

**An Email Discussion Between Rabbi Yisroel C. Blumenthal and Dr. Michael L. Brown  
Focusing on Isaiah 40:1-52:12 as the Backdrop to 52:13-53:12**

The following exchange of letters (e-mails) took place between Dr. Brown and myself (Yisroel C. Blumenthal) from October 17 2018 thru November 11 2020.

This discussion is actually an extension of a video debate that took place between the two of us in 2017. The unidentified suffering servant of Isaiah 53 was one of the focal points of our debate. Dr. Brown insists that this servant is the Messiah to the exclusion of anyone else. My position is that the servant is primarily the righteous remnant of Israel.

We both agree that the 14 chapters that precede Isaiah 53 can help us identify the otherwise unidentified suffering servant of Isaiah 53. Dr. Brown presented what he believed to be an accurate rendition of those lead up chapters (40-52) together with the reasons he felt they supported his interpretation of 53. And I presented my understanding of the same chapters and why I felt that they support my position.

Our debate was followed by a series of written articles posted on our respective internet sites, and as can be understood, much of what we discussed focused on these “lead up” chapters that precede Isaiah 53.

I came to an agreement with Dr. Brown that we would discuss these chapters between the two of us. We also agreed that at some point in the future we would publicize our discussion for the benefit of the public. That time has now come.

The actual discussion (which followed our public exchange) began with an outline of these chapters presented by Dr. Brown on his “Line of Fire” radio show of October 10, 2018. We used this outline as the springboard for the discussion where I presented questions about his outline on each segment, Dr. Brown responded and that is how the discussion continued.

In the written rendition that you are about to read I formatted the discussion along the following lines. Each segment begins with Dr. Brown’s outline in bold lettering. My words are presented in italics and Dr. Brown’s words are in regular lettering. Since formatting is often lost in digital transmission I put an “M” (for Michael) before Dr. Brown’s words and a “Y” (for Yisroel) before my own words.

I hope that this discussion is not over. I intend to continue communicating with Dr. Brown and with others about these important passages. However, I believe that at this stage, the discussion has reached a point that the public can clearly see how each of us is reading these Scriptures. I trust that you will find this discussion helpful in your understanding of these chapters.

**M – Ya-hweh, the only true God will save sinful Israel in the sight of all the nations!**

**40:1-11 Words of comfort to captive Israel. God is coming to redeem her for the whole world to see!**

**40:12-26 The incomparable greatness of Israel's God (contrasted with the folly of idolatry in vv. 18-20)**

**40:27-31 The God of Israel gives strength to weary Israel**

*Y - Let me begin with two questions:*

*You entitled 40:1-11 as "God is coming to redeem Israel..." From your perspective, how does the revelation of God's glory (verses 5-10) tie in to the redemption of Israel?*

*You entitled 40:27-31 as God giving strength to weary Israel - does this mean that you accept that Israel is described as "those who hope to God?" (verse 31)*

M - First question: There are really two phases to these redemptive prophecies, the immediate, lesser fulfillment as Israel comes out of Babylonian captivity, and the later, greater fulfillment as Israel is redeemed from captivity (spiritual, possibly natural as well) at the end of the age.

In both cases God is glorified before the nations by acting publicly on behalf of His people's salvation and deliverance.

Second, in general, yes, captive Israel is hoping in God for deliverance from captivity. More specifically, though, I see this as a promise to those who truly are hoping in God. They will be renewed.

*Y - Thanks for your answers. I too read the prophet's words this way.*

*Here is my next question (if that's ok) - Would you take this a step further and put your two answers together to say that the redemption of Israel is associated with the revelation of God's glory precisely because they had been hoping to God? I see this in line with Isaiah 49:23; Psalm 69:34-35; 102:16-18?*

M - My answer is, broadly, yes and no. Yes because indeed, many are crying out for redemption and deliverance (although much of the world does not know that); I say no because we see throughout Isaiah that we are faithless, that we forget God, but He doesn't forget us. Isa 59 plays in here as well.

*Y - I understand that you could look at this from two different angles, my question is - what angle is Isaiah talking about? Both you and I agree that Isaiah 40:1-11 is describing Israel's redemption. How is "the glory of God revealed" or "behold your God" redemptive unless this is what they had been waiting for? How are these events a "comfort" for the nation unless the prophet is talking to those in Israel who do have some*

*level of hope to God as evidenced by the prophet's description of these same people as "those who hope to God" in 40:31 and 49:23? Do you believe that Isaiah (as in Isaiah 40:5) was talking about something different than the Psalmist (as in Psalm 102:16,17)?*

M - I was just looking at the verses in your email more carefully, now that my day has finally slowed down.

First, again, God's glory is displayed because He is a covenant keeping God who reaches out to save His people in the sight of the nations, just as He did in the exodus. It is not their hope or faithfulness that brings Him that glory; it is His saving actions.

Second, comfort is real to those in despair as well as to those in hopeful expectation. We see this in the exodus account as well. Surely, many of the people were not in active faith for deliverance, and plenty were distant from the Lord.

Third, I agree that there was always a remnant that hoped and waited, as reflected in the Psalms (although the language there could be more generic). I simply don't see your point as a major emphasis in Isaiah when it relates to God being glorified. Can you at least understand why I view the text like that?

*Y - If you read the text assuming that the people being comforted are not hoping to God - you would have to assume (and correct me if I am wrong) that when it says "the glory of God is revealed" or "behold your God" it means that God acted on behalf of Israel in a way that is meaningful to people who care nothing about God and yet in the context of describing the comfort being brought to these people the prophet spends more time describing the glory of God revealed than he does describing the physical salvation that is actually going to comfort these people. Is that how you are reading this passage?*

*Another related question - why does Israel care that this salvation is being done to the eyes of the nations? Why is this such an important part of the comfort that it makes it in to your brief title for the entire section of Isaiah?*

*As it relates to the exodus - I don't see the people being comforted with the promise of the revelation of God's glory or with the words "behold your God". The primary promise is the physical redemption (Exodus 3:16; 6:6).*

M - First, the greatest theme of these chapters is the glory of God. This is more about Him than it is about us. That's why the emphasis is what it is. This answers another question you ask re: why this should matter to Israel. Again, it is primarily about God's exaltation before the whole world, not primarily about why this would matter to Israel.

Second, there are different levels of hoping in/waiting for God. Godly people can do it; irreligious people can do it. In other words, just like a non-religious family might pray for a

dying child to be healed, so also captives in Babylon (including the irreligious) could hope for God's deliverance. But still, I have always said there was a seeking, believing remnant, and they would be the first to hear this words in faith. Let's also remember that the polemic against idols in these chapters is so strong because deaf and blind Israel was still guilty of idolatry. God was about to shake that loose, hence the calls to look and see what God is doing and to compare that to the idols.

And, once again, I see no emphasis at all that God would be glorified in the eyes of the nations because His people were waiting for Him. It is His actions that bring Him glory -- actions, which Ezek 36 reminds us -- were because His name was being defiled by His sinful people being in exile. So, He acted for the sake of His holy name.

*Y - First of all, a point from your previous e-mail. Isaiah 49:23 describes the knowledge that is accomplished through the redemption as "you will know that those who hope to Me will not be shamed" - this knowledge can only come about with people hoping to God. So it is their hope that brings Him glory, this aspect of His glory cannot be revealed without the participation of people hoping to Him.*

*Getting back to your most recent e-mail - The following are your words describing Isaiah 40:1-11- "Words of comfort to captive Israel. God is coming to redeem her for the whole world to see!" So are these "words of comfort" or are they words that describe what God is going to do for His own glory which in a backhanded way will benefit rebellious Israel?*

*You speak of different levels of hoping to God - my question is simply - what level of people is Isaiah talking about?*

*And what makes you say that the blindness and deafness attributed to Israel represents idolatry? 42:16 and 17 tell us that the blind will be saved while those who hoped to idols will be put to shame - the blind*

*and those who hoped to idols are two different groups, they are clearly not one and the same.*

*You imply that Israel doesn't care that God is exalted to the eyes of the nation - so why then do you entitle 45:16-25 as ... public "vindication" of Israel - doesn't "vindication" mean "proven right"? How is Israel "proven right"?*

M - We seem to be missing each other to some degree. I have no argument that God will be glorified in the eyes of His people who hope for Him. Of course! But that's not the principle message to the nations of the world. They will see that Israel's God is THE GOD when He delivers them from bondage and captivity and sin.

