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# The Blessings of Being God's People: Election in the Book of Isaiah

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THE BLESSINGS OF BEING GOD'S PEOPLE: ELECTION IN THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

HONORS THESIS

BY  
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## **Introduction**

Over the years, the doctrine of election, or God choosing a people, has been a highly debated topic. Two thousand years of church history can attest to that, and even today churches split over disagreements about the topic. To begin to gain a clearer understanding of this doctrine, one must set aside common presuppositions, expectations, and even the understanding in church history. Often, election is seen as a New Testament doctrine. However, it is important to remember that the Old Testament forms the background for the New Testament and is often quoted in New Testament passages. Isaiah is heavily relied upon in the New Testament and therefore it is a good choice for a study of Old Testament texts on this topic. It is important in such a study to read the Old Testament texts without anachronistically injecting New Testament teachings. Isaiah 41:8-20; 43:1-13,19-21; 44:1-5; 49:1-7 each contain the Hebrew root **בָּחַר**, meaning “to choose,” which is clearly tied to election theology in the Old Testament. Further, these four passages are all in the same section of Isaiah. In addition, these passages contain quite a bit of Exodus imagery, in which God maintains his faithfulness to his chosen people, Israel, even when they sin and turn their backs on him. In this way, the Exodus imagery highlights the chosen status of Israel. Thus, the fact that this small section of Isaiah has such a concentration of passages containing **בָּחַר** and election imagery from Exodus indicates that it is a good place to look to begin to understand what the Old Testament has to say about election, specifically what being chosen by God meant for Israel.

## **Authorship**

The authorship of the book of Isaiah has been heavily debated over the last few centuries. This issue is important specifically for locating the book of Isaiah in its historical setting. Before the late 1700s, people never really questioned the authorship of the book of Isaiah. It was

understood that Isaiah, son of Amoz, was the sole author of the entire book. By the end of the 1700s, though, there were suggestions that Isaiah may have written chs. 1-39, but another author (or group of authors) must have written chs. 40-66 at a later date. Supporters of the multiple author view emphasized a few key points. They claimed that the theological focus of Isaiah 1-39 is very different from that of 40-66. Also, they contended that the vocabulary used and the writing style changed significantly. After noticing these things, some scholars began to see another break in the themes and style of Isaiah within chs. 40-66, citing a third author for Isaiah 56-66.<sup>1</sup> Further, some critical scholars felt the specific, predictive nature of Isaiah's prophecy in chs. 40-66 was not possible.<sup>2</sup>

There was then a conservative response to these claims. Traditionalists countered the multiple author view and continued to support the single author approach. They argued that the language and themes found in Isaiah 1-39 absolutely resonated with those found in chs. 40-66. Another form of support for the single author view is the fact that other preexilic prophets made allusions to Isaiah 40-66, which would mean that this section would have to be preexilic, like 1-39. Further, when the New Testament cites Isaiah, it is pulling from passages found in both 1-39 and 40-66. Thus, New Testament authors thought of the book of Isaiah as being one book, from one author. In addition, this was the view held not only in the New Testament, but also for centuries that followed until the end of the eighteenth century. Lastly, the book of Isaiah begins in 1:1 with a superscription that attributes the book to Isaiah. Nowhere else in Isaiah do we see a different superscription implying a different author. Now, though critical and conservative

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<sup>1</sup> Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 303-306.

<sup>2</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 40-66*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 3.

scholars may not agree on authorship, there is at least a shift toward acknowledging that the book as a whole has unity and is not disjointed, as argued earlier.<sup>3</sup> This shows that the literary and stylistic arguments made by the multiple author supporters have been adequately countered by the single author supporters. Therefore, the only remaining argument is the possibility of predictive prophecy. In response to this issue, “it is the scholarly understanding of the phenomenon of biblical prophecy that needs to be corrected, not the traditional view of the book’s authorship.”<sup>4</sup> Given the evidence, it is fair to recognize Isaiah as the only author of the book of Isaiah, which would date the book to the preexilic time period of the eighth century BC. Thus, the passages in Isaiah that seem to speak about Israel in exile are prophetic texts in which Isaiah is speaking of a future time when Israel will be in exile.

### Terminology

Three Hebrew roots that appear repeatedly in these Isaiah passages are critical to understanding what is taught about election. These roots are **בָּחַר**, **יָצַר**, and **גָּאֵל**.

The Hebrew root **בָּחַר** occurs 169 times in the Old Testament. Of those 169 occurrences, 20 are in the book of Isaiah. All five of the times it shows up in the passages in this study, **בָּחַר** is in the Qal stem. The best translation of this word as it appears in Isaiah is “to choose.”<sup>5</sup> There is no real debate on how to translate this root in these passages. It is important to look at other passages where this root occurs, which will then help readers understand what theological connotations **בָּחַר** had acquired by the time Isaiah used it. For instance, Deuteronomy 7:6b-7

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<sup>3</sup> Longman and Dillard, 306-309.

<sup>4</sup> Oswalt, 6.

<sup>5</sup> Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, “**בָּחַר**,” in *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 103.

says, “For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen (בָּחַר) you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose (בָּחַר) you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.” This idea is repeated almost word for word in Deuteronomy 14:2. According to these passages, then, God specifically chose Israel to be his people and this had nothing to do with them being a great nation, rather Israel was a smaller nation than the others. God’s choosing of Israel made them his treasured possession and a result of that choosing is that Israel is called to be holy. Therefore, when בָּחַר shows up elsewhere in the Old Testament, specifically with God as the one choosing Israel, the original audience would have been familiar with the implications of passages like those in Deuteronomy. This aspect of the term בָּחַר would have been perceived much more strongly by the original audience than the modern audience reading “chosen.”

