you tired from all this advice?” God calls upon their astrologers and prognosticators (stargazers who predict the future) to arise and show they can actually do anything to save Babylon from its certain destruction. The astrologers and sorcerers of ancient Babylon kept their monthly astrological predictions, including the movement of the planets, in a series of clay tablets called the Enuma Anu Enlil. A modern equivalent would be the printing of horoscopes in daily newspapers. God’s taunt against the sorceries, enchantments and spells, is similar to His condemnation of idol worship which is one of the main themes of the writings of Isaiah. Whether one trusts in worthless idols or trusts in the enchantments of sorcerers, the result is the same. They cannot do anything to predict the future, provide counsel or save them from calamity. There is only one “Wonderful Counselor” Isaiah 9:6, “who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in wisdom.” Isaiah 28:29.

47:14-15 Look, they will be as stubble; 
the fire will burn them up. 
They will not be able to save themselves 
from the heat of the flames. 
It will not be a mere coal to warm by,
or a bond fire to sit by.

15 Such will be those with whom you have labored,
and have dealt with you since your youth.
They will wander off everyone in his own direction;
there is no one who can save you.

Those who invoke spells and enchantments in Babylon will not be able to save themselves. Daniel 2:2, 10 describes them as “magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and Chaldean astrologers.” Their magic arts will be useless to save them from the fiery destruction that is to come upon them and Babylon. This is a reference to the final destruction of Babylon near the end of the Tribulation period as declared in Revelation 18:8. When the armies of Cyrus conquered Babylon was was for the most part a merciful conquest. There is no record of Babylon being burned by the Medio-Persian armies. The final destruction of Babylon in the future will completely and accurately fulfill the predictions of chapter 47 of Isaiah. The modern world is still fascinated with the occult and astrological predictions. They are as demonic now as they have been in the past and Christians need to keep well clear of their influence and trust only in the infallible Word of God as David L. Cooper advises:

In verses 12-15 we see a very clear picture of the various methods of attempting to learn the future. The Babylonians, from the beginning of the ancient kingdom, believed in enchantments, sorceries, star-gazing, astrology, fortune-telling, and the like. This is clear from the tablets which have been unearthed in old Chaldea. These ancient methods of the occult world will be brought into full vogue and operation in the end time. The prophets, foretelling the complete and sudden overthrow of the Babylonians, challenged her to invite all her fortune-tellers, star-gazers, and prognosticators to reveal the future concerning her fate as he had done. The inference of the challenge is that they will not be able to give her any light as to the future. There is such a thing as fortune-telling, which is accomplished by the power of demons and Satan himself, but those who thus are in contact with the demon world are limited by the Lord Almighty and cannot reveal things as the Lord does. They are limited by the power of the Almighty. God has always hated every effort to unravel the future by fortune-tellers, astrologers, and the like. No Christian can afford to have any part or lot with anything that borders on the occult. If one wishes to know anything authoritatively, let him go to the sacred, holy, infallible Word of God and there see what the Lord has said. He has revealed the things which He wants us to know. If He has not spoken upon any subject, then we should not attempt to get information from any other source. ”To the law and to the testimony! if they speak not according to this word, surely there is no morning for them” (Isa. 8:20). (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – August 1945).

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 47:

47:1-7 Babylon’s Ruling Leaders to be destroyed
47:8-15 Babylon’s Religious Leaders to be destroyed


Chapter 48 of Isaiah concludes the first of the three major sections of Isaiah 40-66. See introduction to chapters 40-48 for specific details regarding each major section: 40-48; 49-57 and 58-66. Chapter 48 has two distinct parts. Verses 1-11 discuss the obstinacy, rebelliousness and treachery of God’s people who even though they called themselves after the holy city Jerusalem, they were far from God in their hearts and in their worship of Him. Verses 12-22 discuss the plea of God for His people to leave the influence of the Babylonians and God’s planned redemption of His people. Although many see only the return of the exiles from ancient Babylon in this chapter, it also includes a far future prophecy of the days at the end of the Tribulation period when Babylon will finally be destroyed as chapter 47 so clearly describes.
48:1-11: The Rebellion of God’s People

48:1-2 Hear this, O house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel, and born from the waters of Judah, who swear by the name of the LORD, and invoke the God of Israel, but not in truth or righteousness. 

2 For they call themselves after the holy city, and depend on the God of Israel. The LORD of hosts is his name.

God calls upon His people to “Hear this,” or “listen.” What God has to say is so vitally important, God repeats this call to hear Him several times in chapter 48. Each of the two main sections of chapter 48 begin with this call to hear Him: vs. 1 and vs. 12. Also, to emphasize how critical His message is to His people, God calls His people to “now look at all this”, vs. 6; “Look” vss. 7 and 10; “Assemble yourselves all you, and listen,” vs. 14; “come near to me, listen to this.” vs. 16; and “This is what the LORD says,” vs. 17;

God describes His people with several descriptive terms that reveal their identity and their relationship with Him. The first descriptive term is: “house of Jacob.” The name Jacob means “supplanter” or “following after.” See Genesis 25:19-34 for the context of the meaning of the name Jacob. This term, “house of Jacob,” first occurs in Genesis 46:27 which describes the total number of those from the line of Jacob at that time. It occurs most frequently in Isaiah: 2:5, 6; 8:17; 10:20; 14:1; 29:22; 46:3; 48:1; and 58:1. It also occurs in Exodus 19:3; Psalm 114:1; Jeremiah 2:4; 5:20; Ezekiel 20:5; Amos 3:13; 9:8; Obadiah vss. 17-18; Micah 2:7 and 3:9. It also occurs once in the New Testament in Luke 1:33 which has significance for the future of the house of Jacob: “He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.” The Messiah will forever rule over His elect and chosen people, who are called the “house of Jacob”, of whom He will not forsake nor abandon.