As for the words of comfort, yes, they are just that: Words of comfort to captive, suffering Israel. Nothing backhanded here at all. But, as explained in Ezek 36 as well as in Isa 52:5, the Lord acted first and foremost because His name was being blasphemed because of His people's exile and they would know His name principally because of His actions.

As for the level of hope, those most comforted and those who most see God's glory in Israel are the certainly the righteous remnant, addressed here and there in Isaiah (with specific mention at the end of Isa 6 and in the name Shear Jashub in Isa 7, which becomes paradigmatic for the book).

As for vindication, I'll examine that word again in context and decide if it's the best to use. But yes, the world will see that, despite our sin and disobedience, we are God's people. Similarly, the restoration of modern Israel, largely through the agency of atheists and communists and non-religious Jews, vindicates Israel in the eyes of many, who now recognize that God did not forsake His ancient people and the promises remain true -- despite our sin.

Finally, re: blind, that's a fair question. I'll check every relevant reference and respond.

Thanks for the interaction. It appears that, once again, my greater emphasis is on God the Savior while yours is on Israel's faithfulness.

*Y - In the very first paragraph of your most recent e-mail you write that the principle message for the nations is that Israel's God is THE GOD.*

*I couldn't agree more. In that first segment (40:1-11) God is described as Israel's God (your God, our God) 4 times. Do you see this connection between Israel and God as a fundamental aspect of what is happening? In what way is God "Israel's God"? Does this tie in to the comfort and vindication of Israel? Would you not agree that the point of these passages is that the God that Israel identifies as God is the only true power? And that this truth will be demonstrated to the eyes of those who worshiped idols?*

*I disagree with the last line of your most recent e-mail. You are trying to cut Israel out of any positive role in God's plan while I am trying to point out by doing so you are missing the spirit and the letter of these passages.*

M - Yes, I agree with you in terms of THE GOD being Israel's God. Absolutely.

Re: my last point, with which you differ, it's a matter of emphasis. I see Israel as bound and needy, with only a remnant really serving the Lord, reaching her national destiny through the Messiah, at which time God's glory ultimately shines for the world to see.

So, Israel has a positive role, first through the Messiah, second through the righteous remnant, and third, as a sign nation in repentance at the end of the age.

You see Israel as having a much more positive and active role, to the point I asked you in our Isaiah 53 article exchange why Israel even needed a Messiah.

*Y - I would like to save our assessments of each other's interpretation for later if that is ok with you. For now I will go back and ask you if you understand that we are talking about an idol-worshipping people and the revelation of God's glory is of no interest to them - why would you*

*entitle the section (40:1-11) as "words of comfort"? Wouldn't a better title be "God promises to reveal His glory and redeem Israel" or something like that?*

*Another question - in the third section (40:27-31) do you see any significance in the fact that God is described as One who does not get weary and those who hope to Him are described in similar terms while those who do not hope to Him are describes as getting weary? And if yes - what is the significance?*

M - That's fine with me re: saving our assessments.

Re: my description, God's mercy is great, and comforts both His faithful people and His unfaithful people. He will deliver them both from exile and captivity. And comfort is comfort, whether you are loyal or disloyal. Either way, God was promising an end to suffering. Also, as I've stated repeatedly, and as many texts would indicate, the people were a mixture -- the YHWH worshipers and the idolaters.

Re: 40:27-31, first, the Lord is addressing those who are feeling forsaken by God -- so, they believe in Him but think He has abandoned them. Second, in the normal course of life and suffering, even the young will wear out and fail. Not so those who trust in Him! It is an invitation and a promise.

*Y - Thanks for your answers, I am going to probe some more. Comfort (or console) in this context is a matter of pointing to certain concepts or truths. For some people you would point to one set of concepts in order to comfort them while to others you would point to a different set of concepts. Let us look at two Jews who were exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon. One cares nothing about God and is still worshiping idols but is very upset that he was uprooted from his home while the other is deeply disturbed by the fact that God's presence is no longer manifest in Israel in an open way. If you were called to console and comfort these two people and tell them that their suffering is going to end you would point to different concepts to ease the pain of these different people. For the first one you will emphasize the return to his home while to the second you would emphasize the reconnection with God.*

*Isaiah's words would seem to be focused on the second group of people more than the first. Or to word this differently, if you have a passage about the revelation of God's glory entitled "console console My people" -- you get the impression that we are dealing with people who care about the revelation of God's glory.*

*Since you acknowledge that such people exist within the nation, and you also acknowledge that sometimes the prophet refers to these people as "the nation" (as opposed to a lonely group of individuals - such as in 51:7) why then is it so difficult for you to accept that this section of Isaiah (40:1-11) is primarily addressing those people? Don't you accept that 40:27-31 is focused on people who hope to God in a deeper way? Yet they are being addressed with the generic*

*"Jacob" "Israel" - wouldn't it follow that 40:1-11 is addressing the same group that is being addressed in 40:27-31?*

*As for my second question - It seems that I was not clear - Let me try again, Do you see any significance in the fact that God is described with the same words that are used to describe the strength He gives to those who hope to Him? (i.e. not weary)*

M - Thanks for taking the time to articulate further. Before I respond again, please let me know where in my outline you found me emphasizing that Isaiah was focused on blind and idolatrous Israel. I had simply written this:

40:1-11 Words of comfort to captive Israel. God is coming to redeem her for the whole world to see!

40:12-26 The incomparable greatness of Israel's God (contrasted with the folly of idolatry in vv. 18-20)

40:27-31 The God of Israel gives strength to weary Israel

*Y - Of-course in your outline you wrote what you wrote. My entire point is that the title that you gave for the first segment - and you gave that title because the text pretty much gives it that title - would give us to understand that there is a connection between Israel's hope in God and the redemption. Not in the sense of merit (as in - we "merit" redemption because we hope to God) but rather in the sense of vindication and answered prayer (as in - this is what we were hoping for). The title you gave would not be appropriate for the given text (40:1-11) if the prophet was primarily focused on idolatrous Israel who cares nothing about God. That is what I am driving at here.*

M - I find quite a gap between comfort and vindication, the latter speaking on some level of merit. In some cases, they could go hand in hand, but they need not do so. Ezek 36:13-32 makes explicit that it is God's name which will be vindicated as He redeems sinning Israel, and it is His reputation, not His people's, to which attention will be drawn.

In honesty, I consistently find you understating this, all the way back to your treatment of Isa 53 in Contra Brown. So yes, this is a fundamental point of difference between us as we read the texts.

*Y - So do you believe that the prophets never spoke of the redemption in the sense of vindication of Israel's faith (again, not in the sense of merit, but in the sense of - this was the right place to put our faith despite the fact that our enemies were telling us to put our faith elsewhere) and in the sense of an answer to their prayer?*

*If this is your position then I would ask you to explain the closing verses in Psalm 69; Psalm 97:7,8; 102:16-21; Micah 7:7-17.*

*I would assume that you agree that there are faithful in Israel whose faith will be vindicated at the time of the redemption and that is what these passages are talking about while Ezekiel was talking about those in Israel who are steeped so deeply in sin that the redemption is an embarrassment to them. (There are other ways of reconciling Ezekiel and these passages - but this is the simplest way.) The question is simply - what was Isaiah focused on? Was he looking from Ezekiel's angle or from Micah's angle? Or both (which I believe to be the correct answer - but most of 40-52 fits in with Micah's angle better than with Ezekiel) Quoting Ezekiel has no bearing on the discussion because we are not discussing Ezekiel we are discussing Isaiah.*

*And by the way, you did not answer my last two questions can you please share your perspective?*

M - No, I am not saying the prophets never spoke of redemption as vindication. I am saying that this is not the theme of Isaiah 40.

It begins by addressing downtrodden and forsaken Judah and Jerusalem which have suffered for their sins. But they will be inhabited again! God will have mercy. The judgment is past and it's time for comfort.

