
Observations from Isaiah

LESSON XXXX : WHO IS THIS SERVANT OF JEHOVAH? (49:1-13)

General outline (from Oswalt's *Isaiah*):

- I. INTRODUCTION: THE PRESENT AND FUTURE OF GOD'S PEOPLE (1-5)
- II. A CALL TO SERVANTHOOD (6)
- III. BASIS FOR SERVANTHOOD: WHOM SHALL WE TRUST? (7-39)
- IV. THE VOCATION OF SERVANTHOOD (40-55)
 - A. MOTIVE FOR SERVANTHOOD: GRACE (40-48)
 - B. THE MEANS OF SERVANTHOOD: ATONEMENT (49-55)
 - 1. Anticipation of Salvation (49:1-52:12)
 - a. Comfort through the Servant (49:1-13)
 - (1) The Servant's calling (49:1-7)
 - (2) The Servant's work (49:8-13)
 - b. Zion not forgotten (49:14-50:3)
 - (1) Written on My hands (49:14-26)
 - (2) The will and the power to deliver (50:1-3)
 - c. The Servant's confidence (50:4-9)
 - d. Obey the voice of his Servant (50:10-51:8)
 - e. Awake and be delivered (51:9-52:12)
 - 2. Proclamation of Salvation (52:13-53:12)
 - 3. Invitation to Salvation (54:1-55:13)

1. Anticipation of Salvation (49:1-52:12)

a. Comfort through the Servant (49:1-13)

(1) The Servant's calling (49:1-7)

<i>Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations: Before I was born the LORD called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name. He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver. He said to me, You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display</i>	<i>Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far; The LORD hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name. And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me; And said unto me, Thou art my servant, O</i>	<i>Hearken, O isles, unto me, And attend, O peoples, from afar, Jehovah from the womb hath called me, From the bowels of my mother He hath made mention of my name. And he maketh my mouth as a sharp sword, In the shadow of His hand He hath hid me, And He maketh me for a clear arrow, In His quiver He hath hid me. And He saith to me, 'My servant Thou art, O Israel, In</i>
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my splendor. But I said, I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing. Yet what is due me is in the LORD's hand, and my reward is with my God. And now the LORD says — he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself, for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD and my God has been my strength — he says: It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth. This is what the LORD says — the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel — to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers: Kings will see you and rise up, princes will see and bow down, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you. (NIV)

Israel, in whom I will be glorified. Then I said, I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the LORD, and my work with my God. And now, saith the LORD that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and my God shall be my strength. And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth. Thus saith the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the LORD that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee. (KJV)

whom I beautify Myself.' And I said, 'For a vain thing I laboured, For emptiness and vanity my power I consumed, But my judgment [is] with Jehovah, And my wage with my God. And now, said Jehovah, who is forming me from the belly for a servant to Him, To bring back Jacob unto Him, (Though Israel is not gathered, Yet I am honoured in the eyes of Jehovah, And my God hath been my strength.) And He saith, 'It hath been a light thing That thou art to Me for a servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And the preserved of Israel to bring back, And I have given thee for a light of nations, To be My salvation unto the end of the earth.' Thus said Jehovah, Redeemer of Israel, His Holy One, To the despised in soul, To the abominated of a nation, To the servant of rulers: 'Kings see, and have risen, princes, and worship, For the sake of Jehovah, who is faithful, The Holy of Israel, and He chooseth thee.' (YLT)

“With this chapter a new section of the book begins. While the language of captivity and deliverance continues, neither Cyrus nor Babylon is mentioned again. While ‘servant’ continues to be a dominant theme, it is no longer the passive servant of chs. 40-48 whose mere existence is to be evidence of the helplessness of the gods. Rather, it is that servant who was introduced at the beginning of the previous section (42:1-9), who will be God’s agent to bring his covenant to the people and his justice to the nations. In subtle but nevertheless clear ways the focus has shifted from the physical captivity of the Judeans to the moral and spiritual captivity of Israel and the whole world. God has said that the lives of his servants, Israel, would be the evidence to the world that he alone is the Holy One. The section 48:17-22 brings that thought to its climatic expression. *But how is that possible? Will God simply ignore the sin that projected Israel into slavery in the first place? How will the blind, deaf, rebellious servant Israel be any different just because Cyrus has sent them home? The answer is: the Servant, ideal Israel, will give himself to be for and in Israel what Israel could never be in itself.* God’s mighty arm is about to be revealed (50:2;

