

Isaiah 38-55 has two parts.

Chapters 38-39 give the historical background-  
the prediction of the future Babylonian exile.

Chapters 40-55 then give the promise of the restoration from exile.

This promise is itself broken into three sections.

Chapter 40 is the introduction-the call to hear the Word of the LORD.

Chapters 41-48 consist of seven messages to Judah/Israel

Listen to the opening lines of each of these messages:

But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen... (41:8-42:25)

But now thus says the LORD, he who created you O Jacob/Israel (43:1-28)

But now hear, O Jacob/Israel (44:1-20)

Remember these things, O Jacob/Israel (44:21-46:2)

Listen to me, O house of Jacob/Israel (46:3-47:15)

Hear this, O house of Jacob/Israel (48:1-11)

Listen to me, O Jacob/Israel (48:12-22)

God is calling his people to hear – to listen – to remember!

We need to be good at hearing – good at listening to what *God says*.

And then we need to *remember* what God says!

After all, where did it go wrong for Adam and Eve?

They listened to the serpent!

They heard the voice of the serpent – and refused to hear God.

In these seven messages, the emphasis is on Israel as the Servant.

Chapters 49-55 then begin to make a distinction between the Servant and Israel.

Both sections (starting in ch 41 and ch 49) begin with "Listen to me, O coastlands."

The nations are called to hear of what God is doing with his Servant.

Isaiah's message to Israel and Judah is that God's purposes  
are wider and broader than Israel alone.

Last time we heard the first message –

where Israel was set forth as the Servant of the LORD.

In 42:6-7 God promises that he will give Israel, his Servant, as a covenant for the nations,  
to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon.

And in 42:16 God promises that he will lead the blind in new paths,  
and turn the darkness into light.

But now in 42:18-20 we hear that the Servant is blind and deaf.

## 1. The Deaf and Blind Servant Is Plundered (42:18-25)

<sup>18</sup> *Hear, you deaf,  
and look, you blind, that you may see!*  
<sup>19</sup> *Who is blind but my servant,  
or deaf as my messenger whom I send?  
Who is blind as my dedicated one,<sup>[d]</sup>  
or blind as the servant of the LORD?*

The servant is supposed to open the eyes of the blind,  
but his own eyes are blind.  
He is supposed to bring the prisoners out from the dungeon,  
but he himself is trapped in holes and hidden in prisons.  
Who is blind as the servant of the LORD?  
(Read verse 20)

<sup>20</sup> *He sees many things, but does not observe them;  
his ears are open, but he does not hear.*

Isaiah was called to go to Israel and Judah and proclaim a message  
that would blind their eyes, stop their ears, and harden their hearts.  
The problem with Israel is that they are just as wicked and sinful as the nations.  
(Read verse 21)

<sup>21</sup> *The LORD was pleased, for his righteousness' sake,  
to magnify his law and make it glorious.*

There is certainly no fault with God.  
He has given his glorious Torah-the instruction in the way that Israel should go-  
but (verse 22)

<sup>22</sup> *But this is a people plundered and looted;  
they are all of them trapped in holes  
and hidden in prisons;  
they have become plunder with none to rescue,  
spoil with none to say, "Restore!"*

The servant has been handed over to the plunderers, and none can rescue him.  
But who has done this?  
Who has given Servant Israel over to Babylon?  
(v24)

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

<sup>24</sup> *Who gave up Jacob to the looter,*

*and Israel to the plunderers?  
Was it not the LORD, against whom we have sinned,  
in whose ways they would not walk,  
and whose law they would not obey?  
25 So he poured on him the heat of his anger  
and the might of battle;  
it set him on fire all around, but he did not understand;  
it burned him up, but he did not take it to heart.*

Notice how Isaiah identifies himself with the people's sin,  
but distances himself from their refusal to walk in God's ways!

Was it not Yahweh, against whom we have sinned,  
in whose ways they would not walk,  
and whose law they would not obey?

So the same section in which the Servant is introduced,  
the Servant is also condemned as blind - failing to see what God is doing -  
and deaf - failing to hear what God is saying.

He is no better than a deaf messenger.

What is a deaf messenger going to say?

"Hello, I'm sure my master wanted to tell you something,  
but I have no idea what it is!"

So if the first message regarding Israel, My Servant,  
is that Yahweh has chosen and strengthened him,  
the second is that the servant is a failure.

The Chosen Servant, the Spirit-filled Servant who *will* bring justice to the nations,  
is, at present, also the blind and deaf Servant, who does not understand God's purposes.

## **2. "But Now" – The Word of the LORD to Israel (43:1-7)**

### **a. I Have Redeemed You (v1)**

*43 But now thus says the LORD,*

But now!

Those two most precious words in the Bible!