Then, in the middle of the chapter there's a polemic against idolatry. Is that only for the nations, or also for the people of Judah?

As for the promises at the end, they are an encouragement to the people of God to look to Him rather than a statement that they have been righteous.

As for reading Ezekiel, the same Spirit inspired both prophets, and the words of Ezekiel are in harmony with other prophetic messages in Tanakh, including Isaiah's.

As for unanswered questions, I must be missing one, since I only see this unanswered in our thread: "Do you see any significance in the fact that God is described with the same words that are used to describe the strength He gives to those who hope to Him? (i.e. not weary)?" My answer is not particularly, since we are encouraged elsewhere to find our strength in Him -- in other words, we take on His strength.

What do you feel the significance is?

*Y - Before I start let us get on the same page. When I say "vindication" I do not mean "a statement that they have been righteous." I mean "vindication" in the sense of "that what they had been hoping for has come about."*

*I see verses 1-11 as God promising to reveal His glory for the whole world to see and that He will do this for the comfort and consolation of Israel. This makes sense to me if we assume that*

*the people that are being comforted care about the revelation of God's glory. If they care nothing about the revelation of God's glory and the entire comfort is the reassurance that they will be physically redeemed, then the words of the prophet in verses 3 thru 9 don't fit under the heading provided in verses 1 and 2.*

*Furthermore, if this is a people who care nothing about the revelation of God's glory, then the polemic against idolatry is completely incidental to the comfort of the people, which would be strange.*

*Finally, the closing verses (27-31) of this chapter are clearly talking to people who hope to God, why not accept that the whole chapter is addressing the same group of people? That way the chapter is not 3 disjointed units but rather one unit of comfort for people who are reassured when they hear about the greatness of God and folly of idolatry because this is what they are hoping for.*

*So I see the polemic against idolatry (12-26) as part of the encouragement to the people who had been hoping to Him, reminding them and making clear to them that their hope is in the right place. We all need to be reminded constantly that God is the only power.*

*And, yes, that (the question about "weary") was the question I was referring to. I see it as you see it, and as quite significant because the prophet is giving us to understand that God gives of His strength ("not weary") to those who hope to Him. Which is the theme of the chapter, the vindication of His eternal truth is the vindication of those who have been hoping for that truth and for the revelation of His glory.*

*As it relates to Ezekiel - do you not acknowledge that Ezekiel and Micah/Psalmist - who were all inspired by the same spirit - are illuminating the same redemption from different angles? Why are you insisting that Isaiah is talking from the angle of Ezekiel and NOT from the angle of Micah and the Psalmist? Do you have any evidence from the text of chapter 40 that Isaiah is talking from the same angle as Ezekiel as opposed to Micah and the Psalmist?*

*2 more questions. If Israel is still sinning in exile in the same way and to the same degree that they had been sinning in the land - how then has their sin been appeased? They are still sinning!*

*And in verse 27 - what is it that Israel feels that God is not properly considering?*

M - Again, my description in the outline is accurate -- I meant it simply to be descriptive and not interpretive. I just want to reiterate that. As for your definition of "vindication," on a certain level, you need to explain what you mean, which to me suggests that it's not the best word to use. But, to repeat, I do not find that theme in Isa 40, and I've still to hear how you see it explicitly in the text.

As for who is being addressed from v. 1, the text tells us: the desolate cities of Judah, foremost Jerusalem who had been judged because of their sin. Were there people among them who were

trusting in God? Surely. Were others still in sin? Surely. But you don't seem to consider the possibility that God acting redemptively for them is the very thing that will awaken the sinners. His mercy and grandeur can bring us to repentance as well. Do you not allow for this in the text?

As for the polemic against idolatry, do you really need to make this point if the people being addressed are all faithful worshipers? Isn't it a little overkill, to say the least? You say we all need to be reminded that God is the only power, but the polemic against idolatry lessens in later, post-exilic Jewish literature, as it appears there was less outward idolatry. Why does the theme occur so often in these chapters in Isaiah? And why are there so many rebukes of sinning Israel in these chapters?

As for the final verses addressing people who hope in God, I already noted that this could be a promise and an encouragement. In other words, it's urging people to put their hope in God, not necessarily saying they were all already doing so. Once more, I could accept that the whole chapter is addressing the righteous remnant if the text said so. I don't see clear indicators of that, so I don't state it my outline. In my view, if you added anything about "vindication" in your outline, you would have to read it in.

As far as Ezekiel, etc., yes, the same Spirit inspired the different authors, and they sometimes addressed the same audience, sometimes different audiences, or sometimes they brought different messages to the same audience. I believe the overall tenor of Isa 40-55 is in harmony with Ezek 36. It was NOT repentance that brought us back from Babylon; it was the mercy of God and jealousy for His glory.

As for how Judah's sin was appeased, it was by suffering in exile. In Lev 26, God promised a seven-fold punishment for our sin but here we received only double -- so, still, great mercy from the Lord. But who said we were sinning the exact same way and to the same degree? When I did say those words? Clearly, we suffered because of our sins -- a great theme to remember when we get to Isa 53, especially based on your view that this is the righteous being addressed -- and it could be because of the prayers for mercy of the righteous, like Daniel in Dan 9 -- that helped bring us back home.

As for v. 27, we are not told explicitly the answer to your question, but we could argue that Israel feels forever forsaken by the Lord, which He said He would never do or that some have repented, because of which they are appealing their cause to heaven? But again, it is totally clear from other verses, both in Isa 40-55 and in other prophetic books, that we were not delivered from exile because of our repentance or righteousness.

My last point here. I know you're pushing me to see something because of a larger "vindication" theme you feel unfolds in these chapters, but I'm convinced you're reading your view into the text and it's simply not here -- at least, not in this chapter. Put the emphasis where it belongs: the glory of God being revealed before the nations as He redeems His people, proving Himself to be the one and only God.

*Y - Again, we are not on the same page. I did not say a word about repentance and certainly not about repentance being the cause of redemption described here in Isaiah.*

*I accept that your description in the outline (about these verses) is accurate because it reflects what the text says - it speaks of comforting Israel and about their redemption. So I am not arguing about your description in the outline - I am arguing that your description in the outline betrays the fact that your read on the text is not in line with your theology (just to remind you, you used the word "vindication") I understand that as you read the text and wrote the outline, in some instances, the text got the better of you and that is what I am trying to demonstrate.*

*Yes, the text addresses Judah/Jerusalem - but who in Judah/Jerusalem? is this the people described in 51:7 and in Psalm 102? or is it the people described in Ezekiel 36? (or assuming these are the same people but from two different viewpoints - which viewpoint is Isaiah addressing?)*

*I have no problem with the idea that God's redemption will awaken the sinners - but here God is talking to people before the redemption telling them that the redemption is coming and the passage is entitled "comfort" although the thrust of the passage is the revelation of God's glory and not the physical redemption of the people.*

*As for your "overkill" question. - If this is "overkill" then what do you say to the book of Deuteronomy which is speaking to people who have seen all the miracles - what is it telling them that they don't know when Moses constantly reminds them of God's power and greatness? What about the book of Psalms where David is constantly reminding himself of God's greatness? Were these people idol-worshippers that needed to be reminded to worship God?*

*The reason the theme appears so much in these chapters in Isaiah is precisely because the entire thrust of the redemption is that idolatry will be proven to be false and the truth of God's absolute power will be revealed to all. That is what the redemption is all about.*

*I also explained in my original outline why these chapters speak of Israel's sin - the context is explaining that the redemption has not been delayed because of God's powerlessness but because of Israel's sin.*

*I think that your insistence that the revelation of God's glory is NOT the thing that is bringing comfort to Israel is not the text talking to you but your theology. But I am ready to move on.*

*The way I would have written the outline (had I been using your style) is - 40:1-11 "Words of comfort to captive Israel. God is going to reveal His glory for the whole world to see!" - don't you agree that this would be a more accurate description of what the text is saying?*

*As for your thought that the tenor of Isaiah 40-55 is the same as Ezekiel 36 - again, this is not the text talking to you, this is your theology. There is so much about vindication explicitly in the text*

*of Isaiah and nothing about Israel's shame in these chapters - but let's continue to study these chapters together and see what we can learn.*

