

Allan MacRae: Isaiah 1-6: Lecture 10

Biblical Theological Seminary, 1976

I'm going to move forward rapidly in order to get to the point we discussed last time: how is the term "servant" used? We were speaking at the end of the last hour about number 9 in the outline, "the Servant of the Lord." Now as we announced in the catalogue, this class is to cover Isaiah 1-6 and 56-64. And I thought at first to divide it into 2 parts, separately. But then as I thought about it, I saw that in order to properly understand the latter part, it's necessary to have some idea of certain important things in the parts in between. And so last week and this week we are just glancing at certain outstanding things in between these two main parts. And I'm not going to call them part one and part two; I'm just going to go straight along with the numbers.

So I gave Roman numeral nine in the outline "The Servant of the Lord." And we notice that capital A. Isaiah's use of the word 'servant'. There are a few general uses in the early part of the book, where it just speaks of a servant of a king, or something like that. Isaiah uses it of himself in Isaiah 23.

But then we pointed out all uses of the singular use of "servant" after Isaiah 37 are of a special type --for emphasis--with two exceptions at most. Last lecture I said one exception at most, but I've changed that to two exceptions at most. I don't think that there are any other exceptions, but I say at most there are two. Isaiah uses this word so many, many times in this part of his book and never uses it again after chapter 53, and right in this section, he uses it so many times. Is there a very special reason why he uses it so many times? Does it have a very special meaning? And either way, you can say that it does have a special meaning every time it is used. Now, there are two cases where someone might say it's referring to Isaiah. I don't think that they could prove that, but if you want to hold it that way, it's not particularly important in the whole matter, because you have

these many cases that I gave you to turn in last Friday, where "servant" is used in a very specific sense and we want to find out what that specific sense is.

And so, capital B, we take the first three appearances, or occurrences, and these first three appearances of the term "servant" are very different, as you doubtless noticed as you prepared this assignment for last time. They are very different from one another. The first two, of course, are identical, but the third is very different from the other two. And so look at the first: the word "servant" is specifically applied to Israel, 9 times, of which Isaiah 41:8-9 are as clear as any. There can be no question in chapter 41 verses 8 and 9 what he is talking about. Now I hope you all have your Bibles open to these. So, I think if you can look at your own Bible for this – and I don't care what version you are using – we will look at those two verses, 8 and 9:

“But you Israel are my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham, my friend; you whom I have taken from the ends of the earth and called from the chief men thereof and said to you, ‘You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you away’”

There is no question in these two verses that he is talking to Israel – which can be called Israel or called Jacob, for the two terms are used indiscriminately. We tend to think of Jacob as a man, who was the son of Isaac and of Israel as the nation. While Jacob's name was changed to Israel in the latter part of his life, the nation of Israel is often referred to as the province of Jacob, though more often as Israel. So there is no question that in these two cases he is speaking to Israel, and about Israel, even though Israel refers to the nation as "Jacob" does also.

And the whole point of us here is – Israel need not fear, for God has called her in order that a task be performed. This chapter begins with the coming of the great conqueror, Cyrus the Persian. He is named later, but he is coming and the nations are filled with terror and the different people of the nations are rushing to

make new idols, looking for help and protection from this terrible aggressor that is coming against them. But God says to Israel: you don't need to fear, because you are my servant. And he twice in these two verses brings out that idea. Israel is his servant. Now you might expect him to say: Israel, you are my chosen one, but he doesn't. Again, you might expect Him to say: "You are my chosen one; you're the one I've called; you're the one I have great blessings for; you are one I have great interest in." We find such things in other parts of the Bible, but here he says: you are my servant. And he says it twice in these two verses, and I believe that points to a very important matter. God did not call Israel simply because he chose to pick out a certain people group and give them special blessing. God called Israel in order that a task should be performed. He called Israel to be his servant. Israel to perform certain things.

Now, of course, the most immediate task of Israel is to keep a memory in the minds of people of the name of the Lord. We know the world had turned away from God and tried to put Him out of its memory. God revealed himself to Abraham and called Abraham out, to separate himself from the ungodly world and to raise up a nation which would keep alive the memory of the name of God and his greatness. That is a great part of Israel's task. It's keeping alive the knowledge of God and be the instrument through which God would give His revelations in the world. God used Israel in a very definite way, and God loves Israel, and he blesses Israel. But His great reason in calling Israel is in order that a task be performed. And this task has certain obvious elements that we have just referred to, and which He might enlarge on, but here in Isaiah, He thinks of a very special aspect of the task and that's why He uses the word "servant" so many times; specifically to stress the fact that there is a great task that is to be performed, and he has called Israel for that purpose and so Israel need not fear. God has called her in order that the task be performed.