You might think that the most precious words in the Bible are "Jesus Christ,"  
or justification and sanctification,  
or faith and love.

No.

All of the power of those words are dependent upon these two little words.

"But now."

It is a phrase that suggests a contrast (and especially in the OT it can be used to express a contrast for the worse:

you were given so much, but now you've made a mess of it!)

But in many places it has an eschatological ring:

After God had forgiven the sin of Israel in the wilderness he told Moses,

"But now go, lead the people to the place  
about which I have spoken to you." (Ex 32:34)

After David had repented of his sin in 2 Samuel 24, he said:

"I have sinned greatly in what I have done.  
But now, O LORD, please take away the iniquity of your servant"

Solomon spoke of how David could not build the temple

because of the constant warfare during his reign,

"But now the LORD my God has given me rest on every side." (2 K 5:4)

When God spoke to Job out of the whirlwind, Job declared:

"I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,  
but now my eye sees you." (Job 42:5)

In speaking of the future restoration, Zechariah 8:11 says

"But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people  
as in the former days, declares the LORD of hosts.  
For there will be a sowing of peace."

Paul speaks of the coming of the last days in this way:

"The times of ignorance God overlooked,  
but now he commands all people everywhere to repent." (Ac 17:30)

Or in Romans 3:21,

"But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law  
although the law and the prophets bear witness to it."

Or in Colossians 1:22

"But now he has reconciled you in his body of flesh by his death,  
in order to present you holy and blameless  
and above reproach before him."

All told, Paul uses this phrase 25 times,

almost always with this eschatological emphasis.

Once, things were different.

Once, you were aliens and strangers from Christ,

"But now"!

God starts by reminding his Servant –

I created you – I formed you –

and, what is more, I have redeemed you!

*he who created you, O Jacob,  
he who formed you, O Israel:  
“Fear not, for I have redeemed you;  
I have called you by name, you are mine.*

“Israel is my son, my firstborn” – let my son go that he may serve me!  
That’s what God said to Pharaoh.  
And that’s what God promises once again!

**b. I Will Be with You (v2)**

<sup>2</sup> *When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;  
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,  
and the flame shall not consume you.*

Whether through fire or water, I will be with you.  
No matter the trial – I will be there!

And God gives as his reason, his name:

**c. I Am the LORD (v3)**

<sup>3</sup> *For I am the LORD your God,  
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.  
I give Egypt as your ransom,  
Cush and Seba in exchange for you.*

I am Yahweh.  
I am Yahweh your God – the *Holy One of Israel*.  
This is Isaiah’s favorite name for God –  
The Holy One of Israel.

And because he is the Holy One, he wants his people to share his holiness!

**d. I Love You (v4)**

<sup>4</sup> *Because you are precious in my eyes,  
and honored, and I love you,  
I give men in return for you,  
peoples in exchange for your life.*

Do you find it incredible that God *loves you!*  
But God shows his love for us in this,  
that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us!

So

**e. Fear Not, I Will Gather You (v5-7)**

<sup>5</sup> *Fear not, for I am with you;  
I will bring your offspring from the east,  
and from the west I will gather you.*

God promises that he will bring back the exiles –  
that he will restore his people – and bring his children back from afar.  
(v7)

<sup>6</sup> *I will say to the north, Give up,  
and to the south, Do not withhold;  
bring my sons from afar  
and my daughters from the end of the earth,  
<sup>7</sup> everyone who is called by my name,  
whom I created for my glory,  
whom I formed and made.”*

God’s purpose is to bring salvation to his deaf and blind servant!

**3. The Holy One Is the Redeemer of the Deaf and Blind Servant (43:8-21)**  
**a. “Besides Me There Is No Savior” – Yahweh vs. the Gods (v8-14)**

So then he says,  
Bring out my servant! (v8)

<sup>8</sup> *Bring out the people who are blind, yet have eyes,  
who are deaf, yet have ears!*

Idols are frequently spoken of in this fashion:

They have eyes but they do not see;  
ears, but they do not hear.

The Servant – Israel – is *supposed to be* the image of God.

But they have become blind and deaf.

After all, “those who make them become like them!”

Those who trust in blind and deaf images become themselves blind and deaf!

And God calls for witnesses:

<sup>9</sup> *All the nations gather together,  
and the peoples assemble.  
Who among them can declare this,  
and show us the former things?  
Let them bring their witnesses to prove them right,*

*and let them hear and say, It is true.*  
<sup>10</sup> *“You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD,*  
*“and my servant whom I have chosen,*  
*that you may know and believe me*  
*and understand that I am he.*  
*Before me no god was formed,*  
*nor shall there be any after me.*

Let the nations and their gods bring their witnesses to defend them.