*Let me move on to your answers to my questions. The text clearly says that the suffering is what brought about the appeasement, not our repentance or our righteousness, but our suffering. To me this only makes sense in light of Isaiah's prophecy that the suffering is a refining process (1:25; 48:10). I understand this in a twofold sense, that the worst sinners will be destroyed and that the suffering will force Israel to see the truth. So as Israel moves toward the redemption there is less sin - not more righteousness - just less idolatry and open rebellion. I don't see how the sin can be appeased through suffering if they are still worshiping idols as they were in the land before they were exiled.*

*However you explain verse 27 - you will need to explain how verses 28-31 are a response to what the people had been saying and an explanation as to why they shouldn't be saying that. My understanding is that they are saying something similar to what is expressed in 49:4 and the response is that God is with them and He will not falter and that their cause will ultimately prevail. I believe that the response to verse 27 goes all the way to 41:16.*

M - OK, so you agree my outline reflected what the text said. And I can tell you that I base my theology on Isaiah, so how can the text contradict my theology? Perhaps it contradicts your understanding of my theology, but nothing in my outline challenged my view of the chapters, since I base my theology on what the chapters say. Ironically, as I keep trying to figure out why and how you're making your points, I can only say, "He's obviously reading his theology into the text." So,

As for the audience, God is speaking to His people corporately, and they are a mixture.

Regarding the warnings concerning idolatry, they were quite relevant to the Israelites, who rebelled as a whole generation against the Lord in the wilderness. They were therefore quite relevant to Isaiah's audience as well.

And I have NOT said that the revelation of God's glory brings comfort to Israel, as you state, but rather that is not the main (or, certainly, not the only) message of the chapter. Start in v. 1, which makes clear that the comfort is first and foremost deliverance and redemption.

Re: the appeasement coming through suffering, we agree. Yet, for the second (or third?) time you argue against something I never said, namely, that Israel's sin was the same throughout. I explicitly said that I never stated this, which makes me wonder if you're reading my emails for what I'm actually or reading them through what you think I believe. (I'm not frustrated; I am a little baffled.) I believe what you wrote re: suffering and the lessening of rebellion to some degree.

Re: your suggested outline, I wrote, "Words of comfort to captive Israel. God is coming to redeem her for the whole world to see!" You said you would prefer, "Words of comfort to captive Israel. God is going to reveal His glory for the whole world to see!" I could go either way, since He reveals His glory by redeeming her. But sure, your wording is fine as well.

*Y - I thought we were done with 40 but in this most recent e-mail you wrote - "Start in v. 1, which makes clear that the comfort is first and foremost deliverance and redemption." - Where in verse 1 do you see anything about the content or composition of the comfort?*

M - Who is addressed in the opening verses of the chapter? Jerusalem, which surely includes its inhabitants, who had been judged for sin, and who were described decades earlier in Jer 24. The comfort given is clear: Your time of suffering is coming to an end! It seems quite obvious and straightforward.

Also, reflecting again on Isa 40:27ff., you can make a good case for the closing verses to be more exhortation than anything else. In other words, "Israel, you complain that your way is hidden from God and that He has forgotten your cause. But if only you would look to Him! You would be supernaturally renewed."

*Y - So for you all the prophet has to say to mean that the comfort is "first and foremost" the physical redemption of Israel - is the word "Jerusalem." The way I determine the "first and foremost" of the content of the comfort is the fact that the prophet spent the next 7 verses speaking of the revelation of God's glory and only afterward did he spend 2 verses to speak of Israel's physical redemption.*

*I am satisfied to leave this part of the conversation here.*

*Another question for you - verse 3 (in chapter 40) speaks about a path "for God" do you believe that God walks on this path alone?*

*I see how you now read verse 27 - This is not what you first thought when you read the text because you wouldn't have entitled that segment "The God of Israel gives strength to weary Israel" – you would have written God exhorts Israel to trust in Him and find strength - this is what I meant when I said that the text got the better of you.*

M - No, the prophet tells us what the comfort is: No more suffering for your sins!! Be comforted! Then, the announcement of God's glorious acts.

And implicit in the text is a call for repentance in the call to clear a path for God to come and visit His people. As for your question, God leads His people out in the newly formed paths as He brings them back from exile.

Re: Isa 40:28-31, for decades I have read these verses as both a promise and an invitation. In an outline, you write the simplest description of the text, which is a promise. But I always saw an invitation here as well and preached it as such for decades.

In any case, I'm still waiting for the text to get the better of you, although I lose some hope when I see your overriding, Israel-exalting presuppositions (in my opinion) driving your reading of the text.

*Y - Do you believe that verse 2 is addressing Jerusalem? My understanding is that the words of comfort begin in verse 3 and verse 2 is God explaining to those who will be comforting Israel why it is that He is doing so (comforting Israel) but the words that are to be addressed to Jerusalem only begin in verse 3 - do you agree or disagree?*

*I agree with you that God does not walk by Himself on the path, He brings the exiles with Him. Question, do you see any significance in the fact that the exiles are only explicitly mentioned later in the passage and not here?*

M - As far as I can tell, there's overlap between Jerusalem and "My people" in these verses, so both are being addressed. If you see a distinction, please explain.

As for the significance of the exiles not being mentioned until later, no, I don't see it. First, the desolate city and suffering people are addressed, next all attention is pointed to the Lord, then to His acts of deliverance as His people are called on to repent.

*Y - I too see "My nation" of verse 1 and "Jerusalem" of verse 2 as synonymous - but they are not being addressed in these 2 verses. Verses 1 and 2 are encouraging an unidentified group of people (the prophets, the righteous, or the leaders/spokesmen) to comfort Jerusalem/My people. And the words that this group of people are to say to Jerusalem/My people only begin in verse 3.*

*How do you read verse 1 and 2 with the understanding that "Jerusalem/My people" is being addressed in these verses? Verse 2 clearly commands someone (plural) to speak to Jerusalem - this someone is not Jerusalem. Am I missing something?*

M - Oh, that clarifies things! I thought you meant who was to be comforted, not who was doing the comforting.

*Y - OK - so now that we are on the same page do you acknowledge that the first words of comfort (from verse 3 through verse 9) do not mention an end to Israel's physical suffering? On what basis then do you say that the comfort is "first and foremost" deliverance and redemption?*

M - So, you mean the first words of comfort after saying how the people are to be comforted in vv. 1-2, which DO include the reference to deliverance from suffering? Yes, I agree. The

foundation has been laid, speaking of this end of suffering and exile; now all attention is put on the Lord, with a call to the people to prepare the way.

*Y - So you are ok with the idea that 7 verses out of 9 - that are supposed to be "words of comfort" are only indirectly comforting the people that these words are meant to comfort - because according to your understanding the fact that God's glory is revealed is not of interest to Jerusalem - they would be just as happy if their physical suffering ended without God's glory being revealed - Is this your understanding? I am just checking that I understood you correctly - I am ready to move on (if you are).*

M - I want to believe you're genuinely trying to understand me, but you keep overstating or misstating my view. First, there is a godly remnant among the people. Second, even the idol worshipers were presumably syncretists, so they would still have a belief in YHWH. Third, all would presumably be comforted by the idea of God rising on their behalf. But note also that there is an implicit call to repentance in these verses as well: make the way clear for God!

*Y - Can you please tell me what the word "syncretist" means? And I agree wholeheartedly that there is an underlying theme of a call to repentance in these passages.*

M - Syncretist is merging two different faiths/ideas together. So, in this case, worshipping YHWH along with other deities, or worshipping YHWH in a paganized form.

*Y - I am trying to understand - You acknowledge that there is an element of vindicated trust in the prophet's words here – it's just that you disagree with me as to how prominent that this vindication is?*

M - Yes, I would agree with that.

**41:1-7 The Lord raises up a ruler from the east to the terror of the (idol worshiping) nations**

**41:8-16 God will help servant Israel to the consternation of the nations**

*Y - I am ready to move on to chapter 41 (If you have more to say about 40 - I am more than happy to hear) - so here is my question for chapter 41.*

*Verses 11 and 12 speak of the embarrassment of those who contend with Israel. Who is getting embarrassed and why will they be embarrassed?*

*Does this have anything to do with Micah 7:10?*

M - Having said this, though, let's move on to Isa 41, but to repeat, I do not believe you demonstrated that anything was wrong with my outline or that your position is supported by the text.