Another key word in the Isaiah passages is the Hebrew root יָצַר, which means “to form” or “to create.”<sup>6</sup> This root appears in the Hebrew Bible 77 times, 29 of which are in Isaiah. Again, the key to the connotations of this root lies in the uses of it in certain contexts. In Genesis 2:7, God formed (יָצַר) a man from the dust of the ground. In Jeremiah 33:2, God is said to have formed (יָצַר) the earth. The same root is applied to God as a potter, one who forms (יָצַר), and Israel as clay in his hands in Jeremiah 18. This word, then, carries more significance than our English “to form.” Just as a potter forms the clay with purpose, God formed the man and the

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<sup>6</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, “יָצַר,” in *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament Study Edition*, trans. Mervyn E.J. Richardson (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1:428.

earth with purpose. By extension, there is purpose behind his forming of Israel, which will be discussed in the context of the four passages in Isaiah.

Lastly, the Hebrew root **לָאָה** shows up a few times in these passages. **לָאָה** is usually translated as “to redeem,” or “to reclaim as one’s own.”<sup>7</sup> According to Watts, “redeemer” has multiple facets and it “addresses the issues of Israel’s sin and rebellion, of the effects of judgment on a former generation and age, of problems posed by exile and devastation, and of the need for faith and hope when these were hard to find.”<sup>8</sup> For the people of Israel, seeing God as “redeemer” meant that God was willing to bring them back from their sin and from the judgment. God was willing to restore the people of Israel to right relationship with him. God was going to be there to help them and comfort them, even though they had failed to hold up their end of the covenant. To be redeemer (**לָאָה**) speaks of God’s faithfulness to his people.

#### **Isaiah 41:8-20**

“Isaiah 1-39 focuses on judgment but also contains glimpses of deliverance.”<sup>9</sup> As the author moves into chs. 40-66, the focus of Isaiah shifts from a message of judgment to a message of hope and a future time of restoration. Further, Isaiah 40 serves as both an introduction to and a general summary of the entire section of 40-66.<sup>10</sup> Isaiah 40 declares a hope for God’s people, claiming that God is more powerful than any idols that man can make. Isaiah 41 proclaims a similar theme that God is in total control and he promises hope for his people. God’s people can

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., “**לָאָה**,” 1:169.

<sup>8</sup> John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 641.

<sup>9</sup> J. Daniel Hays, *The Message of the Prophets: A Survey of the Prophetic and Apocalyptic Books of the Old Testament*, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 99.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 123.

trust in him and do not need to fear because he is powerful enough and he loves them enough to care for them. The end of Isaiah 41 again points to God's power over idols.

Isaiah 41:8 begins with a confirmation of Israel's chosen status. Oswalt notes that 41:8 is the first time in Isaiah that Israel as a nation is referred to as "servant," which is a positive term as it appears here, clearly tied to Israel's election in that God has chosen Israel as his servant.<sup>11</sup> If Israel is to be a servant, he will need to be totally committed to God, but this commitment is preceded by God's commitment to Israel in his "taking initiative" in choosing Israel as his servant.<sup>12</sup> The mention in 41:8 of Jacob and Abraham is meant to draw on the memory of Israel so that they will remember that God still has a present and future relationship with them, even if they are in exile.<sup>13</sup> The people of Israel, as descendants of Abraham, have inherited the blessing of God's calling Abraham. When God calls Abraham in Genesis 12, he tells him to leave his land and go to a place that God will show him. In Genesis 12:2-3 God says, "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." The next verse says that Abram went just as God had told him to. In his calling, Abraham trusted God. Likewise, in Isaiah, Israel is being called to trust God. Further, Abraham was to be a blessing, with all the peoples of the earth being blessed through him. Israel later should be working to be a blessing to other nations. The original audience may have seen the mention of Abraham as a reminder that being chosen came with a call to be a blessing.

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<sup>11</sup> Oswalt, 90.

<sup>12</sup> John Goldingay, *Isaiah*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 232.

<sup>13</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 33.



In Isaiah 41:8, Abraham is called God's friend, or literally "my beloved." God cares for Abraham and Israel probably recognizes this as comforting in their situation. Isaiah is prophesying about a future time when Israel would be in exile, reminding his audience that Israel would still be God's "servant" and "beloved," and the use of these terms in Isaiah 41 shows his people that he has not rejected or forgotten them.<sup>14</sup> These terms are also used to link Israel back to Abraham, "the prototype of election," and the use of "my friend," or "my beloved," gives evidence that election "is rooted and grounded in . . . the love of God for the chosen."<sup>15</sup>

Not only are they chosen, but God also promises that he will not reject Israel. Here in Isaiah 41:9 there is the positive ("chosen") followed by a negative ("not rejected") to further emphasize the idea that God has chosen Israel.<sup>16</sup> Goldingay explains that being "chosen" and "not rejected" has implications of a kingly status that further illustrates God's commitment to Israel, which enables them to follow the "do not fear" command in v. 9.<sup>17</sup> It is important in v. 10 to take note of the relational presence of God. He tells them not to fear because he is with them, thus he is present. He says, "Do not be afraid, for I am your God," showing that there is a relationship between God and Israel. The use of the "personal pronoun 'I' (*'ānī*) to emphasize God's personal commitment and presence" which is "similar to the promise of God to be present with their forefathers," shows that God is "still present with them and available to care for them."<sup>18</sup> Because he is their God, he will strengthen them, help them, and hold them up with his

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<sup>14</sup> Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 134.