But you (O nations) are my witnesses –  
and Israel, my servant, whom I have chosen –  
that Yahweh alone is the living and true God.

<sup>11</sup> *I, I am the LORD,*  
*and besides me there is no savior.*  
<sup>12</sup> *I declared and saved and proclaimed,*  
*when there was no strange god among you;*  
*and you are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “and I am God.*  
<sup>13</sup> *Also henceforth I am he;*  
*there is none who can deliver from my hand;*  
*I work, and who can turn it back?”*

Verse 11 and verse 25 both use repetition “I, I am the LORD”  
or “I, I am he.”

This serves to highlight both the particular word,  
and as a rhetorical device to mark the flow of thought.  
Verses 11-14 and 25-28 bracket the section with statements of God as savior.

In between we have two thus says the LORD's (14-15 and 16-21),  
followed by a series of seven "not" statements,  
before concluding with the final "I, I" in 25-28.

Hebrew does not use the pronoun "I" very often.

It is usually included as a part of the verb.

Any time you write out "anochi" in Hebrew it draws attention to itself.

But here it is written out twice-which has a dramatic effect.

God is making it perfectly clear that He is the only savior of his servant.

Israel is my servant, but Israel himself needs to be saved.

In the first "thus saith the LORD" in verses 14-15,  
God promises that he will bring the fugitives-the exiles-back from Babylon.

<sup>14</sup> *Thus says the LORD,*

*your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:  
"For your sake I send to Babylon  
and bring them all down as fugitives,  
even the Chaldeans, in the ships in which they rejoice.  
<sup>15</sup> I am the LORD, your Holy One,  
the Creator of Israel, your King."*

This is the first reference to Babylon since the end of chapter 39.

But God declares that he will deliver his people and restore them from exile.  
I am Yahweh, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King.  
Isaiah has used creation language in a redemptive fashion before,  
but here he calls Yahweh the "creator of Israel."  
The new creation is as entirely a divine work as the first creation.

**b. "Behold, I Am Doing a New Thing" – Something Greater Than the Exodus  
(v15-21)**

<sup>16</sup> *Thus says the LORD,  
who makes a way in the sea,  
a path in the mighty waters,  
<sup>17</sup> who brings forth chariot and horse,  
army and warrior;  
they lie down, they cannot rise,  
they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:  
<sup>18</sup> "Remember not the former things,  
nor consider the things of old.  
<sup>19</sup> Behold, I am doing a new thing;  
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?  
I will make a way in the wilderness  
and rivers in the desert.  
<sup>20</sup> The wild beasts will honor me,  
the jackals and the ostriches,  
for I give water in the wilderness,  
rivers in the desert,  
to give drink to my chosen people,  
<sup>21</sup> the people whom I formed for myself  
that they might declare my praise.*

The second "thus saith the LORD," in verses 16-21 bears this out.

Recalling the exodus, and the crossing of the Red Sea,  
he reminds his people that he made a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters.  
He opened the Red Sea and let his people walk through on dry land.  
But he destroyed the horse and rider, quenching them like a wick.  
But don't remember that!  
Don't think about the past.



Because I am doing a new thing.

"I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."

God is preparing a highway through the wilderness,  
a road upon which only the righteous may travel.

The direct route from Babylon to Jerusalem goes straight through the desert.

But God will provide water in the wilderness to

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

God's mighty deeds in the Exodus are far short of what he will do next.

But there is a problem.

"But not."

#### 4. "But Not" – Israel Is a Weary Burden to God (43:22-28)

<sup>22</sup> *"Yet you did not call upon me, O Jacob;  
but you have been weary of me, O Israel!"*

<sup>23</sup> *You have not brought me your sheep for burnt offerings,  
or honored me with your sacrifices.*

If "but now" are the most precious words in Scripture,

"but not" are the most perilous.

Isaiah has already spoken of those who carry out a plan – but not mine! (30:1)

Hosea speaks of those who will eat, "*but not* be satisfied

they shall play the harlot, *but not* multiply" (Hos 4:10)

Micah 6:15, "You shall sow, *but not* reap."

Verses 22-24 consist of a series of "not" statements, beginning, "but not."

But not me did you call O Jacob.

The wording calls attention to their failure to call to God – their deliverer.

Indeed, Israel has been weary of their maker!

Four of the "nots" are in verse 23:

You have not brought me your sheep for burnt offerings,

You have not honored me with your sacrifices.

The latter part of verse 23 needs some explanation.

*I have not burdened you with offerings,  
or wearied you with frankincense.*

The problem for the English reader is the word play that is going on.

After all, Israel was very faithful at bringing the prescribed sacrifices  
all throughout the era of the kings.

The temple in Jerusalem had a constant throng of burnt offerings and sacrifices.