The second descriptive term is: “who are called by the name of Israel.” Often in Scripture, the names of Jacob and Israel are mentioned together. The origin of the name “Israel” is revealed in Genesis chapter 32. Jacob was returning to his homeland and was concerned about meeting his brother Esau. At Peniel (meaning the face of God), Jacob was met by an angel (see also Hosea 12:4). Jacob wrestled with this angel and prevailed over him and the angel gave Jacob a new name: Israel. Genesis 32:28 states: “Then he said, Your name shall no longer be called Jacob but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.” See also Genesis 35:9-12. The name Israel means “ruling with God.” The significance of the name Israel is that it defines the relationship between God and His chosen people. They were to rule over the inheritance God had given them. Israel, as a people, however chose to rebel against God and instead of fulfilling His purposes for them, they scorned their Creator and crafted and worshipped worthless idols. Isaiah in several sections of his prophecy, warns Israel against this vile practice and exhorts them to return to the Holy One of Israel.

The third descriptive term is: “born from the waters of Judah.” Other versions translate “waters” as line or loins, however the Hebrew word is mayim (or mimme) which literally means “water.” The use of the word water can be understood as the biological line of Judah “flowing” from the loins of the Judah. (See also Numbers 24:7; Deuteronomy 33:28; Psalm 68:26;). It was Judah from whom the patriarch Jacob prophesized that
the ruling scepter would never depart (Genesis 49:9-12). The name Judah means “praise.” The combination of the three names, Jacob, Israel and Judah indicate clearly that God is speaking to His chosen people whom He has make several covenants to be their God, redeem them, and give to them a permanent inheritance in the land which has for its capital city, the holy city, Jerusalem.

The fourth descriptive term for identifying this people is: “who swear by the name of the LORD.” The word “swear” is the Hebrew word shaba meaning to “swear” or “take an oath”. It also occurs in Isaiah in 14:24; 19:18; 45:23 (twice); 54:9; 62:8; 65:16 (twice). The reference in Isaiah 48:1 to those who swear by the name of the LORD may stem from Deuteronomy 6:13 and 10:20. See also Psalm 63:11; 119:106; and 132:2. The point of this statement is that it specifically identifies those who are called Jacob and Israel and are from the line of Judah as those who would qualify as having sworn by the name of the Lord.

The fifth descriptive term for identifying this people is: “and invoke the God of Israel.” The word “invoke” is the Hebrew word zakar which has the primary meaning of “remember” and “mention.” It also occurs in the Old Testament in the sense of recalling or focusing the attention on what God has done on behalf of His people. The usage of zakar in Isaiah 48:1 likely has the meaning of “make mention of” as is the translation in the KJV and the NKJV. Zakar also occurs in Isaiah (DASV) in 12:4 (proclaim); 17:10 (mindful); 19:17 (mention); 23:16 (remembered); 26:13 (remembrance); 36:3 (recorder); 22 (recorder); 38:3 (remember); 43:18 (remember), 25 (remember), 26 (remind); 44:21 (remember); 46:8 (remember); 47:7 (reflect); 49:1 (mentioned); 54:4 (remember); 57:11 (remembered); 62:6 (remind); 63:7 (recall), 11 (remembered); 64:5 (remember), 9 (remember), 65:17 (remembered); and 66:3 (“burns” frankincense, KJV margin note: “a memorial of”). As with all the other descriptions of these people, God is reminding them of their special relationship with Him and that God’s repeated call upon them to listen to Him is critical because of this unique relationship. The next phrase in Isaiah 48:1, however, is a stinging indictment of them.

The final phrase of Isaiah 48:1 is what God wants His unique covenant people to hear and take to heart. God indicts them by stating they have sworn by His name, and have invoked or made mention of His name, but they have done these things “not in truth or righteousness.” Although God has faithfully and righteously kept His covenant with them, they have been untruthful and evil in their relationship with Him. God knows and understands both the thoughts and utterances of his people along with their actions. No one can hide these things from God and He cannot abide sinfulness and rebellion in anyway, whether it be by inward thoughts or outward deeds.