Re: Isa 41, it is Israel's enemies who will be embarrassed -- the pagan, idol-worshiping nations -- who thought that their God was powerless or that He had forsaken His people. Not the case! As for whether they're the same enemies as in Mic. 7:10, that's possible, but we don't have context to say.

*Y - As it relates to 41 - You say the enemies of Israel are those who say that here God is powerless and/or that God has abandoned her (I agree).*

*My question to you is - what was Israel thinking? Did Israel believe that her God is powerful and that He hasn't abandoned her?*

M - As to what Israel was thinking, yes, as the following chapters indicate, many had forgotten the Lord, many were spiritually blind and deaf, and certainly some felt forsaken forever. I believe there were others who held on in faith as well. Some chapters address both, some; one more than the other.

*Y - My question about what Israel was thinking was specifically about Isaiah 41:11 - do you believe that this verse is addressing all of Israel? Even those who are as steeped in idolatry as are the nations that persecuted them?*

*What was the conflict and contention between Israel and her enemies that the prophet was referring to in this verse (41:11)?*

M - Re: Isa 41:11, it appears to be a promise to the righteous remnant, based on the preceding verses, but it could still refer to the nation as a whole, based on God's calling and grace. What's clear from text after text is that we are vindicated and rewarded for God's glory, not because of our goodness.

As for the conflict in 41:11, the text doesn't tell us explicitly, but we know that we were hated by other nations -- which was hardly uncommon in the ancient world. I'm happy to respond to whatever you find clearly laid out in the chapter.

*Y - How do you understand the mountains and hills being crushed in verse 15? Do you see these representative of physical opponents or of spiritual opponents? (or both or neither)*

M - I see the mountains and hills as most likely referring to physical opponents -- the nations that hurt our people and mocked our people (which often including mockery of our God) -- although spiritual opponents can possibly be included, just as the gods of Egypt were also judged (and we have passages like Isa 47 here). But primarily, I take this as judgment on the nations when God delivers His people, hence my outline description.

**41:17-20 The Lord will care for thirsty Israel in the wilderness**

**41:21-29 A call to the nations and their gods to predict the future in contrast with the Lord and His declarations**

## **42:1-9 The Lord's servant will bring justice to the nations and will set the captives free**

*Y - A question on 42 - in your outline you put a break between verse 8 and 9*

*- I could understand a break between 7 and 8 or between 9 and 10 but I don't understand how you see a break between 8 and 9. I see 42:9 reflecting 41:21-29 which you described as a call to the nations and their gods to attempt to predict the future (I agree with your description) - and here in 42:9 God is declaring that He predicts the future which would connect it with verse 8 which speaks of God's exclusive glory - so again - I could see this unit of verses 8 and 9 appended to the previous unit or to the later unit but I don't see why you would split verse 8 from 9 - what was your reasoning?*

M - Re: Isa 42, I should have put the break at v. 10 based on my reading of the passage. Not sure why I made the mistake, but it's totally clear the break is not where I put it. Apparently just a mental error in looking at the numbers. So, I changed to 42:1-9, then 42:10-25.

*Y - Here is my next question - Looking at the big picture of 41:21 through 42:9 - would you agree that an underlying theme is that God is challenging the idols (indirectly addressing the worshipers) - asking them - what foreknowledge or benefit do the idols bestow upon those who worship them - and contrasting that emptiness with the power and foreknowledge that He grants to His servant(s)?*

M - Yes, of course, that's what 42:9 is saying, a repeated theme in these chapter. I would just emphasize differently, saying the contrast is between God's foreknowledge and that of the idols. But we know of that foreknowledge because He shares it with His servants, the prophets. But the emphasis is on God's foreknowledge.

## **42:10-25 The Lord will arise and deliver His blind, (idol-worshipping)/(disobedient) servant Israel**

*Y - Again, we don't seem to be that far apart on this one - Here is the next question - In your title of 42:10-25 you describe Israel as "idol-worshipping" - a) where do you see that in the text? b) as I pointed out, blind Israel is contrasted over and against those who trust in idols, the former is redeemed the latter is put to shame (42:16,17) and c) Isaiah 65:11,12 would seem to say that those Jews who were idol-worshippers will not be redeemed Would you reconsider your description or can you explain why you chose that description?*

M - To help me better respond, in what way is Israel blind? Why is the servant called deaf and blind -- it is clearly not meant as a compliment?

Of course I'm open to reconsider my outline, so your answer will help me re-read the relevant texts.

*Y - I could read the blindness several ways. 42:19 would seem to imply that the more one is a servant of the Lord the more blind he is. One way of reading this (the Malbim goes in this direction) is that the blindness refers to disobedience but we can only call someone blind if he has the ability to see - Israel, who was granted so much spiritual blessing from God is capable of so much more spiritual goodness, only their disobedience can be called "blind/deaf) because they have the spiritual eyes and ears but do not use them. They could be trusting in God with so much more confidence - yet they still worry and despair.*

*It could be read as general spiritual disobedience - but then we would have a problem with 42:19 It could be read as physical suffering and weakness as in 35:5 - see 33:23 It could be read as a compliment - Israel is blind to the flash and dazzle of the powers of the world - as in 50:10 I could go with any of these or even a combination of any of these - they are not that far apart from each other as they may seem at first glance.*

M - For many years, when reading these chapters, I assumed that the constant polemic against idolatry was more of a proclamation to the pagan nations that God alone was God. More recently, upon deeper reflection, I realized that, at least to some extent, part of the polemic was also addressed to idol-worshipping Jews. Then, that naturally tied in with the concept of spiritual blindness, since our people were often rebuked and corrected in these chapters as well.

That being said, I'm going to analyze afresh all the references to being blind and deaf, then respond to your questions. It may take a few days to do this satisfactorily and fairly, since I have to refocus, so to say, and read things as if I never read them before.

Quick update: The more I re-read the text, the more I differ with your view that the blind cannot be idolaters. If I don't write before Shabbat, hopefully you'll have something waiting for you after.

*Y - I appreciate the seriousness with which you approach our discussion and I appreciate that serious study takes serious time - so please take your time. I will allow myself to throw in a thought which you might (or might not) find helpful.*

*The same words that console and comfort one element of the nation can serve as a rebuke and an encouragement to repent to another segment of the population. The direct audience of Isaiah are the righteous and those who are not so righteous but are not deeply invested in idolatry - in other words people who consider the God of Israel their God - He is the One they turn to when they get stuck. For these people the words of Isaiah are direct words of comfort (and sometimes rebuke). However, there is a third group of people - those who are deeply invested in idolatry. Isaiah is not directly addressing this group - this group is not consoled when they hear how the idol-worshippers are embarrassed and confounded. But this group can hear the conversation between God and the rest of the nation and these words inspire them and draw them to be a part of the consolation. So the direct audience - the ones being consoled are people who have some minimal level of loyalty to God and the indirect audience are those who don't but will hopefully*

*be inspired by the words of consolation to repent and rejoin the nation to whom God speaks such wonderful words of consolation.*

*Just a thought - I hope you find it helpful.*

M - A very helpful thought (which actually ties in with the short "update" note) I just sent. And on a certain level, I concur with your approach here, especially about "overhearing" a conversation.

I just realized today that with the busyness of travel and ministry, I failed to respond to your questions, which I'll repeat here: You wrote: "In your title of 42:10-25 you describe Israel as "idol-worshipping" - a) where do you see that in the text? b) as I pointed out, blind Israel is contrasted over and against those who trust in idols, the former is redeemed the latter is put to shame (42:16,17) and c) Isaiah 65:11,12 would seem to say that those Jews who were idol-worshippers will not be redeemed Would you reconsider your description or can you explain why you chose that description?"

I chose that description because: 1) there was a specific rebuke to idolaters in this section; and 2) Israel was castigated for spiritual blindness in these verses as well. So, to me, the connection seemed clear.