The key is found in those opening words of verse 22, "but not me."

You called – but not to me.

You brought your sacrifices – but not to me.

Your sacrifices are not satisfying to me.

Why?

"You have burdened me with your sins; you have wearied me with your iniquities."

The word "burdened" is literally "enslaved."

God is offering a contrast:

I have not enslaved you with offerings, or wearied you with frankincense.

The contrast again is to Egypt (earlier in 16-17).

There Israel was enslaved and wearied.

And indeed, in Babylon they will be enslaved and wearied once again.

But God has not enslaved them with his requirements.

Rather, they have enslaved him.

They have wearied him.

They have refused the grace that he so abundantly offered.

<sup>24</sup> *You have not bought me sweet cane with money,*

*or satisfied me with the fat of your sacrifices.*

*But you have burdened me with your sins;*

*you have wearied me with your iniquities.*

But God declares once again, "I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake."

(v25)

<sup>25</sup> *"I, I am he*

*who blots out your transgressions for my own sake,*

*and I will not remember your sins.*

Why does God blot out your transgressions?

It's not because we deserve it!

The wages of sin is death.

If God gave us what we deserved, we would all die!

But God blots out our transgressions *for his own sake.*

<sup>26</sup> *Put me in remembrance; let us argue together;*

*set forth your case, that you may be proved right.*

<sup>27</sup> *Your first father sinned,*

*and your mediators transgressed against me.*

<sup>28</sup> *Therefore I will profane the princes of the sanctuary,*

*and deliver Jacob to utter destruction  
and Israel to reviling.*

It is not because you deserve it.

It is for my own sake.

And God says that if you want to argue (v26),  
make your case!

Your first father sinned (probably a reference to Adam),  
and your mediators transgressed against me.

Prophets, priests and kings have all failed to lead Israel in God's ways.

And so while God will indeed redeem his people,  
it will not be through the priests (the princes of the sanctuary),  
that God will deliver them.

Jacob will be handed over to destruction,  
and Israel to reviling.

(It is passages like this that make it very difficult to think  
that Isaiah 40-55 could be written by someone after the Exile.

This is speaking of the coming judgment – the Babylonian exile.)

And so once again, God concludes with an eschatological,  
v'attah-but now!

##### **5. “But Now” – Yahweh Is the Redeemer of the Servant (44:1-8)**

*44 “But now hear, O Jacob my servant,  
Israel whom I have chosen!*

*<sup>2</sup> Thus says the LORD who made you,  
who formed you from the womb and will help you:*

*Fear not, O Jacob my servant,  
Jeshurun whom I have chosen.*

*<sup>3</sup> For I will pour water on the thirsty land,  
and streams on the dry ground;*

But now, hear O Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have chosen!

Thus says the LORD who made you, who formed you from the womb and will help you:

What does God say?

Once again, as he had in 43:1-7, he proclaims two "Fear nots"

Fear not – I will pour water on the thirsty land,  
and streams on the dry ground;

How will he do this?

*I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring,  
and my blessing on your descendants.*

*<sup>4</sup> They shall spring up among the grass*

*like willows by flowing streams.*

They will belong to Yahweh, and they shall be identified with Israel.

The covenant promise to Abraham will come to pass:

I will be their God and they will be my people.

<sup>5</sup> *This one will say, 'I am the LORD's,'  
another will call on the name of Jacob,  
and another will write on his hand, 'The LORD's,'  
and name himself by the name of Israel."*

And so,

<sup>6</sup> *Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel  
and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:*

(That is, the King of Israel and the Redeemer of Israel)

*"I am the first and I am the last;  
besides me there is no god.*

<sup>7</sup> *Who is like me? Let him proclaim it.<sup>[e]</sup>*

*Let him declare and set it before me,  
since I appointed an ancient people.*

*Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen.*

Who dares to challenge Yahweh?

And so he says for a second time,

<sup>8</sup> *Fear not, nor be afraid;*

*have I not told you from of old and declared it?*

*And you are my witnesses!*

*Is there a God besides me?*

*There is no Rock; I know not any."*

When God redeems his Servant, Israel, God will pour out his Spirit on the Servant's offspring.

All of Israel's history will come to its glorious conclusion in the great "but now."

It's no wonder that Paul chose that phrase!

Jesus has brought the great "but now!"

You were aliens and strangers to the covenants of promise,

*But now* in Christ Jesus you who once were far off

have been brought near in the blood of Christ (Eph 2:12-13)

I have been crucified with Christ.

It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me

*but now* the life that I live in the flesh,  
I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal 2:20)

This is what Isaiah was talking about.  
Jesus has brought the great “but now”!

And so, yes,  
God has done for us what we could not possibly do for ourselves!  
He has forgiven our sin – for his own sake!