51:9; 52:10; 53:1). But instead of being a jack-booted destroyer of the enemies of the nation, he will be a tender plant (cf. 6:13; 11:1), an apparent failure, but he will atone for the sins of the nation and of the world.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] The segment is structured in three parts:

ANTICIPATION OF SALVATION, 49:1-52:12 — the first part is marked by an increasing note of anticipation; the challenged to believe God and the word of his Servant grow in intensity; the possibility of a restored relationship between the people and their God is depicted more and more clearly; the picture of deliverance takes on a cosmic note. This climaxes in 52:7-12 in the announcement that God has indeed won the victory and the people are free.

THE MEANS BY WHICH SALVATION IS PROVIDED, 52:13-53:12 — the question arises then, how has God won the victory? God’s mighty ‘arm’ is revealed in the person of His Servant who defeated sin, making possible a relationship between a holy God and a sinful world.

THE INVITATION TO PARTAKE OF SALVATION, 54:1-55:13 — since Israel has been restored and has shone the light of God’s salvation to the world, Israel is invited to share in something already provided.

THE BEGINNING OF A NEW SEGMENT — Although this verse begins an entire new segment, it is also true there are clear connections with what has preceded. “In particular is the call to hear, which is characteristic of ch. 48. Further, it is a message addressed to the ends of the earth, as per 48:20. Here the author deals with the nature of the message of redemption that Israel will be able to shout to the world.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF THE SERVANT OF JEHOVAH — important to our discussion is the fact that ‘Servant of Jehovah’ is used in several different senses throughout Isaiah. “A study of the occurrences of ‘servant’ in chs. 40-55 reveals an interesting pattern: two kinds of servants are discussed. The first one mentioned is not identified, but he is a humble, responsive servant who will be God’s agent to bring God’s light to the world (42:1-9). But thereafter in chs. 40-48, the servant is blind, deaf, unbelieving Israel, who is nonetheless God’s chosen. Through what he has done and will do for Israel, God will show the world that he is God alone. Israel is assigned no task but promised many benefits. But in chs. 49-55, the proportions and order are exactly reversed. Here it is the servant of ch. 42, whose task is large and whose benefits are small, who is at center stage. The only clear reference to the nation, again speaking of benefits, is the last occurrence in chs. 40-55, 54:17. *As several commentators have observed, it is as though Isaiah wishes to be sure the idea of the ideal Servant is planted in the readers’ minds (in ch. 42) before he goes on to discuss the intermediate service of Israel in chs. 43-48. Then when that subject has been thoroughly covered, he returns to the ideal Servant to show the necessity of his work for the overall picture., ending with the reference to Israel again to remind the reader that the Servant’s work does not mean his people are not still called to serve him.*” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] Delitzsch agrees, although he makes a third division of the use of the word: *to refer to all of Israel, to refer to the remnant within Israel, and then of the Ideal Israel, the Messiah.* “When it is expanded to its widest circumference, the ‘servant of Jehovah’ is all Israel; when it only covers its smaller and inner circle, it is the true people of Jehovah contained within the entire nation, like the kernel in the shell; but here it goes back to its very centre. The ‘servant of Jehovah,’ in this central sense, is the heart of Israel.... Just as Cyrus is the world-power in person, as made subservient to the people of God, so the servant of Jehovah, who is speaking here, is Israel in person, as promoting the glorification of Jehovah in all Israel, and in all the world of nations.” [K&D, *Isaiah*]

WHO IS THE SPEAKER? — This ‘song’ consists of a single unnamed speaker. Who is the speaker in these verses? The Jews consider this to be the Servant of Jehovah, the nation Israel, an obvious interpretation since he is even identified in verse 3. Some consider it to be Cyrus, called the Lord’s anointed (45:1) to set Israel free from captivity. Possibly Isaiah himself. But Christians believe the speaker of these verses to be the true Servant of Jehovah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Reasons as to why we believe this to be the Messiah is as follows:

- **THE SPEAKER IS AN INDIVIDUAL** — throughout this ‘song’ the speaker is a single person, not a collective nation. This by itself is not a strong argument however since it is possible Isaiah was speaking metaphorically of Israel using the picture of an individual. But considered together with the other reasons makes this impossible to be the nation Israel.