What, then, of your objections? Re: 42:16-17, it appears to me that these idolaters were among the blind in Israel. After all, we're told explicitly in vv. 18-25 that these blind Jews have cast off the Torah and have been judged severely by the Lord. Surely there are idolaters among them.

Those, however, who continue in idolatry and do not repent (addressed in 42:17), will not experience God's redemption and mercy. This, then, would be confirmed by 65:11-12. These are the blind who choose to remain blind.

So, I feel my outline is justified, although I would have no problem adjusting it to refer to Israel as disobedient and blind rather than idol-worshipping.

*Y - Thanks for your response*

*So you do not see verses 16 and 17 set up as a contrast to each other? As in "these will be guided and led forward - while those others will be turned back and shamed"? Don't you see 43:9 being contrasted against 43:10,11,12? Do you see this in any way as a parallel to Psalm 97 where verse 7 is set up as a contrast to verse 8? Or do you not accept that there is a contrast there either?*

*How do you read 42:19? Why is the Lord's servant the most blind?*

M - Yes, I agree, but based on his reference to idolaters who are worshipping the eternal, first cause deity in the form of an idol, that seemed to point to the people of Israel more than the pagans. I'll respond, though, to your email here separately for clarity.

Yes, I do see a contrast between vv. 16 and 17 (it's quite obvious), but given the description of the blind and deaf servant in vv. 21-25 -- in serious disobedience and even defiance, because of which God judged the servant -- I cannot believe that Israel was that sinful, but not idolatrous. So, I see the contrast in this: God will lead His blind servant out of bondage, but those who refuse to turn to Him and submit will be cast out.

Re: 43:9-12, yes, there are different groups being addressed, but I understand God telling Israel, "Look, you are My witnesses to what I have declared and done. I did this, not the gods of the nations. How can you not see?"

It's possible that some of this material parallels Ps 97, but there Israel is not also rebuked in such strong terms.

As for Isa 42:19, it appears Israel is most blind because Israel has been given the most light and the most revelation, yet failed to see and understand.

(Quick question. Do you think the Malbim's comments to 42:17 include Israelite idolaters?)

*Y - His comments are about the general philosophy of idolatry in general which would apply to any idolaters - Israelite or not.)*

*Are you saying that at the time of the revelation of God's glory that Isaiah is talking about - there will be a period of time in which individual Israelites have a choice to repent and that those who do will be led through the wilderness while those who don't will be put to shame?*

*If this is what you understand - I will ask you - where do you see this concept in these passages? The entire thrust of these passages is that the same revelation of God's glory will shame the idolaters (Israelite or not) and bring joy and comfort to others. 40:5,9; 42:12-15 sound like extreme and drastic action on part of God that is decisive and absolutely clear - I don't see any "waiting period."*

*Furthermore, the evidence you bring that the audience addressed is idolatrous is from the rebuke of 42:18-25. But Micah 7:9 describes an Israel that bears God's wrath because of her sins yet is not idolatrous.*

*Throughout Scripture - those who are redeemed in a way that brings them joy are not the idolaters. Where in Scripture do you see Idolatrous Israel being redeemed in a way that brings her joy together with vindication over her enemies?*

M - To be clear, I'm totally fine with Israel being a blind, deaf, and disobedient servant but not an idol-worshiping people. I'm just trying to be honest with the text and I'm happy for you to convince me otherwise.

Let's remember that only a portion of the Babylonian exiles returned to Judah. Is this part of the separation?

I know you pointed to Micah 7:9, but where in the general history of Israel recorded in the Tanakh did we flagrantly violate Torah (as in 42:18-25) WITHOUT worshiping idols? Again, I have no agenda in my interpretation at all. I'm just trying to be honest with what we know about our history. (And note that in Deut 28:36 God says that, in exile, we will serve idols, so I would assume that applied to at least some of our people.)

In short, I see a mixed people being addressed (although, overall, characterized as blind and deaf). The idolaters are warned again that they will perish and not see redemption. The rest of the people will rejoice at God's hand and be left out of captivity.

Again, tell me where I'm wrong.

*Y - To directly answer your question about when in our history were we disobedient without worshiping idols - Second Temple, idolatry is conspicuously absent from the rebukes of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.*

*I am not trying to say that Israel hasn't or isn't worshiping idols - what I am trying to say is that the element of Israel that Isaiah is addressing in chapters 40-53 - although they are a mixed bag - from righteous to disobedient - but they are a group apart from the idolaters - so again - it seems that we are not that far apart from each other in our understanding of the text.*

M - Yes, for sure, in the Second Temple period, there was disobedience without idolatry, based on these prophetic books. Does that mean that the idol worshipers perished or stayed in exile? Either way, yes, can move on, and I'm quite open to your reading of the text. I'll reevaluate the "idolatrous" part of my outline accordingly.

**43:1-21 The Lord will have mercy and deliver His blind servant Israel from captivity**

**43:22-28 Israel deserved judgment not mercy; the Lord acts for His sake**

**44:1-6 Encouragement for redeemed Israel**

*Y - If you don't mind let's move on to 44. You entitled 44:1-6 as encouragement to redeemed Israel - two minor disagreements first - I would put the break between 5 and 6 and not between 6 and 7 (I imagine this was a typo on your part) and second I would say that the encouragement is to as of yet unredeemed Israel predicting and describing the coming redemption. - Would you agree with this?*

M - In 44, yes, that was a typo. And yes, I agree with your description. Because it speaks of the end result, I titled it "redeemed Israel," but I'll find a better way to express that.

**44:7-20 The eternal God contrasted with dead idols**

*Y - You entitled 44:6-20 as a contrast between God and the dead idols - would you agree that this contrast is being presented as an encouragement for an audience that sees itself as*

*worshippers of God but perhaps does not appreciate the goodness that is inherent in their worship? (Based on the contrast between verses 8 and 9 and swinging back between verses 20 and 21)*

One question for you before I respond. You mentioned that, at times, idol-worshippers (and whole nations) are tacitly addressed by the prophet -- I think you said they're listening in -- as Israel is addressed directly. Do you see that here at all?

*Of-course I do. Isaiah was speaking long before the destruction of the First Temple - a time when idolatry was rampant - so although his words directly address future generations living in exile who already experienced the destruction - he certainly was hoping to inspire people of his own generation to repent and turn back to God. Furthermore, I am sure he was hoping that even in exile - those who worship idols would be encouraged to abandon those idols and join his audience in looking forward with yearning to a time when idolatry is abolished and God alone is exalted.*

M - Thanks for the response. And to answer your question, yes I agree with the position you presented in your email. I see it the same way.

To be clear, I was also agreeing with this: "You entitled 44:6-20 as a contrast between God and the dead idols - would you agree that this contrast is being presented as an encouragement for an audience that sees itself as worshipers of God but perhaps does not appreciate the goodness that is inherent in their worship? (Based on the contrast between verses 8 and 9 and swinging back between verses 20 and 21)."

#### **44:21-28 The Lord will redeem servant Israel, raising up Cyrus to rebuild Jerusalem**

*Y - Back in 44 - verse 26 - how do you see "His servant" and "His messengers" do you see them as the individual prophets or do you see this as referring to the nation as a whole who is the repository for the prophetic word? Or do you perhaps have a different explanation?*

M - I have read it historically in terms of the prophets, starting with Isaiah here, and I see that the Targum has servants rather than servant. It's possible, though, that "servant" here refers to Israel as the repository of the prophets, but I'm inclined to see the more obvious reference to Isaiah and other prophets first.

*Y - Doesn't that look interesting in light of 42:19? As far as I can tell these are the only 2 combinations of "eved" and "malach" in these chapters.*

*Another question - how do you understand the emphasis on the fact that the word of the servant is fulfilled - isn't this the word of God to begin with? Shouldn't the point be that God's word is fulfilled?*

M - Yes, it's an interesting parallel in 42:19, as you noted. In your view, then, who is/are "His servant/messengers"?

Re: fulfilling the word of His servant, I see it as similar to 1 Sam 3:19 and nothing unusual or striking about it.