<sup>15</sup> Oswalt, 90.

<sup>16</sup> Shalom M. Paul, *Isaiah 40-66: Translation and Commentary*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 166.

<sup>17</sup> Goldingay, 232.

<sup>18</sup> Smith, 135.

righteous right hand. This idea would have helped the people of Israel to understand that they would be helpless and hopeless without God taking care of them.

In 41:11-13, Israel's enemies are said to be as nothing at all because God is taking care of Israel. Brueggemann makes a connection between this passage and Exodus 14:30-31, where the Egyptian army was made as nothing, dead on the shore of the sea after attempting to chase down the Hebrew people, noting that this is how it would turn out for Babylon, too, as they would seemingly "evaporate" as a result of attempting to counter God's plan for the world. This is done only by God's great power.<sup>19</sup> Oswalt draws on the imagery of God taking hold of Israel's right hand (Isaiah 41:13) to show that God is not separated from his people.<sup>20</sup> He is present and active. A similar instance concerning God's presence occurs in Isaiah 45:1 where God is described as having taken Cyrus' right hand. The point, though, is not whether Cyrus was a follower of YHWH, but that God chooses people for purposes and when he does, he takes them by the hand and leads them to do what he sees fit. This seems to support the view of election as instrumental, while not specifically indicating that salvation is a part of this choosing.

An instrumental view of election means that Israel has been chosen to complete a task or a service. An intrinsic view of election means that God chose Israel, not simply to do tasks for him, but rather to simply be his people. Kaminsky holds the view that God's choosing of Israel is intrinsic because of God's deep and unfailing love for Israel. He claims, "Love relationships are not best conceived in instrumental terms, especially a love relationship like that between God and Israel . . . . Israel perceived that her special relationship with God was not primarily an

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<sup>19</sup> Brueggemann, 33-34.

<sup>20</sup> Oswalt, 92.

instrumental one or else there would be no basis for . . . future hope.”<sup>21</sup> By that, Kaminsky means to point to his understanding that God’s choosing of Israel cannot be instrumental. With that said, there are some aspects of Israel’s election closely tied to service, or the instrumental aspect. Kaminsky also acknowledges this idea. He contends that one cannot separate service from God’s people. One must be careful, or else there is a danger of falling into works-based righteousness, where God saves people based only on their actions. He concludes, “one needs to be cautious in employing the metaphor of service in a heavy-handed fashion that obscures the more relational elements of Israel’s election theology,” and the “passages that link the meaning of election to the idea of service continue to affirm God’s mysterious and inexplicable love for his chosen people, Israel.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, while Kaminsky agrees that there are instrumental aspects to election, he greatly emphasizes the intrinsic nature of election. However, it may be that God’s choosing of Israel is both instrumental and intrinsic, with neither receiving a greater emphasis. To get the best understanding of this idea, though, it will be important to pay attention to how it shows up in the passages that follow as well.

In Isaiah 41:14, readers get a glimpse of the family-duty implications of “Redeemer.” God’s plan is to redeem his people, the ones he has chosen, from captivity.<sup>23</sup> In vv. 15-16, there will be a role-reversal where Israel, who is weak, will be made into a new, sharp threshing sledge and will be able to take down powerhouses like Babylon.<sup>24</sup> Here, God is making certain that his people are equipped for his purposes by making them new and sharp. Further, Israel’s enemies

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<sup>21</sup> Joel S. Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob: Reclaiming the Biblical Concept of Election* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 156.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 156-158.

<sup>23</sup> Paul, 170.

<sup>24</sup> Brueggemann, 35.

will be scattered and Israel can rejoice in God as “the Holy One of Israel.”<sup>25</sup> The people of Israel will acknowledge that God provided for their needs and rejoice in his salvation.

The next section, Isaiah 41:17-20, requires discussion on a few topics. Brueggemann views this section as a shift from the previous sections with a focus on the “transformation of creation,” and also that God will provide for Israel’s needs so that he “may be enhanced” and others will see and know that “the God committed to Israel is the one who acts powerfully over the larger domain of creation.”<sup>26</sup> Childs draws on these passages to show that as God provides for the people of Israel in the desert, they will better understand his redemptive action on their behalf, just as he has done so historically (when they left Egypt, for example).<sup>27</sup> In Exodus 17, the Israelites complain about not having water. They are thirsty and they grumble against Moses who calls out to God and asks what to do. God provides water by commanding Moses to strike a rock with his staff. It is possible, then, that Isaiah 41:17-20 contains a direct, purposeful allusion to the exodus event. Watts notes that this section serves to prepare Israel for the role of Servant of the LORD, their instrumental service to the LORD, and it is a call to recognize his purpose and plan.<sup>28</sup> Oswalt, though, sees this section as figurative, serving to show that God will care for those who cry out to him and “the chief point is simply that God is able to take that which is barren and unproductive, the human soul, and make it fertile and fruitful.”<sup>29</sup> Paul emphasizes that God is able to provide water in the desert and he will not abandon his people.<sup>30</sup> Smith

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<sup>25</sup> Paul, 172.

<sup>26</sup> Brueggemann, 36-38.

<sup>27</sup> Brevard Childs, *Isaiah*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 320.

<sup>28</sup> Watts, 642.

<sup>29</sup> Oswalt, 95-96.