- **“FROM THE LOINS OF MY MOTHER”** — the terminology used by Isaiah argues against it being the nation of Israel. The NIV captures the sense of what Isaiah is saying here but is bad as we are considering the exact phrasing. The more literal translations are better for seeing this particular point: *The LORD hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name.*” (KJV) *“Jehovah from the womb hath called me, From the bowels of my mother He hath made mention of my name.”* (YLT) ***This strongly argues for a child from a single mother, especially when considered together with other prophecies which center on the mother:*** *“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers”* (Gen 3:15); *“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”* (Isa 7:14); *“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites.”* (Micah 5:2,3); *“From birth I was cast upon you; from my mother’s womb you have been my God.”* (Ps 22:10). ***“The expression my mother precludes regarding the speaker as a personified group. The words can be used only by an individual speaking of his own mother.... It is this reference to my mother that makes it clear that the speaker is the Messiah.”*** [Young, *Isaiah*] *“[W]hat he affirms of himself is expressed in such terms of individuality, that they cannot be understood as employed in a collective sense at all, more especially where he speaks of his mother’s womb. In every other case in which Israel is spoken of in this way, we find only ‘from the womb’ without the addition of ‘mother’, which is quite unsuitable to the collective body of the nation* (except in such allegorical connections as Isa 51:1-2, and Ezek 16:3). Is it then possibly the prophet, who is here speaking of himself and refers in v. 1b to his own mother? This is very improbable, if only because the prophet, who is the medium of the word of God in these prophecies, has never placed himself in the foreground before.... ***Moreover, what the speaker in this case says of himself is so unique, so glorious, that it reaches far beyond the vocation and performance of any single prophet, or, in fact, of any individual man subject to the limitations of human life and human strength.***” [K&D, *Isaiah*]

- **THIS SERVANT’S WEAPON IS HIS WORD** — v. 2 eliminates Cyrus because his weapon was the military. But the Servant of Jehovah’s weapon is his mouth. ***“He will accomplish God’s will not by military force but by a revelation of God’s word. The power of God’s word had been demonstrated again and again by the prophets. It was the power to break down and build up.”*** [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] Of this the NT agrees: *“For the word of God is*

living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” (Heb 4:12); “In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.” (Rev 1:16); “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:1,14) **“His is an office of the mouth, his task a declaration of the Truth; for he is a prophet par excellence, and his word is the Gospel, which to the one is a savor of death unto death, and to the other the savor of life unto life. In order that He may bring to naught all the opponents of God’s Holy Name, the Lord will send His servant to the earth. Likewise, through the servant’s mouth the truth of redemption will be proclaimed to the poor and needy. These two concepts should not be separated; for what is set forth here is the servant as prophet, and the word of that prophet brings life and judgement.”** [Young, *Isaiah*]

● **THIS SERVANT IS USED BECAUSE OF HIS QUALITIES, NOT IN SPITE OF THEM** — as discussed below in v.2, God uses this Servant because of His preparedness and effectiveness, the opposite of the picture given of the nation Israel up to this point. **“He is particularly called for the task; he is particularly equipped for the task; he has been particularly kept for the task. Thus it is not by chance that the Servant finds himself in this role. All the culmination of God’s work in history comes to its point in him. God has appointed him for this particular task, and as a result of his work, God will be seen in all his beauty.”** [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

● **THIS SERVANT WILL PERFORM THE FUNCTION OF ISRAEL** — v. 3 at first glance is an argument for the speaker to be the nation Israel. **“The issue is: Will this phrase be allowed to submerge all the indications of individuality in the passage, or will those indications be allowed to interpret this phrase? First, it is important to note that the term Israel is used not so much as a name as it is a parallel term to servant. It is as though the Lord had said, ‘You are my Israel, in whom I will be glorified.’ Thus it is the function, not the identity, of Israel that is emphasized. This Servant is going to function as Israel. What was Israel’s task, as indicated throughout the entire book, from ch. 2 onward? To be the means whereby the nations could come to God. But how could a nation that could not find its own way to God, a blind, deaf, rebellious nation, show anyone else the way? This is the dilemma that the Servant has come to solve. He will be for Israel, and the world, what Israel could not be.”** [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] **“Matthew saw Jesus as the expression of God’s mind for Israel, as his quotation of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15 makes clear and the Gospel of John asserts that God’s glory is revealed in him (e.g., John 1:14, 2:11). Jesus, even more than Nathaniel, is ‘a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false’ (John 1:47).”** [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