*Y - I understand that the "servant" and "messengers" are those who trust in God and who are commissioned by God to bring His truth to the world.*

*This role is most concentrated in the prophets but it is not disconnected from the people. The word being fulfilled is not limited to prophecy but includes also prayer and hope. And the people who believe in the words of the prophets participate in the dissemination of those words. The point of these passages is not only to show how God is the only power but also that He is there for those who trust in Him (as in 49:23 which I see as thematic for this entire segment of the book). It is for this reason that the fulfillment of prophecy is described as the fulfillment of the prophet's words as opposed to the fulfillment of God's own prediction (as in 44:7). Just as in 1Samuel 3:19 where the point is that God made sure that everyone knew that Samuel was His man.*

*Here too, God wants to demonstrate that these servants are truly His people.*

*Would this be in line with your understanding of these passages?*

M - Yes, our understanding is not far apart here. As for 49:23, I see it as one of the themes of this section of Isaiah but not necessarily the main theme.

I have some questions for you as we move ahead, but I'll save them until we get to the relevant part of the outline.

#### **45:1-8 The incomparable God gives victory to Cyrus**

#### **45:9-15 How dare you challenge the Lord's dealings with Israel (45:15 A God who hides Himself)**

*Y - Again, not so far apart at all. Next question if I may.*

*You entitled 45:9-15 as "How dare you challenge the Lord's dealings with Israel" and you see a different subject in 45:16-25 (the Lord, not the idols will bring public vindication to Israel) Here is my question - shouldn't the break be between 13 and 14? (Instead of between 15 and 16)*

M - I'm not sure. It's certainly possible, and I went back and forth in my thinking. In the end, I felt that v. 15 was another word of what God would do for His people, followed by the remark about God hiding Himself, then the attack on idolatry, etc.

Why do you feel I'm wrong here? Again, I'm wide open to that possibility.

*Y - My understanding is that those who were "telling God what to do" were people who predicted the practical future - and God responds by telling them that the practical future will not turn out as they predicted but rather will turn out as God predicted.*

*I see verse 14 as part of a prophecy about the spiritual upshot of God's practical plan - that the idol worshipers learn about the true God and give up their own gods.*

*So God's practical plan is to save Israel from her physical enemies and the spiritual upshot is that this event reveals His exclusive power. So I see the divide between 13 and 14 because until 13 (including 13) the prophet speaks of the practical redemption of Israel while in verse 14 he begins describing the spiritual ramification of that redemption.*

*Furthermore - the phrase "v'ei od" - "and there is none else" of verse 14 is repeated in 18, 21, 22, The concept of 14 (the nations recognizing that it is only Israel's God that is real) is reflected in the contrast of 16 and 17; as well as 24 and 25.*

*Finally - if the final verses of the chapter are entitled "vindication to Israel" - wouldn't verse 14 be one of the most explicit descriptions of vindication - where the nations recognize that Israel's God is the only true God?*

*Do you see my point?*

M - Great points. Thanks for articulating them so carefully. I'll definitely reconsider changing the break in the outline.

*Y - 1. In your outline you mentioned 45:15 - How do you understand the "hiding" of God and how does that glove into the flow of these passages?*

M - Re: Isaiah 45:15, when Israel is in exile and it seems that God is indifferent to her suffering, He seems to be hiding Himself. In the immediate context, which speaks of God's powerful work in redemption and His exposing of the idols, it almost seems as if the prophet is saying, "Lord, You're having me speak all these glorious promises, and I do believe they're true, but it seems as if so much of the time (or even right now) You hide Yourself rather than show Yourself." This, it appears parenthetical. Do you have another take? I'm quite open to hear.

### **45:16-25 The Lord, not the idols, will bring public vindication to Israel**

*Y - 2. You described 45:16-25 as "The Lord not the idols will bring public vindication to Israel" - these words imply that the alternative option (other than God's exaltation) is that the idols will be exalted and bring vindication to Israel - but the text makes clear that the nations are the ones who are associated with the idols and the exaltation of the idols is the exaltation of Israel's enemies (45:14,15,17,19,20)*

*3. How do you understand the "vindication" of Israel? - Do you see 45:14 as an expression or description of that vindication?*

M - Re: 45:16-25, yes, upon reflection, I can improve on the wording in the outline. I was trying to say two things at the same time and did poorly. I wanted to emphasize that the Lord will rise up and act on behalf of His people, thereby showing He is God; and, the idols will be proven powerless. In fact, the nations of these idols will acknowledge the Lord. I will reword accordingly.

And YES, I see 45:14 as directly related to the vindication, especially the second half of the verse. Indeed, that is a central expression of that vindication. In obedience or disobedience, Israel is associated with the one true God, and the ultimate vindication is about Him -- He alone is God! -- but it then vindicates the people as well as the people of that God, even when tattered, torn, bruised (and, sometimes, in sin) in exile.

*Y - I completely agree with your answers.*

**M - 46:1-13 God, not the idols, will fulfill His purposes for Israel**

**47:1-15 The fall of Babylon, which mistreated guilty Israel**

*Y - I am still looking forward to your questions but in the meantime I'll take the liberty of continuing with my own questions.*

*You described chapter 47 as "The fall of Babylon which mistreated guilty Israel." The prophet does indeed describe Babylon in those terms - but would you not consider that the prophet spends more words describing Babylon as one who trusts in other entities aside from God? Wouldn't it be more in keeping with the theme of these chapters to describe Babylon (if you have only one phrase to use) as one who arrogantly sees itself as independent from God?*

M - 1) I'll reflect on your comments re: the title of Isa 47. You could be right in terms of the prophet's emphasis.

**48:1-22 God, not the idols, calling his stubborn people Israel out of Babylon**

*Y - And one question on chapter 48 - Why is it so important to have the news of Israel's redemption from Babylon be brought to the ends of the earth? (As in 48:20)*

M - 2) Re: Isaiah 48:20, the whole world will see that Israel's God is the one true God, and this becomes clear as He delivers them from Babylon, just as it was clear at the exodus.

*Y - Would you accept that 48:20 and 44:23 are describing the same event?*

M - Yes, it appears to be describing the same event

*Y - The theme of the heavens rejoicing with the redemption of Israel as well as the impact of that redemption going to the ends of the earth seems to appear quite a number of times (at least this*

*is how I see it). Would you agree that this same event is also the subject of the following passages? - Psalm 69:35; Psalm 98; Psalm 102:16; 2Chronicles 16:31*

M - It's possible the texts refer to that same event, but also possible they refer to the final redemption of Israel (of course, the Isaiah texts also refer to the return from Babylon, but we know that is the foreshadowing of the greater final redemption as well).

Y - *You wrote (in the first segment of our debate) -*

*“Let's go back to the book of Isaiah, looking in particular at chs. Isa 40-55, a section which focuses on Israel's deliverance from Babylonian exile, which for many of the prophets served as a backdrop of the coming redemption.”*

*I agree to this way of looking at the text. The prophet uses one (the return from Babylon) to illuminate the other (the final redemption). So could we say that these verses are describing, if not the very same event, but the same spiritual concept - either in the sense of the return from Babylon or the final return or both? Would you agree?*

M - Yes, I agree.

One quick note: I'm doing my best to answer your questions with no concern for where your arguments lead. In other words, if you're simply going through the text and asking questions as they arise, or if you're building to an exegetical argument re: Isa 53, I'm not trying to look ahead, thereby doing my best to be as unbiased as possible.

I assumed you would take this for granted, but I wanted to state it nonetheless.

Y - *If you agree that conceptually Isaiah 48:20 and 44:23 are related to each other and that you see these at least conceptually connected to Psalm 69:35; Psalm 98; Psalm 102:16; 2Chronicles 16:31, then why when I compared Isaiah 48:20 to the report of 52:15 and 53:1 - and I quote -*

*“28. What is the "report" of 53:1? Rabbi Blumenthal had argued that the report of Isaiah 48:20, announcing Israel's deliverance from Babylonian exile, is the same report as 53:1, and he seeks to buttress that argument in Blumenthal 3. Unfortunately, the biblical text is against him, even if I agreed with him that 52:13-53:12 spoke of Israel rather than the Messiah (which it does not). Look carefully at 48:20, which states, "Go out from Babylon, flee from Chaldea, declare this with a shout of joy, proclaim it, send it out to the end of the earth; say, 'The LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob!'" So, this is referring to our people's deliverance from Babylonian captivity over 2,500 years ago. In contrast, according to Rabbi Blumenthal, 52:13-15 speaks of Israel's future exaltation, to the shock of the nations, leading to the report of 53:1.”*

M - I hope to write within the next day or two; I've been on the road almost continuously and am way behind on emails.