In Isaiah 48:2, God states that His people identify themselves with the holy city. The descriptive term “holy city” for Jerusalem is found a few times in the Scriptures: Nehemiah 11:1, 18; Isaiah 48:2; 58:1; Daniel 8:24; Matthew 4:5; 27:53; Revelation 11:2; 21:2, 10 and 22:19. It is perhaps surprising that it does not occur more often. The intent of God’s declaration that His obstinate people (vs. 4), call themselves after the holy city seems to be that they identify more with the city of Jerusalem than with the God of the city. They had thought that they were of a special status, protected from harm, because they were inhabitants of the city where God’s temple was located. God also, in vs. 2, states that His people “depend on the God of Israel.” They swear by and mention His name in their religious ceremonies but, in reality, God was only a token deity to them. God had previously spoke against their hypocrisy by honoring Him with their lips but their hearts where far from Him, Isaiah 29:13. They had also burdened Him with their sins and wearied Him with their iniquities but did not call upon Him, Isaiah 43:22-24. God, at the end of vs. 2, reminds them again who He is. He declares that the LORD of hosts is His name. God is Yahweh, the self existent One, Exodus 3:13-14. He is also the Lord of armies who commands the hosts of heaven and earth to do His bidding and accomplish His purposes, Isaiah 5:25-30; 7:17-25; 46:10 and 48:14.
48:3 I have predicted things beforehand from long ago;
yes, they went out of my mouth,
and I proclaimed them.
Suddenly I did them,
and they came to pass.

God had previously mentioned “former things” in Isaiah 41:21-23; 42:9; 43:9, 16-17; 44:6-8; 45:18-25; and 46:8-13. In 48:3, God does not state a specific incident but Isaiah’s audience may have remembered the exodus from Egypt in ancient times and the protection of God from the Assyrians in more recent times. God’s previous declaration, recorded in Isaiah 46:8-10 is worth comparing to His words in vs. 3:

8 Remember this and be assured;
bring it again to mind, O rebels.
9 Remember the former things of old;
for I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is no one like me.
10 I declare the end from the beginning,
and from ancient times things that have not yet happened;
saying, "My purpose will stand,
and I will fulfill what I have planned."

As part of the message He wants His people to hear (vs. 1: “Hear this”), God reminds them that only He can predict things that will accurately occur. He has done this in the distant past with the patriarchs of the Jewish nation. He is doing this during the days of Isaiah, Isaiah 46:11 and will do this in the future, Isaiah 62:1-12. God will allow no comparison with idols who cannot hear, act, speak or predict anything, nor will He share His glory with any other so-called god or people or anything created.

48:4-6a I know how obstinate you are;
and your neck muscles are like iron,
and your forehead like bronze.
5 Therefore I predicted it to you long ago;
I announced it to you before it came to pass;
so you could not say,
'My idol did this,
and my carved image,
and my metal idol commanded them.'
6 You have heard my predictions;
now look at all this.
Will you not acknowledge it?

God fully knows just how obstinate and rebellious are the people of Judah and Jerusalem. He had told Isaiah when He commissioned the prophet, as recorded in Isaiah 6:9-10:

9 He said, "Go, and tell this people:
Keep on listening, but do not understand;
keep on looking, but do not perceive.
10 Make the heart of this people insensitive, 
and make their ears deaf, 
and shut their eyes; 
so that they may not see with their eyes, 
and hear with their ears, 
and understand with their heart, 
and repent and be healed."

Although God continued to remind His people of His protection, love and salvation that He offered to them, they refused to listen to Him. See also Isaiah 28:12; 30:9 and 66:4. In 48:4 God states, “I know how stubborn you are.” The word “you” is singular referring to the entire Jewish nation. The word “obstinate” is the Hebrew word qasheh which has the meaning of hard, severe and stubborn. This word also occurs in Exodus 32:9; 33:3, 5; and 34:9; Deuteronomy 9:6; 13; and 31:27 which is translated in the KJV as “stiffnecked.” It also occurs in Isaiah (DASV): 14:3 (hard); 19:4 (fierce); 21:2 (harsh); 27:1 (terrible); and 27:8 (fierce). God declares that their foreheads are like bronze. Like Isaiah, the prophet Ezekiel was told to bring a message to the people of Israel, as recorded in Ezekiel 3:4-9:

4 Then he told me, “Son of man, go to the house of Israel, and tell them my words. 5 For you are not sent to a people of an unintelligible speech or a difficult language, but to the house of Israel– 6 not to many peoples of an unintelligible speech or a difficult language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, if I sent you to them, they would listen to you. 7 But the house of Israel will not listen to you because they will not even listen to me. For the entire house of Israel is hard-headed and stubborn hearted. 8 Look, I have made your face as hard as their faces, and made you as hard-headed as they are. 9 I have made your head harder than flint. Do not be afraid of them, or terrified by their looks, for they are a rebellious house.”

The things God had predicted long ago, vs. 5, include the events of the exodus from Egypt and then onward up to the destruction of the Assyrian army as recorded in Isaiah 37:36. The reason God told them long ago things that would happen and then did happen just as God had declared, was so that His people could not say that their idols had commanded this. God was adamantly declaring that He alone is the only God who can declare the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10). Only God can do this and He will share His glory for His accomplishments with anyone or anything. In vs. 6a, God announces to His people that they have heard His predictions and emphatically states, “now look at this.” God calls His people to sharp attention and then bluntly asks: “will you not acknowledge it?” The people of God need to answer Him. They must admit that they had knowledge of His accurate foresight and that He did predict things long ago that happened just as He declared. They must therefore acknowledge God’s greatness and His divine power to themselves and to the nations so that no one could claim that their idols could hear, speak, act or make any predictive declaration so that God alone would be glorified in all the earth.