<sup>30</sup> Paul, 173.

argues that vv. 17-20 are not just part of the salvation oracle, but rather they are a proclamation of eschatological salvation. He cites the lack of “you” as the recipient of the proclamation and the lack of the “do not fear” command. Instead of referring to exilic Israel, then, God would be speaking of a future people. This serves as a reminder that God does not forget the promises that he makes to his people. “In faith, his people can confidently act now, based on divine assurances about what God will do in the future.”<sup>31</sup> The views of Smith and Childs seem irreconcilable. It may be possible, though, to understand this section of the passage as both an allusion to a past historical event (the exodus) and a future eschatological salvation. Just as God provided for the thirsty Israelites in the desert, he will provide salvation for the poor and needy.

According to Oswalt, 41:20 offers the most direct statement in Isaiah of God’s purpose in “electing and delivering his people.”<sup>32</sup> God will be recognized as the one who has done these things for Israel. Goldingay claims, “Yahweh’s action is characterized by a wild extravagance that will once again bring all people to recognize that this sovereign creativity reflects the work of the Holy One of Israel.”<sup>33</sup> Here, readers see a fair balance between election as instrumental and intrinsic. Oswalt’s statement seems to support the instrumental aspect, but Goldingay’s meshes the two together. God deeply loves the people of Israel and that is why he has chosen them. As a result, they will be instrumental in making God known.

An intended consequence of his choosing the people of Israel as a servant is that they should not fear because Israel is under the special protection of God.<sup>34</sup> He is committed to them and will take care of them. He plans to redeem them because he loves them. Smith notes some

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<sup>31</sup> Smith, 139.

<sup>32</sup> Oswalt, 96.

<sup>33</sup> Goldingay, 234.

<sup>34</sup> Oswalt, 90.

implications of God's choosing Israel are that "three practical aspects of God's salvation are highlighted: (a) God's servants do not need to fear others, for God is with them (10a); (b) God will strengthen and help his servants in the midst of these trials (10b); and then in 41:11–13 (c) God will cause their enemies to be nothing."<sup>35</sup> Oswalt claims, "the nation is called, and cleansed, and empowered . . . as a vehicle of God's revelation . . . . It is as Israel becomes the living evidence of God's unique deity that the world will recognize him."<sup>36</sup> God will use his servant to show to the world that he is sovereign.

### **Isaiah 43:1-13, 19-21**

Isaiah 42 is the first of four "Servant Songs" in Isaiah.<sup>37</sup> In this chapter, God announces his chosen servant (an individual who will be later discussed in regard to Isaiah 49) who, according to 42:6b-7 will serve "as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness." Further, Israel is to praise God for who he is and what he has done. At the end of Isaiah 42, Israel is said to be blind and deaf and they face judgment for their lack of obedience to God. However, Isaiah 43 provides hope for the people of Israel because they have been chosen by God. He will take care of Israel, who will even serve as his witness for those who worship idols.

A few resonating ideas from the previous passage appear in the first part of Isaiah 43. The people of Israel are commanded not to fear and there is a reminder that God has redeemed them. There is some exodus imagery in 43:1-2 that should be noted here (the Red Sea

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<sup>35</sup> Smith, 134.

<sup>36</sup> Oswalt, 96.

<sup>37</sup> Hays, 124. Hays, along with most scholars, agrees that the four Servant Songs are Isaiah 42:1-7; 49:1-6; 50:4-10; and 52:13-53:12.

experience in Exodus 14-15 and the Jordan River experience in Joshua 3-4).<sup>38</sup> Smith emphasizes Israel's going through trials rather than experiencing miracles, arguing that these are allusions to earlier sections of Isaiah where the Assyrian army was described using water imagery.<sup>39</sup> Whether the imagery is from the exodus or an allusion to an earlier section of Isaiah, "by using imagery comparable to past events where God miraculously delivered the people, God was encouraging his people to react with faith, for he had already proven his superiority over similar forces in the past."<sup>40</sup> There seems to be some connection between God as Creator and God as Savior, perhaps suggesting that if God is powerful enough to create, then he is powerful enough to save. Watts mentions that the Exodus imagery serves a prophetic purpose, alluding to the coming restoration.<sup>41</sup> This point by Watts would support the past and future argument of 41:17-20, in which an allusion to a past event serves as a reminder, but also as a glimpse of future hope. In 43:2, Oswalt notes that "the consequence of belonging to God [is] preservation in the midst of trials because of God's presence."<sup>42</sup> A result of being chosen by God is that he will protect and provide for his people, no matter the circumstance.

As in 41:14, there is a reference in 43:1 to God's "redeeming" Israel. Oswalt discusses the use of the perfect tense of the words translated "redeemed" and "called." After giving some options, he concludes that the use of the perfect tense here is meant to show that God's redemption and calling are timeless facts.<sup>43</sup> Thus God's redemption is not just a past action, but

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<sup>38</sup> Brueggemann, 53; Watts, 675.

<sup>39</sup> Smith, 193-194. Smith cites Isaiah 8:7-8; 28:2; 17:12-13.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 194.

<sup>41</sup> Watts, 675.

