

with all who are saved through the work of the Servant.

The emphasis of the passage is on what is to be done for the nations, and this could fit well with the idea suggested by the language of Isaiah 41:8-9, that the Servant is the nation of Israel. Yet a contrary suggestion flows naturally from the statement about the way the work is to be done (vv. 3-4), with its picture of gentle strength and confidence, quite contrary to the usual impression given by the nation of Israel or by the average Israelite. It is hard to reconcile this description with the idea that Israel is the Servant here described.

An Israelite reading this passage for the first time might well stagger in an attempt to comprehend it. In chapter 41 he learned that God had called his nation to do a great task. In this passage he learns that the task involves bringing justice and light to all the nations of the earth. He remembers how the mighty King David conquered the nations immediately north and east of Israel and established a sizable empire, bringing a measure of justice and light to quite a few nations. But even David's empire was small compared to the great empires of Egypt and Assyria. This picture goes far beyond what David accomplished. It includes even the distant "coastlands." Moreover, in Isaiah's time Israel was far weaker than it had been in David's time. The nation had been broken into two parts, and during Isaiah's lifetime the northern and larger portion was conquered and transported into captivity far across the desert. It would take a great exercise of imagination to think that the small nation of Israel could conquer the whole world, as David had conquered the nations in his area, and would be able by this means to bring justice and light to all people. Thus far, the problem of interpretation is already extremely difficult; but when the Israelite reads verses 2-3 and learns that all this is to be accomplished without calling out or even lifting the voice, with the gentleness and patience that are described in verse 3, and with the utter lack of hesitation or discouragement that verse 4 demands, he will surely throw up his hands and confess that he cannot understand how Israel can possibly fulfill these verses.