48: 6b-7 From now on I am showing you new things, 
hidden things which you have not previously known. 
7 They are happening now, not in the past; 
before today you never heard of them; 
so you cannot boast, 
'Look, I knew them already.'
The statement by God in vs. 6b, “from now on I am showing you new things,” is in contrast with that of vs. 3: “I have predicted things beforehand from long ago.” The things predicted from long ago were likely the promises made to the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and major events such as the exodus from Egypt. The new things may refer to the role of Cyrus in releasing the exiles from Babylonian captivity and the role of God’s unique Servant, Isaiah 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; and 52:13-53:12. These things had been hidden, (Hebrew: nasar) which can also be translated as keep, guard or watch over. The word nasar also occurs in Isaiah (DASV): 1:8 (besieged); 26:3 (keep); 27:3(keeper and guard); 42:6 (protect); 49:6 (survivors KJV marginal note: desolations); 49:8 (protect); and 65:4 (sit). In Isaiah 48:6b, the word “hidden” has the sense of things kept or protected by God until He is ready to reveal them. These things were being revealed now, vs. 7. They were not previously known to His covenant people and God kept these things from them so they would not boast as if they had superior knowledge in themselves. These things were a new revelation to them of which they would have no prior way of knowing about them nor would they have even conceived of them. God states, in vss. 9 and 11, His deeper reason for making these new things known. It was not only because they were treacherous and rebellious, vs. 8 and they would not have their ears open to understanding these things. However, it was for His own sake, so that His name would not be profaned and also so that His glory would not be given an any other (person or thing).

48:8 You never heard;
yes, you never knew;
yes, from long ago your ear was not opened to it;
for I knew that you would act treacherously,
and that from birth you were called a rebel.

The surface reason God did not reveal these “new things (vs. 6b) to His covenant people was because their ears were not ready to receive His truth (Isaiah 6:9-10), and that they were people who acted treacherously and were rebellious against God from their birth. Isaiah records this indictment at the beginning of his prophetic writings, 1:4:

O sinful nation,
a people loaded down with iniquity,
an offspring of evildoers,
children who act corruptly!
They have forsaken the LORD;
they have despised the Holy One of Israel;
they have turned their backs on him.

The word “treacherously” is the Hebrew word bagad and has the meaning of traitor or deceitful. God’s people have acted treacherously (as rebellious traitors) to Him. It also occurs in Isaiah (DASV) in 21:2 (treacherously); 24:16 (deceivers (twice) and deceitfully (twice) and 33:1 (traitor, betraying and betray). See also Psalms 25:3; 59:5; 78:57; Jeremiah 3:8, 11; 5:11; 9:2; 12:1, 6; Lamentations 1:2; Hosea 5:7; 6:7 and Malachi 2:10-16. The word “rebel” is the Hebrew word pasha which has the meaning of to rebel and to transgress. It also occurs in Isaiah (DASV) in 1:2 (rebelled); 1:28 (rebellious); 43:27 (rebelled); 46:8 (rebels); 53:12 (transgressors, transgressors); 59:13 (rebelling); and 66:24 (rebelled). Isaiah 59:12-13 aptly explains how God’s people have acted treacherously and rebelliously against God:

12 For our transgressions are multiplied before you,
and our sins testify against us.
Our transgressions are with us,
and as for our iniquities,
we are well aware of them:
13 rebelling and denying the LORD,
turning away from following our God,
talking about oppression and revolt,
conceiving and uttering lies from the heart.

48:9-11 For my name's sake I will defer my anger,
and for my praise I will restrain it for you,
so that I do not destroy you.
10 Look, I have refined you, but not like silver;
I chose to refine you in the furnace of affliction.
11 For my own sake,
for my own sake, I will do it.
For how can I allow my name to be profaned?
My glory I will not give to another.

Beyond the surface reason (vss. 6b-8) for not revealing “new things” until now (vs. 6b) to His covenant people, God in vss. 9-11, reveals His deeper meaning. God, first, vs. 9, states He has deferred His anger against them (for their treachery and rebellion) for the sake of His name and second, He has restrained His anger so that He would not destroy them. God keeps His covenants with His chosen people. He has His name to defend. His name is to be glorified in all the earth. God’s actions for the glory of His name often include mercy and forgiveness of His people: 1 Chronicles 16:35; Psalm 79:9; 102:12-17; 106:44-47; Isaiah 43:5-7. He jealously defends His great name and accomplishes marvellous things, including granting forgiveness and extending mercy, for the sake of His name: 2 Chronicles 6:32; Psalm 23:3; 25:11; 31:3; 79:9; 106:8; 109:21; 143:11; Ezekiel 20:9-44; 36:22-38; Daniel 9:19; and Romans 1:5.

Thomas Constable comments on vs. 9:

Even though Israel had been prone to idolatry (v. 5) and had been congenitally rebellious (v. 8), God had not cast her off. Why? He had made commitments to be gracious to Israel, and to honor Himself in His dealings with her, so that the rest of the world would trust Him. The fact that God did not abandon Israel when He could have done so justly manifested His grace. (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 233).

The Lord in vs. 10 declares that He has refined them, not like silver, but in the furnace of affliction. The reason for this refining was to purify them and change their stubbornness, rebellion and treachery into compliancy, trust and obedience so that they would repent of their sins and turn to Him in faith. David L. Cooper suggests that this time of refining will be in the far future Tribulation period.