<sup>42</sup> Oswalt, 138.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

also an ongoing action that extends into the future. This would further support an eschatological reading of these passages, in that there are immediate implications, but the implications stretch far into a future time when God will redeem his people. Some commentaries draw readers' attention to God's calling Israel by name, noting that to call by name implies a relationship or even ownership.<sup>44</sup> The language used here (redeemed, called, created, formed) should motivate Israel to trust God with their future because he has committed himself to them and he promises to work for the good of his people.<sup>45</sup>

In 43:3, God is referred to again as "the Holy One of Israel," along with "the LORD" and "your savior." Oswalt sees this verse as God, after naming Israel, revealing to them his names, emphasizing the reciprocity of the covenant: Israel being committed to God and "God giving himself to Israel."<sup>46</sup> Scholars' views differ on 41:3 and the idea of God offering nations as a ransom for Israel. Watts sees the offering of Egypt as a ransom as the literal action of Persia conquering Egypt. This is what God gave to Persia because Cyrus aided the Israelites in restoring Jerusalem.<sup>47</sup> Oswalt and Paul take this more generally to show that God is willing to pay any price to redeem his people.<sup>48</sup> Brueggemann offers that the metaphor should not be taken to an extreme and we should see merely that God really treasures Israel.<sup>49</sup> Childs adds that saying God disregards "the worth of other nations badly distorts the metaphor."<sup>50</sup> This point as a whole is clarified in 43:4. God says, "Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and

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<sup>44</sup> Brueggemann, 53; Childs, 334; Paul, 205-206.

<sup>45</sup> Smith, 193.

<sup>46</sup> Oswalt, 139.

<sup>47</sup> Watts, 675-676.

<sup>48</sup> Oswalt, 140; Paul, 207.

<sup>49</sup> Brueggemann, 54.

<sup>50</sup> Childs, 335.



because I love you, I will give people in exchange for you, nations in exchange for your life.” It seems that these verses support the more general approach offered by Oswalt, Childs, Brueggemann, and Paul. In summary, “what is significant is the depth of God’s love and commitment to his people. In faith the audience can believe God’s promise and put their trust in him.”<sup>51</sup> This is a clear indication of the intrinsic aspect of election. God is willing to do so much for Israel because of his love, not because the people of Israel have done anything for him nor can they do anything for him in the future to earn his love.

The next few verses refer to the gathering of God’s people for restoration. Isaiah 43:5 begins with a repetition of the “do not fear” command. This restoration will take place because the people of Israel are God’s people and they were created for his glory. Childs notes that the fact that the exiles are called God’s sons and daughters points back to the covenantal relationship that God has with his people.<sup>52</sup> Thus, in a future time from Isaiah’s perspective when Israel would be in exile, God would still call his people sons and daughters because of his covenantal relationship with them. As in 41:17-20, Smith points to 43:5-6 as eschatological, rather than having only immediate implications.<sup>53</sup> Israel was created, formed and made and the ultimate purpose of that is to glorify God.<sup>54</sup> Further, God’s name is enhanced (or advanced) through his acts of deliverance, like gathering his people from exile.<sup>55</sup> According to Smith, it is important to pay attention to the fact that only those called by God’s name, his sons and daughters, are addressed in this section. He proposes that these are only the faithful followers of God, the ones

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<sup>51</sup> Smith, 195.

<sup>52</sup> Childs, 335.

<sup>53</sup> Smith, 196.

<sup>54</sup> Paul, 209.

<sup>55</sup> Brueggemann, 55.

“who have a covenant relationship with God, who are known as believers, and who bring glory to the name of God.”<sup>56</sup>

A trial scene occurs in 43:8-13 in which the nations are called to gather as witnesses to their gods and Israel is the witness of the One True God. Even though the people of Israel may be (figuratively) blind and deaf, they are able to testify to what God has done. An interesting comparison can be made to Exodus 32 when God wants to be done with Israel and start over. At this point, Israel has broken their side of the covenant and God could walk away. Instead, God continues to allow them to serve him and have a relationship with him.<sup>57</sup> Likewise, in Isaiah 43, Israel is said not to have held up their end of the deal. God has every right to walk away from Israel, but instead he continues the relationship with Israel. No other gods compare at all to the True God of Israel.

Thus what Israel is called to learn is not merely that God is great or living or just or powerful, but much more, that he *is*, that there is no other, that he alone is the one with whom all creation must come to terms. What Israel thought would be a helpful relationship on the way to becoming a dominant culture in the ancient world was in fact a tool whereby Reality would lay hold of them in an unyielding way.<sup>58</sup>

God’s purpose for the people of Israel was higher than they could even imagine for themselves.

In v. 10, there is again a clear reference to Israel being God’s servant whom he has chosen. Here, though, it is paired with the phrase “so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he.” This puts the focus “on Israel’s own personal relationship with God as a fundamental goal of God’s involvement with them. This included a personal recognition of God’s divine sovereign power, plus a firm commitment to accept his will and to faithfully follow

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<sup>56</sup> Smith, 196.

<sup>57</sup> Goldingay, 247.

<sup>58</sup> Oswalt, 147.

his guidance.”<sup>59</sup> According to Oswalt, to be God’s servant is “to be living evidence of the unique saviorhood of God” and, first and foremost, Israel has to know God before taking that knowledge to others.<sup>60</sup>

The last section to be discussed in Isaiah 43 is vv. 19-21. As ruler over the cosmos, God can do what he wants. He can turn dry ground into a source of water and vice versa. He is especially willing to do these miraculous works for his chosen people. Smith sees these verses, like other verses, pointing to an eschatological era in which God will prepare a way for his people and guide them in the desert. Further, Smith claims that “this passage says nothing about ‘returning’ to the ‘land of Israel’ by ‘exiles,’ instead it emphasizes the reversal of the covenant curses on the land and God’s provision of life-giving water. God’s transformation of life...will also have great spiritual significance . . . . The water of God may be a metaphorical reference to a source of spiritual renewal.”<sup>61</sup> Although Smith has some good points here, it may be a stretch to say that the passage does not have immediate implications. For instance, if Isaiah was indeed prophesying about a future time when Israel would be in exile, 43:19-21 could then apply to a return from exile. Also, as seen in Isaiah 41:17-20, it is possible that Isaiah was writing about a time when Israel would return from exile, with implications of a future eschatological restoration of God’s people.