● **THIS SERVANT IS THE SUPERNATURAL SAVIOR OF THE NATION ISRAEL** — as given above speaking of v. 3, this also argues against the speaker being Isaiah or another prophet. No prophet ever would consider himself the ideal Israel. As we get to v. 5-6, it is obvious the speaker is more than human. **Not only can this not be the nation Israel, He will be the Savior of the nation! Verses 5,6 are probably the strongest proof the speaker is the Messiah. “These verses pose severe difficulty for any collective understanding of the Servant. Jacob cannot restore Jacob to a right relationship with**

God anymore than Israel can restore itself to Judah from Babylon. At the same time, these verses eliminate the possibility that the prophet or some other human is being talked about. No human is going to become God's salvation for the whole world, and no Israelite prophet, either before or after this, was ever given a commission to save the world." [Oswalt, Isaiah]

THE ARROW IN THE QUIVER — v. 2 gives the picture of the Messiah as a 'polished arrow concealed in his quiver.' Probably several implications are intended. As an arrow, sharpened and polished, he is available for use at any moment. The arrow is protected from the elements so they can be most useful; a possible picture of the sinlessness of Christ, protected from sin to be used by God. As an arrow He was out of sight until the right moment to be displayed. As an arrow the Servant is equipped to destroy enemies of God both near and far. There may be additional allusions to the directness of his aim and swiftness of flight. "Concealment in the quiver suggests ... an eternal purpose manifest at the appropriate time (cf. 1 Peter 1:20)." [Grogan, Isaiah]

THE MILD AND GENTLE JESUS — after reading such passages that describe Jesus as the anointed Savior of the world, one would think His journey would have been a relatively easy path. But as prophesied here and as attested by the gospels, Jesus did not come as a King but as the meek and lowly Prophet. *"God does not approach the arrogance and oppression of the world with greater arrogance and greater oppression. Rather, he comes with the humility, the vulnerability, and the powerlessness of a child."* [Oswalt, Isaiah] This shows the humanity of Jesus and provides comfort for us weak, sometimes frustrated humans. In v. 3 God says 'You are My Servant,' but in v. 4 the Servant responds with 'But I said, I have labored to no purpose, I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing.' *"If the Servant described in this passage is more than human, he is not less than human. Frustration and feelings of futility, all too familiar to everyone who inhabits flesh, were part of the burden he came to bear."* [Oswalt, Isaiah] What a wonderful lesson for us. We are not to be concerned with the fruit but are rather to 'trust and obey'. Along with this is v. 7 which speaks of both the frustration of the earthly ministry coupled with the exultation of the Servant by God. *"The close of the ministry of Jesus saw the great crowds of Galilean days no longer thronging him, the official religious leaders plotting his death, and the disciples forsaking him in the face of danger; but God would reward him (v. 4; cf. Heb 12:2)."* [Grogan, Isaiah]

THE SERVANT'S MISSION — v. 5,6 gives the mission of the Messiah: not only to restore and gather Israel unto Himself but the Gentile world as well. "The words of v. 6 — 'it is too small a thing' — suggest an estimate of his person or of his work or of perhaps both. The restoration of the remnant — mentioned often in Isaiah (e.g., 11:10-16) — is to be expounded later in this chapter. Israel has light but needs restoration, while the Gentiles need both light and salvation. *The church's mission to the Gentiles is to be viewed in the context of the mission of Jesus himself (cf. John 20:21) and is to the uttermost parts of the earth (Matt 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8) The unique servant's ministry was in fact rejected by the nation (cf., e.g., Rom 9-11). Great as he was, he came as a subject, not only of God himself, but of earthly rulers such as Augustus, Tiberius, and Herod. As a result of his work, the highest of men and women would not only stand in respect and perhaps amazement but, even more appropriately, would bow low in worship and submission."* [Grogan, Isaiah] *"The person addressed here is the Restorer of Israel, the Light of the Gentiles, the Salvation of Jehovah for all mankind. When kings and princes shall behold Him who was once brought so low, delivered from His humiliation, and exalted to the glorious height of the work to which He has been called, they will rise up with*