Though Messiah does not cut off His beloved people because of their rejection of Him and His message, He holds on to them and will make them pass through the furnace of affliction and will refine them as silver is refined: "Behold, I have refined thee, but not as silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction" (vs. 10). In the past God has refined the nation, purging out the sinners and the wicked ones from her, but He has never subjected her to the-purging process similar, to that of refining silver. He does declare, however, that He will yet do this in future. The furnace of affliction, where she will be refined, is none other than the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:7), the time of Israel's affliction and trouble—the great Tribulation Period. (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – August 1945).
In vs. 11, God re-emphasizes that He acts mercifully towards His covenant people for His own sake, so that His name will not be profaned (among the nations of the world) and also so that His glory will not be given to any other (person or thing). The prophet Ezekiel often declared God’s words regarding the profaning of God’s name among the nation by His covenant people. See Ezekiel 20:9,14, 22; 36:20-23 and 39:7.

48:12-22: The Redemption of God’s People

48:12-13 Listen to me, Jacob,
and Israel, my called ones:
I am he;
I am the first,
and I am the last.

13 Yes, my hands laid the foundation of the earth,
and my right hand spread out the heavens;
when I call to them,
they stand up together.

The second major section of chapter 48 (vss. 12-22) begins in a similar way as did the beginning of the first section (vss. 1-11). Vs. 1 begins with “Hear this, O house of Jacob who are called by the name of Israel.” Vs. 12 begins with “Listen to me, Jacob and Israel.” As with the first section, God punctuates the second with commands to listen to him, vss. 12, 14, and 16. God again (see vs. 1) identifies His audience as those who are Jacob and Israel, thus indicating that it is His covenant people whom He wants to pay attention to His words for He has vitally important things to say to them. God’s statement in vs. 12 is very similar to that of Isaiah 41:4:

Who has performed and done it,
summoning each generation from the beginning?
I, the LORD, am the first,
and will be with the last of them, I am the one."

And Isaiah 44:6

This is what the LORD, the King of Israel,
and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts says,
"I am the first,
and I am the last;
besides me there is no other God.

As recorded in vs. 12, He first declares that they are His called ones. They are not like any other nation for God had chosen them before they were even a family. He first called Abram to leave his father’s house and journey to a country where he would have to settle without deeded land rights. When God called Abram, He made promises and cut a covenant with him. The promises are introduced in Genesis 12:1-3 and repeated in 17:1-21 with Abram, now Abraham, and with Isaac in Genesis 26:2-5 and with Jacob in Genesis 28:10-17. The covenant cut with Abram is recorded in Genesis 15:17-21 with the larger context including all of chapter 15. The lineage of Abraham flowed from the chosen son Isaac and then to Jacob and then to Jacob’s sons who would be the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. It was the patriarch Jacob, whom God changed his name to Israel, and from whom the entire race was named. God did not call this nation because their first fathers were outstanding in righteousness, for they were sinners just like all humans, nor because of the
numbers of people included in this nation, for they were the smallest of nations. God called them because He loved them and chose them to be people for His own possession. See Deuteronomy 7:6-7.

Second, God declares three sets of “I am.” The first of these is that He is the unique, self-existing One, “I am He,” which should have reminded Isaiah’s audience of God’s self-identification to Moses, in Exodus 3:13-14 as Yahweh, “I AM.” The “I Am” statements in Isaiah include: 41:4, 10, 13; 42:6, 8; 43:3, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 25; 44:6; 45:5, 6, 7, 18, 22; 46:9; 48:12, 17; 49:23; 51:12, 15; 52:6; 58:9; and 65:5. The second of the three sets is God’s statement that, “I am the first,” which is coupled with the third set, “I am the last.” These statements that God is the first and the last describe His eternality. He existed before the heavens and the earth were created and He will continue to exist forever. He has no beginning and He has no end. He always existed. Revelation 1:17; 2:8 and 22:13 reveal that the One who is “the first and the last” is the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ of whom, Isaiah has discussed as the Servant of God in 42:1-9 and will again declare more about this unique Servant in 49:1-13; 50:4-11; and 52:13-53:12.

These three sets of declarations are in opposition to the idols (Isaiah 48:5) His covenant people have formed and worshipped. The people of Israel, soon after being miraculously released from Egypt’s captivity, were quick to rebel against God and fashioned a golden calf to worship, Exodus chapter 32. Their idol worship continued from that day until the day of Isaiah and will continue up until the day the Messiah returns to rescue them from their enemies and establish His millennial kingdom. Only those who faithfully trust in the Lord for salvation will be citizens of the kingdom with the Messiah ruling them in righteousness. Those who continue to worship worthless idols and fail to trust in the One true God, will never see this glorious kingdom.

Third, in vs. 13, God declares that He is the One who “laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens.” God, through the prophet Isaiah, often reminded His people of His creative acts, Isaiah 40:22; 42:5; 44:24; 45:12. See also Psalm 24:2; 96:5; 102:25; and Hebrews 1:10-12. God reminds them again that He had “spread out the heavens,” (also stretched out) as He had previously declared in Isaiah 40:22; 42:5; 44:24; 45:12; and would again in 51:13 God also stated that when He calls to them, they stand up together, which is similar to His statement in Isaiah 40:22-26. The purpose of declaring to these creative acts is to remind His people of His greatness and His worth so that they will trust Him completely and praise and worship Him. This praise will continue forever in heaven as the Apostle John discovered, Revelation 4:11: “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive the glory, honor, and power; for you created all things, and because of your will they exist and were created.”