Now we turn over to chapter 42 and we find a tremendous difference. There we find the word “servant” again. “Behold, my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom my soul delights. I have put my Spirit upon him and he should bring justice forth to the Gentiles.” That would be a tremendous thing wouldn’t it, to tell this little nation of Israel there, surrounded by great empires many times as strong as they were, “You are to bring justice to all of the nations of the world?” Tremendous isn’t it? Is that Israel’s task, to bring justice to the Gentiles? “He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets. A bruised reed he shall not break, and the smoking flax he shall not quench. He will bring forth judgment unto truth. He will not fail, nor be discouraged, till he has set judgment in the earth and the isles (that’s the distant land that seems like shadowy, distant, great areas to the people of Israel) they will wait for his law.” “Thus says God the Lord, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein. I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness and will hold your hand, and keep you, and give you for a covenant of the people, for a light of the nations; to open the blind eyes; to bring out prisoners from the prison, and those that sit in darkness out to the truth.” Here is a tremendous picture of the task that is to be performed. A description of the servant of God who is to perform a very great task. So Isaiah 42:1-7 presents this task that must be performed.

Now certain ideas are clearly presented in these verses. Small a: "The Task involves bringing light and justice to all the nations." That, we have noticed in verse one, to which He said that He will bring forth judgment, you can translate the recipients of light and justice by the word "Gentiles," or "nations." You can find it again in verse four, where we read, “He will not fail nor be discouraged till he has set judgment in the earth and the isles will wait for his law.” We find it again in verse six, where he says at the end of it, “I will make you a covenant of

the people, a light of the nation (or the Gentiles)” whichever way you want to translate it. So you find this idea expressed here. Here is a tremendous task for the whole world, and God has called Israel in order that this task be fulfilled.

Now b, “God guarantees fulfillment of the task.” It is not merely a hope. Somebody might say to Hezekiah, “God wants you to establish justice throughout the world.” Hezekiah says, “That’s wonderful. Give me the strength that David had. David conquered a big realm.” And the big Assyrian Empire is five times as big as the area that David conquered. “So give me great forces; give me great arms. I’ll go out and establish justice throughout the world.” But for Hezekiah to do such a thing would have been as silly as if the nation of Israel today would say, “We’re going to establish justice in the world: America and Russia, you do what we tell you.” People would just laugh, it would be ridiculous. It would have been just the same way for them to undertake to do such a thing then.

c. "But this is not merely a hope." Wouldn't it be nice if you could do this? This is God's statement that he guarantees that this task is going to be performed. He guarantees fulfillment of the task. It is not merely a hope. We find that in verses 1, 3, 4, and 6. He says “I have put my spirit upon him, and he will do this”. In verse 3, “A bruised reed he will not break.” In verse 4, “He will not fail or be discouraged until he has done this”. In verse 5 God says, “You think this is impossible?” Well, God who created the heavens, God who controls all things, this God said, “This is going to be done”. So verse 5 in here is a guarantee of the fulfillment of these promises. And verse 6 says, “I the Lord have called you in righteousness and will hold your hand and keep you and give you for a covenant for the people for a light for the Gentiles”. We find it is in this section that we finally see the path with which these actions will be done, without uncertainty or discouragement. In verse 4, “He shall not fail or be discouraged, until he has set judgment in the earth and the isles shall wait for his law.”

d. "It will not be done with violent effort, but with gentleness and consideration". We find that in verses 2-3. Hezekiah might have said, "Give me a new army, give me half of, give me $\frac{3}{4}$ of the forces of the Assyrians, let me step out and bring justice to the world: let me bring light to all the nations. They don't want to listen to the message of our God, so let me force them to. Let me send messengers everywhere with this message and carry God's truth to them. "He might say it, he might send the force out to try to forcefully do this, but this is not the picture of the servant. He will not cry, nor lift up his voice to be heard in the street. It is done with gentleness. A bruised reed he won't break, and a smoking wick he won't quench. In other words, here is somebody who is trying to serve the Lord . And he's not succeeding; he's not accomplishing much. Well, push him out of the way; let's put somebody in there who can do the task. No, that's not the way a servant should be. The true servant of the Lord is going to be kind and helpful. And those who are sincerely trying to follow and to do God's will, he is going to help them, not to push them out of the way. He won't quench the smoking wick that's just about to go out; instead of that, he will give it light and give it opportunity of accomplishment.