reverence from their thrones, and prostrate themselves upon the ground in worship for the sake of Jehovah, as before Him who is faithful, showing Himself sincere in His promises, and for the sake of the Holy One of Israel, in that, as is now made manifest, ‘He hath chosen thee.’” [K&D, Isaiah] Observations from Edward Young: “(1) *The Gentiles are in darkness and need light. They are not already redeemed but are lost in the darkness of sin and ignorance. Hence the need for vigorous missionary work. One religion is not as good as another. Christ alone is the Light of this dark world.* (2) *Israel is the first-born in the household of faith. Therefore, we Gentiles who have been brought in from without must love Israel and must bend every effort to bring the Gospel to the Jews.* (3) *True unity is found in Jesus Christ alone in whom both Jew and Gentile have become one.*” [Young, Isaiah]

a. Comfort through the Servant (49:1-13)

(2) The Servant’s work (49:8-13)

This is what the LORD says: In the time of my favor I will answer you, and in the day of salvation I will help you; I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people, to restore the land and to reassign its desolate inheritances, to say to the captives, Come out, and to those in darkness, Be free! They will feed beside the roads and find pasture on every barren hill. They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat upon them. He who has compassion on them will guide them and lead them beside springs of water. I will turn all my mountains into roads, and my highways will be raised up. See, they will come from afar — some from the north, some from the west, some from the region of Aswan. Shout for joy, O heavens; rejoice, O earth; burst into song, O mountains! For the LORD comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones. (NIV)

Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places. They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them. And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted. Behold, these shall come from far: and, lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim. Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the LORD hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted. (KJV)

Thus said Jehovah: ‘In a time of good pleasure I answered thee, And in a day of salvation I helped thee, And I keep thee, and give thee, For a covenant of the people, To establish the earth, To cause to inherit desolate inheritances. To say to the bound, Go out, To those in darkness, Be uncovered. On the ways they feed, And in all high places is their pasture. They do not hunger, nor thirst, Nor smite them doth mirage and sun, For He who is pitying them doth lead them, And by fountains of waters doth tend them. And I have made all My mountains for a way, And My highways are lifted up. Lo, these from afar come in, And lo, these from the north, and from the sea, And these from the land of Sinim. Sing, O heavens, and joy, O earth, And break forth, O mountains, with singing, For comforted hath Jehovah His people, And His afflicted ones He doth pity. (YLT)

The song advances from the Servant's calling to the Servant's work as described by God. "God declares that the Servant's task is to make it possible for God's people around the world (49:12) to return to him. The language is that of the return from exile, but in the most general terms. The people are prisoners who are brought forth from the darkness (v. 9; cf. 61:1) and led as sheep on a smooth highway (vv. 9-11; cf. 35:8). As in 42:10-13, the response to God's mighty work through the Servant is universal joy in which nature take a leading part (49:13)." [Oswalt, Isaiah]

THE SERVANT VINDICATED AT THE TIME OF RENEWAL — In verse 7 we saw God respond to the Servant's cry that His life outwardly appeared futile. The Servant's status in relation to others was very low, as He was abhorred by the mass of the people; not just unworthy of attention but positively distasteful (one might think of a snob's attitude towards the homeless in comparison). But while lowly on earth, the Servant is exulted above the heavens themselves (Phil 2:9-11). Continuing that mind-set, the Lord promises here that when He moves to save the world, He will 'answer' the Servant ('answer' in the sense that God will respond with support). *"In a time of favor reflects the idea of the Jubilee year (Lev 25:8ff.), that time when the captives were freed, and inheritances restored to the rightful tenants under God's ownership."* [Oswalt, Isaiah]

THE SERVANT'S TASKS — *The Lord gives a list here of tasks for which the Servant is appointed: to be a 'covenant to the people', to restore the land, to apportion desolate heritages, and to call forth the prisoners.* Paul's use of this verse in 2 Cor 6:2 shows he interpreted this to be accomplished by the Messiah: *"As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says, 'In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.' I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation."* (2 Cor 6:1,2) *'The covenant to the people'* means Jesus will represent God's covenant to the people. Although Israel again and again broke the covenant, God still understood Himself bound by it and intends to offer it in a new form (Jer. 31:31), the New Covenant. *"Jehovah heard His servant, and came to his help when he prayed to Him out of the condition of bondage to the world, which he shared with his people.... The fact that Jehovah makes His servant 'a covenant of the people,' i.e., the personal bond which unites Israel and its God in a new fellowship is the fruit of his being heard and helped."* [K&D, Isaiah] Note the releasing of the prisoners is a spiritual work; the language is figurative.