“The section comes to a climax with the reminder that it is Israel’s calling to honor Yahweh.”<sup>62</sup> Again the recurring theme that God has chosen a people so that “they may make known [his] praise” appears. The point of him choosing a people is so that they can bring him

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<sup>59</sup> Smith, 202.

<sup>60</sup> Oswalt, 146-147.

<sup>61</sup> Smith, 210.

<sup>62</sup> Goldingay, 250.

glory.<sup>63</sup> Again, Oswalt is emphasizing the instrumental aspect of Israel's election. However, this does not mean that their election is *only* instrumental. Perhaps Israel's election is also intrinsic, or natural. They are not only called to do something. They are chosen as God's people and as a result they will bring him glory.

It seems obvious here, but it is still important to note that an implication of being chosen by God is that the chosen ones will bring honor and glory to God. They will serve God in making him known to the world. Those chosen by God have no need to fear because God will take care of them, provide for them, and protect them. God is willing to do almost anything for his chosen people. Being chosen involves being committed to God's will and recognizing his sovereignty.

#### **Isaiah 44:1-5**

Isaiah 43 ends on a negative note. God claims in 43:28 that he will “deliver Jacob to utter destruction and Israel to reviling” because Israel has continued to sin rather than offer pleasing sacrifices to him. Thus the impact of Isaiah 44 is great. God has chosen the people of Israel and he will pour out his Spirit on them. The people of Israel are reminded that God has redeemed them and that, again, they do not need to serve idols because they are God's people.

Both Childs and Oswalt connect the beginning of 44:1-5 to ch. 43. No matter what Israel has done in the past, what is important is the “now.”<sup>64</sup> “Their disobedience in 43:22-28 required discipline, but this does not mean that God has totally rejected them or wants to abandon his relationship with them.”<sup>65</sup> Brueggemann notes that Israel's “chosenness” is closely related to

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<sup>63</sup> Oswalt, 155-156.

<sup>64</sup> Childs, 341; Oswalt, 164.

<sup>65</sup> Smith, 219.

God's action of making, forming, and helping in 44:2.<sup>66</sup> This would mean that Israel's election is intrinsic and it comes solely from God, based on his will alone. Again, God commands Israel not to fear. This is still a reminder that being chosen by God means that there is no reason to fear anything because he is with his people. The reiteration of the election terms "servant" and "chosen" shows that Israel is loved by God and will continue to be loved by him.<sup>67</sup> Israel is referred to in v. 2 as "Jeshurun," another name for Israel. It seems, though, that "Jeshurun" may come from the same root as יָשָׁר, which can mean to be right or upright.<sup>68</sup> As upright people, they should be able to trust God.<sup>69</sup>

Israel is like dry and thirsty ground until God pours his spirit on them. The result is that people will be proud to be known as God's people. In 44:3, Smith again sees eschatological implications. Noting the similarities between this verse and 41:17-20 and 43:19-21, Smith claims even that this restoration "has nothing to do with a return from exile."<sup>70</sup> It is important to consider here that though there is a coming return from exile, things just never return to the way they were for Israel before the exile. It seems, then, that there is a strong case for an eschatological reading of 44:3. Again, it is a stretch to say that this passage does not refer to a return from exile. There is an immediate implication of a return from exile for Israel and there are also eschatological implications of future salvation.

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<sup>66</sup> Brueggemann, 65.

<sup>67</sup> Oswalt, 165.

<sup>68</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, "יָשָׁר," 1:449.

<sup>69</sup> Smith, 219.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

Watts argues that 44:5 specifically refers to Jews in exile who have assimilated and have hidden in their new culture being glad to be known as God's again.<sup>71</sup> Likewise, Brueggemann notes, "Israel in exile will receive a clear, fresh identity as Yahweh's people."<sup>72</sup> In a general way, Oswalt claims this means that it will be an honor to be a member of God's people.<sup>73</sup> Paul makes a connection between the marking on their hands and ancient Near Eastern practices of having markings on one's hand to identify with a specific god. He claims that the blessings mentioned in vv. 3-4 "will induce individuals from other nationalities to want to worship the God of Israel and thereby become, in effect, part of the Israelite nation."<sup>74</sup> The end of v. 5 says that these people "will take the name Israel." This seems to imply that people who were once not a part of Israel will decide to be a part of Israel. Smith argues that the language used here makes the subject rather ambiguous. Thus, "the important thing emphasized is not the ethnic or religious background of these people; the central issue is what these people choose to become. The Spirit's transforming power will make them want to be identified with God and his righteous people."<sup>75</sup>

This passage appears, though, just after Isaiah 43 where Israel is confronted about their unfaithfulness. This shows that God's choosing of Israel has implications that go farther than Israel's sins. Even if Israel makes mistakes and is unfaithful, God has chosen to love them and to be faithful to them. "God has reminded the people that their sin has removed him from any obligation whatsoever to them; they cannot demand that he deliver. But that does not mean that

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<sup>71</sup> Watts, 687-688.

<sup>72</sup> Brueggemann, 65.

<sup>73</sup> Oswalt, 168.