48:14-15 Assemble yourselves, all you, and listen.  
Who among them has predicted these things?  
He whom the LORD loves will perform his pleasure on Babylon,  
and his arm will be against the Chaldeans.  

15 I, even I, have spoken;  
yes, I have called him.  
I brought him,  
and his course of action will be successful.
The Lord calls an assembly to listen to Him. Those called may have been all nations or His covenant people (vss. 1, 12). God asks a rhetorical question: “Who among them has predicted these things?” The things predicted may refer to the new things (vs. 6), or the predicted things of long ago (vss. 3, 5), or to God’s future actions against Babylon (vs. 14). If the time of Isaiah’s message is approximately 700-690 B.C, the future action against Babylon is about 150 years in the future, as Babylon was captured by Cyrus in 539 B.C. The point God is making that no one among His covenant people or among the nations of the world could have or did predict any previous things or any future things. God is again reminding His audience that it is completely useless to trust in worthless idols who could create nothing or predict anything. It is also an act of evil rebellion against God to trust something, even a piece of wood, and thus ascribe to it of more worth than God. God had just declared (vs. 5) that the things predicted long ago were announced to them so they could not say their idols made a prediction or commanded predicted things to happen.

Many scholars suggest that the latter part of vs. 14 and all of vs. 15 is God’s reference to Cyrus. For example, Thomas Constable comments:

48:14 The Israelites needed to listen because only the Lord could reveal what He would do. Specifically, Yahweh revealed His love (choice, cf. Deut. 4:37; Mal. 1:2-3) of Cyrus, who would fulfill God's will on Babylon by defeating the Chaldeans (cf. 44:28). The Israelites, in view of who their God is, should not resist His choice of Cyrus or reject the revelation about him. The idols, "them," could not reveal this.

48:15 What God had decided and declared would stand. Cyrus would prosper in his assignment because God had called him to do it. As surely as God had called the host of heaven (v. 13), Israel (v. 12), and Assyria (cf. 10:6), He had called Cyrus. (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 234).

However, David L. Cooper, suggests an alternative viewpoint:

Messiah then, in verse 14, calls for an ideal assembly of the peoples of earth and asks, "Who among them hath declared these things?" There is no one who can answer or take up the challenge thrown out by this question. Continuing the Messiah declares, "He whom Jehovah loveth shall perform his pleasure on Babylon, and his arm shall be on the Chaldeans." He is the one whom Jehovah in heaven loves. Thus He states that He will perform His pleasure on Babylon.

Verse 15 is somewhat difficult of interpretation: "I, even I, have spoken; yea, I have called him; I have brought him, and he shall make his way prosperous." Who is the speaker in this verse? Is it Messiah? If so, who is referred to by the pronouns he and him? The most probable interpretation of this difficult verse is the following: In the midst of Messiah's declaration regarding His performing the pleasure of the Almighty against the Chaldeans, God the Father speaks from heaven, showing His sanction and approval of all that Messiah does and says. Such a sudden and dramatic interruption in the speech may be illustrated by the baptismal scene of the Lord Jesus Christ. After Jesus was baptized and was coming up out of the water, the heavens were opened and a voice from God said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (See Matt. 3:13-17.) Anyone can understand this dramatic interruption on the part of the Father. For one to understand that Isaiah 48:15 is a similar situation is to unlock the door to the prophecy. When Messiah speaks in the latter part of verse 14, stating that He has appeared to perform the Almighty's pleasure against the Babylonians, then the voice from heaven chimes in saying, "I, even I, have spoken ..." The I in this passage therefore is none other than God the Father, who assures the world that He has brought the Messiah forth and that He, Messiah, shall make His own way prosperous--under the blessing and guidance of God the Father. (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – August 1945).

See also Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah*, Vol. 2, pages 327 and 328 for an excellent discussion on vss. 14b-15, regarding whom God is speaking about and its relevance.
48:16 Come near to me, listen to this.
"From the beginning I have not spoken in secret; when it happens I am there."
So now the sovereign LORD has sent me, along with his Spirit.

There has been much debate among students of Scripture as to whom is speaking is vs. 16. This verse acts as a bridge between vss. 12-15 and 17-22. It seems to be in place to both complete the message of previous verses and introduce the message God is declaring at the end of chapter 48 which concludes the larger section of Isaiah chapters 40-48. As with previous verses, the speaker is calling His audience to come and listen to Him. But who is speaking? Some have suggested that it is the prophet Isaiah whom has been sent by the Lord but Isaiah could not claim, in the context of chapter 48, of things predicted long ago that “when it happens I am there.” Nor could Isaiah claim to have been “from the beginning” if it is understood that the beginning in this context was the beginning mentioned in Genesis 1:1. Nor could the speaker be any other human, including Cyrus, for this reason. The speaker also was not the same as the One who had addressed His people from the beginning of chapter 48 because the speaker had been sent by the “sovereign LORD.” So, who is left to consider? The evidence must lead to the One who is the subject of the Isaiah’s prophecy which follows in just a few verses from 48:16. Verses 1-13 of chapter 49 is the second great “Servant Song” (see 42:1-9 for the first). The Servant is the Messiah who will come to fulfill God’s purposes to bring Jacob and Israel back to Him (49:5). The Servant who is the Messiah, therefore must be the One who is speaking in 48:16. He has been sent from the sovereign LORD and has been sent along with His Spirit. See Isaiah 42:1 and 61:1.