Now number 4, these were 4 aspects of the task. Number 4 is, "It is hard to think of 42:1-7 as describing Israel." As we already mentioned: a. Israel lacks the tremendous power needed. How could Israel do this tremendous thing? A tremendous power is involved. God has never made such a call to Israel. b. Israel is human and subject to discouragement. Israel has fallen into sin repeatedly, and God has had to punish them for their sins. A great part of the book of Isaiah is the punishment that has come for their sins. And yet He has called Israel to be His servant in order that this work be accomplished, and here is the work that is to be done and the servant is to accomplish it. Not to be discouraged, not to fail until they have done this tremendous task.

Small d: “Israel hardly fulfills the characteristics described in verses 3 and 4.” A bruised reed he won’t break, a smoking wick he won’t quench. One must admire the Israelites for their accomplishments in the world. Persecuted, oppresses, kicked about, they have nevertheless risen up and actively worked and gotten ahead and had influence on the world far out of proportion to their number. But, they have not done it by being quiet and not lifting up their voice in the street and being as gentle and kindly to everybody. They have done it with force, and with energy, and often with violence. But Isaiah's picture of the servant hardly seems to fit Israel, as Israel was in that day, or as Israel, as the whole, has been since.

Yes, Isaiah 41:8-9 and also many later passages clearly show that Israel has a responsibility for the servant’s task. Now we look at a few of these verses, which bring this out so clearly. Here is the beginning of chapter 42 telling us about the servant’s task: what he must do and how he is going to do it. But look at verse 19, “Who is blind but my servant? Or deaf as my messenger that I sent”. “Who is blind”, the King James says, “as he that is perfect”? The “he that is” is in italics. The word can be derived from either one of two Hebrew roots. One of them would mean, “he that is in a covenant of peace”. The other one would mean, “he that should be perfect”. Now, either meaning would fit with Israel. Israel was in a covenant of peace with God. Israel had a duty to carry out God’s law, and to show for it His perfect justice. That is what Israel should be, he says, but Israel is blind and decadent. Who is blind as the Lord’s servant? Israel, Israel the Lord’s servant. And yet Israel is blind and death is following the nation. Sin is turning to idolatry and to wickedness. And He goes right on and He says (this is a), in Verse 22, “This is a people robbed and spoiled. They are snared, they are hid in prison a house”. But verse 24 says, “Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? And did not the Lord, against whom we have sinned? Therefore, pour out upon him the fury of his anger”. And if Israel is in sin, how can Israel fulfill this

purpose of servant? And yet, this is the task of the servant, and Israel has been called in order that this task be fulfilled. In chapter 43 verse 10, again he says, “You are my witnesses says the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen”. Israel is God’s servant to perform some great task. We know that it is to preserve the work of God. We know that Israel preserves the knowledge of God through all those years, when all the world is trying to put Him out of their mind. But there is far more than that in this picture in verses 1 to 7.

How is this going to be fulfilled? 43:10 says that Israel is indeed God’s Servant. Chapter 44 verse 1, “ Yet now hear, O, Jacob my servant and Israel whom I have chosen”. Definitely designated as God’s servant. Again in verse 2, “Thus says the Lord that made you and formed you from the womb, fear not, Jacob my servant”. And in verse 21, He says, “Remember these, O Jacob and Israel, for you are my servant, I have formed you, you are my servant O Israel.” Clearly, Israel is God’s servant. And yet, how can Israel fulfill the fact described in the first 7 verses of chapter 42? In chapter 45 verse 4 again He says, “For Jacob my servant's sake" and "Israel my chosen one," and He (God) tells how He is going to call Cyrus by his name, and bring Cyrus to deliver them from the Babylonian captivity. And in chapter 48 verse 20 we read at the end of the verse, “Say the Lord has redeemed His servant Jacob”. So there’s no question the term servant is used of Israel, but there is no question that the picture in chapter 42 of the work the servant has to do is a picture of something that is very hard to think of Israel as fulfilling.

What is the answer to this problem? Delitzsch, in his excellent commentary, which has many fine things on his commentary on Isaiah, has one thing that I think is quite a mistake. He says the concept of the servant of the Lord is to be thought of as like a pyramid, and sometimes a prophet looks at the base of the pyramid, which is all of Israel, sometimes he looks at the top of the pyramid which is Christ, and sometimes he looks at the middle, which is the remnant. Now

I know of no case where the word servant is used of the remnant. I know of no such case. So there are only the two ways in which "servant" is used, with a possible exception of 2 cases where it might refer to Isaiah, but where it doesn't have to be. With that possible exception, in this whole section, the word "servant" would either refer to the whole nation of Israel, or it would refer, perhaps, to Christ.