<sup>74</sup> Paul, 228.

<sup>75</sup> Smith, 220.

God will not deliver; it means only that what he does is a free gift growing out of his own love.”<sup>76</sup> Another implication of being chosen by God that has already come up is that there is no reason to fear anything, because God cares for and protects his chosen ones. God’s election brings the pouring out of God’s Spirit. Also, being chosen by God is something to be proud of, not hidden.

### **Isaiah 49:1-7**

Between Isaiah 44 and 49, some common themes resurface. God’s people must recognize that no idols are worthy of being worshiped. God’s salvation is said to be coming soon for Israel. In Isaiah 47, God is referred to as Israel’s Holy One and redeemer and he will punish Babylon because of its wickedness. God declares in Isaiah 48 that he will not cut Israel off, but rather, he has refined Israel in a furnace of affliction. Again, God has called and redeemed Israel and they are to declare that to the end of the earth. Isaiah 49 is considered the second of the four Servant Songs, where God, as in Isaiah 42, calls his servant to be a light to the nations. Isaiah then prophesies of a future time when Israel will be restored from the exile in which they will find themselves in the sixth century BC.

From 49:1, there is a controversial issue in this passage: Who is the Servant? Oswalt argues against corporate Israel as the servant, here specifically because of the individual language used concerning being in the mother’s womb. Also, he notes that in chs. 40-48, excluding 42, the servant is clearly corporate Israel and they are not given any tasks, but will receive many benefits. The servant in ch. 49, though, has multiple tasks, but will not receive many benefits. Further, the emphasis shifts here “from the physical captivity of the Judeans to

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<sup>76</sup> Oswalt, 164.

the moral and spiritual captivity of Israel and the whole world.”<sup>77</sup> Childs leans in this direction as well. He claims that a single figure, not corporate Israel, is carrying the title and office of “my servant” and that “the metaphorical usage of a corporate entity [in ch. 49] seems to grow more and more strained.”<sup>78</sup> Childs does mention, though, that the individual in Isaiah 49 has not been named as God’s servant “to replace corporate Israel . . . but as a faithful embodiment of the nation Israel who has not performed its chosen role (48:1-2).”<sup>79</sup> Goldingay further emphasizes this point by claiming that a representative is called here to fulfill the mission of the people because they will not do it.<sup>80</sup> Given the strong evidence presented by Oswalt and Childs it seems that in Isaiah 49 the servant is an individual. It is not impossible to see the servant as an individual who will carry out the mission of Israel as a kind of representative of Israel. However, there does not seem to be much, if any, textual evidence to support this claim.

Regardless of how one views the Servant in this passage, the mission of the Servant shows up clearly in 49:1-7. Isaiah 49 begins with a call to the distant nations to listen. This could be an invitation to all people, or just to the dispersed Jews.<sup>81</sup> The Servant, the speaker in this passage, goes on to explain what God has done for him in calling him from the womb.<sup>82</sup> Paul makes a connection between this calling from the womb and an Akkadian phrase that “appears in [some] royal inscriptions describing the divine preordination of kings.”<sup>83</sup> Just as

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 287-289.

<sup>78</sup> Childs, 384.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 385.

<sup>80</sup> Goldingay, 282.

<sup>81</sup> Brueggemann, 110.

<sup>82</sup> Smith, 342.

<sup>83</sup> Paul, 324.



kings of the time believed they were called to be king long before they became king, the Servant in Isaiah 49 was called even from the womb. The Servant's mouth is said to be like a sharp sword. This probably does not point to engaging in literal war, but rather to speaking God's strong message. The Servant is also said to be a sharpened arrow, which refers specifically to the ability of God's message to pierce the very hearts of its recipients.<sup>84</sup> As both the sword and the arrow, the Servant has been hidden in God's hand/quiver. This has several implications. The weapons would be ready for use whenever needed, hidden from outside elements so that they will be useful, and hidden from sight until they are needed. This shows that the Servant will be prepared and effective for use, not just nonchalantly used without purpose.<sup>85</sup>

In 49:3, the Servant confirms that God has called him to the servant task. He goes on to say that the purpose in being a servant is that God will be glorified, which has been a common theme in these passages. The use of the term "Israel" in this verse, though, seems contrary to the earlier conclusion that the Servant in this passage is an individual. The Masoretic scribes inserted a pause in this verse after "you are my servant." This implies that "Israel" would go more fluidly with the second half of the verse. This would mean that "Israel . . ." would refer to the place (the land of Israel) or the people (the people of Israel) where God will glorify himself through the work of his Servant."<sup>86</sup> Oswalt notes, "it is the function, not the identity, of Israel that is emphasized. This Servant is going to function as Israel . . . . To be the means whereby the nations could come to God."<sup>87</sup> After confirming his calling, the Servant claims that he believes he has failed at his mission. This was contrary to the expectation of one who has been called by

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<sup>84</sup> Smith, 342-343.

<sup>85</sup> Oswalt, 290.

<sup>86</sup> Smith, 345-346.

<sup>87</sup> Oswalt, 291.