If this identification is correct, as it must be for there is no viable alternative, then Isaiah 48:16 is one of the clearest affirmations of the Trinity in the Old Testament. The “Holy Spirit” is mentioned by name in Isaiah 63:10-11. Other references to the Spirit (selected verses only) occur in Genesis 1:2; Numbers chapter 11; 1 Samuel 11:6; 16:14; Psalm 51:11; Isaiah 11:1-5; 30:1; 32:15; 34:16; 40:13; 42:1; 44:3; 59:21; 61:1; 63:14; Ezekiel 36:26-27; Joel 2:28-29; and Zechariah 4:6. References to the Son of God occur in Psalm 2 and Proverbs 30:4. See also Psalm 110:1. From the very beginning of the Scriptures, the divine plurality of God is made clear in the plural name Elohim (God) in Genesis 1:1. As recorded in Genesis 1:26 God states “Let us make man in Our image.” See also Genesis 3:22 and 11:7.

48:17 This is what the LORD says, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:
"I am the LORD your God,
who teaches you what is good,
who leads you in the way you should go.

Verses 17-22 conclude the significant section of Isaiah 40-48. God begins His concluding statements with the reminder that He is the LORD (Yahweh) who is the self-existing God who is to be known by this name, Exodus 3:13-14. Thus, He is the great “I AM” who alone is God for there is no other. See Isaiah 26:13; 43:11; 44:8; 45:5, 6, 14; 45:21, 22; 46:9; and 64:4. God describes Himself as their “Redeemer,” (ga’al) with the rich meaning of their kinsmen or family savior. In Isaiah God is called their Redeemer in 41:14; 43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 59:20; 60:16; and 63:16. In the Old Testament, see also: Ruth 4:14; Job 19:25; Psalm 19:14; 78:35; Proverbs 23:11; and Jeremiah 50:34. The Hebrew word ga’al also occurs in
the Old Testament, in various English versions as: translated as redeem, redeemed, redeems, ransomed, avenger, revenger, deliver, and kinsmen. The New Testament equivalent is Savior which identifies the Messiah as the One who is the “family redeemer” to the people of God and to all who call upon Him for salvation. The next name for God in 48:17 is “the Holy One of Israel.” This name for God identifies the LORD as being holy in His being. The covenant people, Israel are to look upon Him primarily as holy and He because He is holy, he demands that they also be holy, Leviticus 19:2. See also 1 Peter 1:16. When Isaiah first saw the Lord, the Seraphim declared “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts.” See also Revelation 4:8. The name the Holy One of Israel occurs often in Isaiah as a reminder that the God of Israel is to be revered as holy: 1:4; 5:9; 24; 10:20; 12:6; 17:7; 29;19; 30:11, 12, 15; 31:1; 37:23; 41:14, 16, 20; 43:3, 14; 45;11; 47:4; 49:7; 54:5; 55:5; 60:9, 14. Other occurrences in the Old Testament: 2 kings 19:22; Psalm 71:22; 78:41; 89:18; and Jeremiah 51:5.

The Lord reminds His covenant people that He is the One “who teaches you what is good, who leads you in the way you should go.” The role of God as teacher is one that the people of Israel often forgot. They did not look to the written Word of God for instruction and they ignored God repeated attempts to instruct them to trust in Him for guidance and salvation. Isaiah also mentions this teaching role of God in 2:3; 28:9, 26; and 30:20. In the glorious days of the millennial kingdom, the Messiah will teach His people, instructing them so that they will walk in His paths: Isaiah 2:2-5:

2 In the latter days,  
the mountain of the LORD's house will be established  
as the highest of the mountains;  
it will be exalted above the hills,  
and all nations will flow unto it.  

3 Many peoples will come and say,  
"Come and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
to the house of the God of Jacob.  
He will teach us of his ways,  
and we will walk in his paths."  
For out of Zion the law will go forth,  
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.  

4 He will judge between the nations,  
and will settle disputes for many peoples.  
They will beat their swords into plowshares,  
and their spears into pruning hooks.  
Nation will not lift up sword against nation;  
they will not train for war anymore.  

5 O house of Jacob, come,  
let us walk in the light of the LORD.  

48:18-19 O that you had obeyed my commandments!  
Then your peace would have been like a river,  
and your righteousness as the waves of the sea.  

19 Your descendants would have been like the sand,  
and your offspring like grains of sand.  
Their name would not be cut off  
or destroyed from before me."