THE RETURN TO THE LAND — The passage from v. 9b-12 speaks of the return to God's land the Servant has made possible. The images used by Isaiah are ones which he's used several times before in his book: flocks grazing safely, the provisions of the exodus, an easy, well-graded highway. *"The people returning home are represented as a flock. By the roads that they take to their homes, they are able to obtain sufficient pasture, without being obliged to go a long way round in order to find a sufficient supply; and even upon bare sandy hills (Isa 41:18) there is pasture found for them.... They are called my mountains and my highways because they are His creation; and therefore He is also able to change them, and now really does change them for the good of His people, who are returning to the land of their forefathers out of every quarter of the globe."* [K&D, Isaiah] Verse 10 is a combination of the exodus with Psalm 23. Verse 11 speaks of God smoothing the path of return to insure everyone's safe journey to Him. *"God will bring those people who will believe in his promises to himself. He does not promise that the flock's way will be over nothing but soft meadows and gentle hills. The way may lie through deserts and over mountains, but God does promise that through the hardships, he will be the one leading, and therefore we may be assured of provision, protection, and a clear solid way on which even the weakest may walk. Can we be assured of this? Certainly! After all, God made the mountains;*

he says, ‘They are my mountains.’ He who made them can level them at the right moment. Likewise, the highways are his, and he is able to lift them high above the surrounding deserts and take them straight to their destination.” [Oswalt, Isaiah] “The context here suggests that part of the Servant’s work is to establish the aspects of the Abrahamic and possibly the Mosaic covenants that related to the land of Canaan. Children and a land were major blessings of the covenant with Abraham (Gen 12:2-3); the first is mentioned in 48:19 and the second here. The Servant would be a kind of second Joshua (the Hebrew equivalent to the Greek ‘Jesus’). The land would be repopled by freed captives (v. 9a).” [Grogan, Isaiah]

A UNIVERSAL RETURN — The language used here is not to be confined to the return from Babylon. The Servant rightly began His message by calling out to the world (v. 1). Here God calls to the four corners of the earth: ‘See, they will come from afar’ – the word for ‘afar’ is typically a reference to Babylon, the known eastern border at the time of Isaiah. ‘Some from the north, some from the west’ – ‘west’ is literally ‘the sea’ meaning the Mediterranean Sea, the western border of civilization. ‘Some from the region of Aswan’ – although the reference to Aswan (*Sinim*, KJV) was uncertain, it is now accepted to refer to southern Egypt (see note below). *So the return mentioned here is a universal return from the four corners of the earth: the east, north, west and south. God will bring all His people back to Him.*

FURTHER NOTE ON SINIM / ASWAN — MT has *sînîm* which was a problem for interpreters for years. K&D and Alexander take it to refer to China. According to Oswalt, as early as 1720 Michaelis proposed to emend the text to *swnym* = Syene or Aswan, the southern border of Egypt. This is now supported by a reading from the Dead Sea Scrolls (1QIs^a) which has *swnyym*. Most recent commentators consider the question settled. “We know from the Elephantine Letters that a colony of Jews was well established there in the 5th century BC, so it is possible that this fact, plus the fact that this was the southern border of Egypt (so Ezek 29:10; 30:6), and thus of the civilized world, accounts for its use here.” [Oswalt, Isaiah]

THE COMPASSIONATE GOD — verse 10 also gives a reason for this abundance: *it is because God is compassionate that He graciously leads His people. How often do we fail? How often do we turn aside from known truth? How often do we rely upon our emotions rather than His word? Yet time and time again He brings us back. He is always there because He has compassion, because He cares, because He’s concerned of our needs. Much more than we deserve.*

“Shout for joy, O heavens; rejoice, O earth; burst into song, O mountains! For the LORD comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones.”

— Isaiah 49:13 NIV