God! The Servant goes on, though, to say that he trusts in God. He says in v. 4b, “Yet what is due me is in the LORD’s hand, and my reward is with my God.” Even in his failings, the Servant will be used for God’s purposes. Goldingay notes, “God will bring fruit from the servant’s ministry.”<sup>88</sup>

In the next section, the Servant again reminds his audience that the LORD formed him in the womb to be a servant, with the purpose of gathering Israel back to God. The Servant has always “existed to do the will of God.”<sup>89</sup> At the end of 49:5, the Servant claims that God has been his strength. “He realizes that any human evaluation of past failures or successes is not really that important. All that matters is that the Servant will eventually be honored in the eyes of God because of what he accomplishes for God.”<sup>90</sup> The verse that follows is a quote from God. In 49:6, the task of bringing Israel back is too small a task. God tasks the Servant to be a light to the nations so that salvation can go to the ends of the earth. “God’s original plan always was to use the seed of Abram to bring his blessings on all the nations of the earth (Gen 12:3) . . . God’s desire was to greatly honor the Servant, so he gave him the tremendous responsibility of bringing God’s salvation to the ends of the earth.”<sup>91</sup> This points to the Servant’s being called to take God’s message to the whole world, not just Israel. This does not necessarily imply that the Servant’s calling as a light to the world goes against a call to Israel. Rather, being a light to the nations is the climax of the Servant’s calling from God.<sup>92</sup> Many people may point to an instrumental view of God’s election in this passage. Kaminsky, though, does not see that here

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<sup>88</sup> Goldingay, 282.

<sup>89</sup> Oswalt, 293.

<sup>90</sup> Smith, 347.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 348.

<sup>92</sup> Childs, 385.

because of the eschatological implications and because if Israel is elect, then by definition, they are distinct from those not chosen. He claims that Israel's election is not as special if everyone else can gain the same elect status, and thus, Israel's elect status is not being extended to the rest of the world.<sup>93</sup> These ideas from Kaminsky, though, seem to be more about the scope of election rather than the implications of election as intrinsic or instrumental. The implications of an instrumental relationship between God and Israel need to be discussed. It seems that the relationship is instrumental because God is calling Israel to a service, namely, to be a light. However, the flaw in viewing this as an instrumental relationship between God and Israel is in the interpretation of the Servant. As earlier stated, there is good evidence that the Servant in this passage is an individual, not corporate Israel. If that is the case, then it is possible that in this passage God has an intrinsic relationship with his people in his choosing of them. God could then choose individuals for specific services, like the Servant's calling as a light to the nations, which would be God's instrumental choosing. However, this is not the way that it has to be. It is still possible that God did indeed have an intrinsic *and* instrumental relationship with corporate Israel. In this passage, God has called his individual Servant for an instrumental purpose.

Isaiah 49:1-7 appropriately ends with a reminder that God is the Redeemer of Israel. Not only is he the Redeemer, he is also the Holy One of Israel. "He is able to redeem because of his transcendent power, and he wills to redeem because of his unearthly faithfulness and love."<sup>94</sup> Though he will face opposition, the Servant will be successful and those who hated him "will look at him and stand up, often a sign of respect (Job 29:8), and then falling prostrate they will bow down before him to honor him . . . . God's faithfulness and his firm determination to spread

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<sup>93</sup> Kaminsky, 154.

<sup>94</sup> Oswalt, 294.

salvation to the ends of the earth is [sic] the ultimate factor that this Servant and every servant of God can depend on.”<sup>95</sup> Further, this verse again emphasizes the chosen status of the Servant. Though he has been despised and abhorred, God has chosen him for his purposes. In the end, though, the Servant will be respected and God will be glorified.

To be chosen by God means to be equipped by God for his purposes. Also, being chosen by God implies a trusting confidence in God to continue his work, even when the one chosen feels as if he has failed at his task. God is able to make success out of what seems to be failure. Further, one who is chosen should trust God to be his strength. Lastly, “To be the chosen of God does not mean glory along the way, but it does mean glory at the end of the way.”<sup>96</sup>

### **Conclusion**

There is evidence, as Kaminsky argues, for seeing God’s relationship with Israel as intrinsic, with service as a natural outpouring of that relationship. However, there is also strong evidence for an instrumental relationship, as noted in the preceding discussions. Perhaps it is best to understand that sometimes in Scripture, there is tension and it may serve readers well to learn to live with the tension. Is God’s relationship to Israel intrinsic or instrumental? It is possible, even probable that the answer is both. Further, it may be the case that an intrinsic relationship with God and an instrumental relationship with God are inseparable. God chose the people of Israel because he loved them, but his expectation that they will serve him is intertwined with his love for them.

The status of the people of Israel as chosen by God was foundational for how they viewed God. There are several key implications of being chosen by God that are emphasized

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<sup>95</sup> Smith, 352.

<sup>96</sup> Oswalt, 295.

throughout these passages, especially those repeated in the passages. To be chosen by God means that there is no reason to fear. Even when those chosen fail, they should not fear because God's choosing of people goes deeper than their sins and shortcomings. Being chosen by God implies that one must trust God's sovereignty. God uses his chosen people for his special purposes and he equips his people for the tasks that he has for them. Some will say that this is the purpose of Israel's election. Others will claim that this is a result of Israel's election. Where one falls on that spectrum, though, does not change the fact that God does give his chosen people roles. Further, if Israel trusts God, they will be better fit to serve him, which will lead to bringing him honor and glory. Thus, "trust naturally leads to glorification."<sup>97</sup> Finally, God reminds Israel that they are chosen in these passages as a way of encouraging the people of Israel in their situation. "God has in mind a function for them: living evidence, witnesses, of his unique godhood. But that is not so much obligation as a simple fact of their existence."<sup>98</sup> Serving God is natural for his chosen people. Therefore, being God's chosen servant is the highest honor that Israel could ever have been given.

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<sup>97</sup> Smith, 79.

<sup>98</sup> Oswalt, 91.

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