The Lord had started this final section of Chapters 40-48 with the self-identification of Israel’s Redeemer who is their Holy One, the “Lord your God” (vs. 17) who teaches them and leads them in the way they should go. At the beginning of vs. 18, the Lord laments, “O that you had obeyed my commandments!” This lament is not only for the failure of God’s covenant people to obey just the commandments He gave Moses on Mount Sinai but for all God’s commands to them since the exodus from Egypt to the time of Isaiah. If they had obeyed God, they would have enjoyed peace that “would have been like a river,” and would have exhibited “righteousness as the waves of the sea.” They would have fulfilled God’s purposes for them including the present enjoyment of God’s covenant promises to Abraham, Genesis 12:1-3; 15:18-21; 17:1-21; 26:2-5; and 28:10-17. God’s lament that if they had obeyed Him, Israel’s descendants would have been so numerous no one could count them, “like grains of sand.” God had told Abraham, Genesis 22:17, “I will surely bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will possess the gate of their enemies.” See also Genesis 28:14; 32:12, 1 Kings 4:20; Jeremiah 33:22; Hosea 1:10 and Hebrews 11:12. The Lord stated earlier in Isaiah 10:22, that “For though your people, Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant will return.” See also Romans 9:27. By disobeying God, His people would suffer loss in numbers in the generation of Isaiah’s time but as other Scriptures confirm they would still fulfill this promise in a future day. The promise of numerous people, however, would not result in eternal life for all of them as confirmed by Isaiah 10:22 and Romans 9:27. God would keep to Himself a remnant who will be faithful to Him. See comments on the “remnant” in the notes for Isaiah 10:20-22; 11:11-16; 28:5; 37:31-32 and 46:3-4.

God’s continues His lament, vs. 19, by stating that if His people had obeyed Him, “their name would not be cut off or destroyed from before me.” This is a statement of God’s judgment on His people which was delivered when the people of Judah and Jerusalem were exiled to Babylon and Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed and centuries later when the Israelites were conquered by the Romans with thousands killed and Jerusalem and its temple again destroyed and will happen in the far future when the armies of Antichrist wreak their destruction upon Jerusalem, Zechariah 14:1-2. This does not mean that God’s covenant with Abraham will be annulled for it is an irrevocable covenant that God will keep for the sake of His glorious name. The people of God’s temporal blessings within the covenant will however be removed due to their disobedience and rebellion against God. As the above referenced verses indicate, there will be a remnant of God’s people that will enjoy the full benefits of His covenant with them.

48:20-21 Leave Babylon,
    flee from the Chaldeans.
    Announce it with a shout for joy,
    proclaim it to the ends of the earth.
    Say, "The LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob."

They were not thirsty when he led them through the deserts;
    he caused waters to flow out of the rock for them;
    he even split the rock and water gushed out.

To Isaiah’s audience in approximately 700-690 B.C., this message would have seemed confusing unless they had been perceptive enough to connect all that Isaiah had previously declared about the role of Babylon in the future. It is unlikely they would have understood the importance of this call from God as God had previously called them blind and deaf, Isaiah 42:18-19 and 43:8. Although many see the command from God to leave Babylon and flee from the Chaldeans as only relating to the end of the exile in ancient Babylon, some understand that there is a far future prophecy which will be fulfilled at the end of the great Tribulation.
For example, David L. Cooper comments:

Messiah sees Babylon standing as the world metropolis in the end time. At that season many Jews will be residing in this commercial center. He sends His message to them to leave the doomed city, obeying the following injunction "... with a voice of singing declare ye, tell this, utter it even to the end of the earth: say ye, Jehovah hath redeemed his servant Jacob" (vs. 20). Thus the Jews of Babylon are, summoned to leave it and to tell their brethren as well as the world that the time has come for Jehovah to redeem His servant Jacob, the Jews.

According to verse 21, the Lord will provide streams in the desert (literally) for His fleeing people who start their long trek back to the land of their fathers. (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – August 1945).

The reference in vs. 21, is most certainly a reminder that when the Israelites were rescued from captivity in ancient Egypt and travelled through the wilderness and deserts of Sinai, God look after His people by supplying water for them. In one instance God caused water to flow from a rock that had been split open, Exodus 17:6. God promises to also be with His covenant people when they flee the wicked environment of Babylon. God will make provision for them to meet their needs as they obey Him and return to “Immanuel’s land”, the promised land, where their Messiah will one day rule them in peace and righteousness. But not all will return and they will not enjoy peace as the next verse emphatically declares.

48:22 "There is no peace," says the LORD, "for the wicked."

For those who remain in Babylon and do not return to Jerusalem, they will suffer the same punishment as the wicked Babylonians. They will have no peace, either temporarily on the earth or eternally. The wicked will suffer the consequences of their evil hearts and rebellion against God. Unfortunately, many Jews decided to remain in Babylon after the decree of Cyrus to release them so they could rebuild the city of Jerusalem and its temple. Those who remained in Babylon were counted among the wicked who would suffer the immediate consequences of being conquered, Isaiah 47:1-3, and the eternal consequences of God’s judgment for their wickedness.

This timeless phrase, “There is no peace for the wicked,” applies to all peoples of all time and aptly concludes God’s call for obedience to His covenant people and to the peoples of the earth as recorded in the great section of Isaiah, chapters 40-48. This phrase also concludes the following great section of Isaiah, chapters 49-57 and acts as a divine warning, separating the latter half of Isaiah, chapters 40-66 into three equal nine chapter sections. See introduction to chapters 40-48 for a brief explanation of each of these three major sections.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 48:

48:1-11 The Rebellion of God’s People
48:12-22 The Redemption of God’s People