What is the relation then? How can the word be used in such different ways. Number 6, "There is a difference between responsibility and accomplishment." That is the point that I don't think Delitsch talks about. There is a difference between responsibility and accomplishment. Though all Israel bears responsibility for the task, all Israel cannot be involved in accomplishing it. Now that is an obvious thing but it may not appear obvious at first sight. Suppose that I say that members of this class have responsibility to see to it that this table here is put here for me before the beginning of class. Suppose I were to say it: could everyone in the class do it? It would be impossible. We might give responsibility to the whole class, but the actual accomplishment of that particular thing would have to be carried out by a part of the class. Now Israel has many people who did not take part in the major part of the work of the servant and who did not make the truth of God known, who went and worshipped idols, who disobeyed God's law. They certainly can't be thought of as part of those who were accomplishing the task of the servant, but they certainly bear responsibility along with the rest for the task that God has given. The whole nation has a responsibility. But the task cannot be fulfilled by all of them. Some are certainly utterly unworthy; some have definitely turned their backs on God, so it must be just a portion of the nation that will carry out the task.

Now how large a portion of the nation will it be that will fulfill this vital part of the work of the servant? Will justice be brought to all the world, will there be light brought to all the nations? Two thirds of Israel? Will it be half of Israel?

Or is it possible that one individual out of Israel, representing Israel, actually an Israelite, can fulfill the task for which all Israel has responsibility? You see the question then, now there is a difference between responsibility and accomplishment.

Now we move on to C, "the individualization of the servant." When we get to chapter 49 we find evidence that this great task of the servant of the Lord that Isaiah described so much is to be fulfilled not by the whole nation, which would be absurd; not fulfilled by even 2/3 or half the nation, but by one individual who is Israel because he is fulfilling Israel's responsibility, because he is an Israelite, because he belongs to the nation of Israel. He is one individual who can represent Israel in carrying out the great task that God has for Israel to do, the task that will end up bringing light to all the nations, light to all the Gentiles, the task that will end up bringing justice throughout the whole world.

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MacRae: Isaiah 1-6 Lecture 10 Outline

By Bekah Macchia

Israel Called to Servant-hood

- I. Introduction to the class
 - a. Covering Isaiah
 - b. Big Idea: being a servant (Israel)
- II. Israel called into servant-hood
 - a. Called to perform tasks in addition to being a servant
 - i. Think Israel (or Jacob) as a nation: “God has called her in order that a task be performed”
 - ii. Israel is a servant
Eg. “But God says to Israel: you don’t need to fear, because you are my servant.”
 - iii. God calls Israel to service
Eg. “God called Israel in order that a task be performed. He called Israel to be his servant. Israel to perform certain things”.
- III. God Reveals and Reminds...
 - a. Revealed himself to Abraham and calls him to separate himself and build up a nation
 - i. To keep the knowledge of Christ
 - ii. Instruments through how God gives revelations in the world
 - b. Loves and blesses Israel
 - i. Therefore they must build up a nation (their task at hand)
 - c. Servant as a prevalent theme throughout
 - i. Reminds Israel of their task at hand
 - ii. Service is a great task to accomplish, God finds favor with and blesses Israel, calling them to build up a nation
 - iii. Isaiah 42:1-7
 1. Israel is to be light and justice to all nations
 - a. Judgment toward Gentiles
- IV. God’s promise with Israel
 - a. Not only a hope but a guarantee that this task will be achieved
 - i. Do not have uncertainty or discouragement

- b. True service
 - i. Done through gentleness
 - ii. Servants of God are kind and helpful
 - iii. They help others instead of pushing them away
- c. Review of two laws discussed so far
 - i. Law A: Israel lacks power, tremendous power is involved found through God's call to Israel
 - ii. Law B: Israel is human and subject to discouragement, fallen into sin repeatedly and yet God still calls Israel to be his servants so that his task will be fulfilled

V. Israel's called to being servants and the importance of doing so

- a. Biblical References in Isaiah

VI. More answers

- a. Concept of being servant of the Lord viewed like a pyramid
- b. Servant has two references
 - i. Nation of Israel
 - ii. God himself
- c. Not everyone can be involved at the task at hand, even though we are all called to do so
 - i. Whole nation has this responsibility, but the task cannot be fulfilled by all of them
 - 1. Some viewed "unworthy"
- d. Law C: individualization of the system
 - i. Final evidence that this task of the servant of the Lord that Isaiah threatened so much is to be fulfilled not by the whole nation, but one individual who is Israel by fulfilling the responsibility
 - 1. Isaiah 49
- e. Task will:
 - i. Bring light to all nations
 - ii. Light to Gentiles
 - iii. Bring Justice in the world