That being said, I've been formulating an honest answer to your questions, having reviewed the relevant verses, and I want you to know that this whole exercise has been very helpful to me, giving me a better perspective on why you believe what you do. You've explained it before in print, of course, going back to Contra Brown, if I'm correct, but our verse by verse discussion has sharpened my understanding of your position.

Sorry for the delay on my end. Also, I was going through some older emails and spotted this same one from you back then, meaning it was I who dropped the ball, not you.

Here's why I don't accept the parallel between these passages other passages and Isa 52:13ff.. First, in these other passages, Israel is redeemed and there is no other talk of a separate, individual, righteous servant. But in Isa 40-55, there is, quite clearly. Second, on my reading of the texts, the servant in 52:13ff. resembles the righteous, individual servant, not the blind, sinful servant Israel. Third, the servant here is the agent of redemption, whereas in these other passages, Israel is the object of redemption, as I have emphasized at other points. So, Isa 53 explains to us how Israel's ultimate redemption will be accomplished, and this will impact the nations.

*Y - Assuming I accept your arguments (which I don't) but still and all - the argument that you used in your published article - that the verses describing the redemption from the Babylonian exile are not related to the verses describing the future redemption - is inaccurate and misleading. You do agree that the events of the redemption from the Babylonian exile are used by the prophet to illuminate the future redemption and my method of using one (the redemption from Babylon) to help us understand the other (future redemption) is a valid interpretative method. It's just that you are presenting specific arguments why you feel that in this case the two similarly sounding events are not in fact similar - but that is not the argument you presented in your published article.*

M - Thanks for your response. Perhaps I wasn't clear enough. Yes, of course, there are parallels between Israel's deliverance from Babylon and Israel's final, future salvation. But I don't see Isa 52:13-53:12 as speaking of the release from Babylonian captivity. Rather, I see it as focusing on the individual servant. That's what I was trying to convey. I don't see 53:1 as referring to something like 48:20, follow? In that case, I don't see what you feel is misleading in my article. Can you help clarify?

*Y - Getting back to 48:20 - In your article you wrote that even if you were to accept that the servant is Israel my argument (of reading the report of 53:1 in light of 48:20) would be wrong because one speaks of the redemption from Babylon while the other speaks of the future redemption.*

*But this argument is false - the prophet uses one (redemption from Babylon) to illuminate the other (future redemption) as you acknowledged. You are now disagreeing with me on different*

*grounds than the argument you presented in your article. You are saying that the servant cannot be Israel but must be the individual. But that is not what you wrote in your article.*

*Do you understand the point I am trying to make?*

M - Re: my article and your point, to quote the section of mine you quoted below, I wrote:  
"\*What is the report" of 53:1? \*Rabbi Blumenthal had argued that the report of Isaiah 48:20, announcing Israel's deliverance from Babylonian exile, is the same report as 53:1, and he seeks to buttress that argument in Blumenthal 3. Unfortunately, the biblical text is against him, even if I agreed with him that 52:13-53:12 spoke of Israel rather than the Messiah (which it does not). Look carefully at 48:20, which states, "Go out from Babylon, flee from Chaldea, declare this with a shout of joy, proclaim it, send it out to the end of the earth; say, 'The LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob!'" So, this is referring to our people's deliverance from Babylonian captivity over 2,500 years ago. In contrast, according to Rabbi Blumenthal, 52:13-15 speaks of Israel's future exaltation, to the shock of the nations, leading to the report of 53:1."

My question to you is this: Did you state plainly that the first reference to the report of 53:1 was the return of the exiles? (I don't remember that being the case, but please correct me if I'm wrong.) If so, when did the nations express their astonishment? When did they marvel as Israel was so highly exalted? When did this happen 2,500 years ago? Again, I simply don't see this as applicable. On the other hand, if you didn't draw the parallel between Israel's deliverance from Babylon as a foreshadowing of Israel's future deliverance, why would I have addressed something you didn't raise (and something I don't see here)?

*Y - As it relates to 48:20 and 53:1 - I assumed as a given that we all know that the prophet uses the redemption from Babylon to illuminate the future redemption - you mentioned this concept in your first segment of the debate. If a report about the redemption of a servant is to go to the ends of the earth in one scenario (the redemption from Babylon - as per 48:20) and we find a report being heard to the ends of the earth in the second scenario (future redemption - as per 53:1) it is safe to assume that they are talking about the same type of redemption, the same type of servant and the same type of report.*

*You ask - when do the nations marvel that Israel is so highly exalted in the redemption from Babylon? - The whole idea of 48:20 is that the nations should hear how God, the Creator of heaven and earth intervened to redeem His servant Jacob - that is pretty exalted.*

*That is the astonishment of 53:1 - how the nations exclaim - upon who is it that God's might is revealed? Who is God moving to save? - this lowly creature?! we considered him smitten by God - so how is this happening that God is moving to save him?*

*In any case - do you still consider your criticism of my usage of 48:20 to illuminate 53:1 to be fair and accurate? Again, reminding you that you said that even if you were to accept that the servant of 53 is Israel you would reject this connection on the basis of the time gap alone.*

M - First, I don't assume that Isa 48:20 and 53:1 "are talking about the same type of redemption, the same type of servant and the same type of report."

Second, I don't see Isa 53 describing "the redemption of the servant" but rather the exaltation of the servant-redeemer. There's quite a difference there.

Third, the contrast between Isa 48:20 and 52:13 is quite dramatic. In the former, attention is drawn to the Lord who has redeemed His servant Jacob. In the latter, attention is drawn by the Lord to the highly exalted servant.

Fourth, yes, your reading of 53:1 ("That is the astonishment of 53:1 - how the nations exclaim - upon who is it that God's might is revealed? Who is God moving to save? - this lowly creature?! we considered him smitten by God - so how is this happening that God is moving to save him?") is as foreign to me as my reading of the text is as foreign to you. How fascinating!

In sum, yes, absolutely, I feel my criticism of your usage of 48:20 to illuminate 53:1 is quite fair and accurate. The more we press these issues, the more clearly the contrasts emerge -- the very ones I pressed in my article between the two servants, one redeemed and the other the redeemer.

*Y - I am happy to move on with our discussion of Isaiah and I hope to be getting back to you after Purim and after Shabbos. I do find it interesting that you don't see any problem with what you wrote in your article - but it is what it is.*

M - No hurry, of course. I'll step back and look at what I wrote in my article again, but I hope you can see based on my responses to date, including where I have issued corrections, that I'm genuinely trying to wrestle with the text honestly. If I see something a certain way, I do. Can you not see my perspective at all?

*Y - I am back, I would gladly answer your question if I knew what your perspective is. I am not sure if - a - You believe that your article does not imply that it is an inappropriate Scriptural method to interpret the future redemption in light of the redemption from Babylon*

*b- You recognize that your article implies that the two (redemption from Babylon and future) are not connected but you feel that this is indeed true. Or perhaps there is something else that I am missing. Either way - I am happy to let things stand.*

M - I would actually like to pursue this. My perspective is that in SOME texts in Isa 40-55, the redemption of Israel from Babylonian captivity is a pre-figuring of our future redemption and exaltation, but I don't see Isa 52:13-53:12 as one of those texts, since I don't see it applying to Israel for numerous reasons.

Please tell me what I wrote that is contrary to that or where you find my reasoning inconsistent

*Y - If you are happy to pursue this then I am happy to help you. To me the following quotation from your article implies that it is inappropriate to understand that the prophet is using the*

*concepts of the Babylonian redemption and fusing them together with the future redemption. The mere fact that one verse is speaking of the Babylonian redemption while the other speaks of future redemption tells us that the two are unrelated - that is how I read this paragraph. Here is the paragraph:*

*"28. What is the "report" of 53:1? Rabbi Blumenthal had argued that the report of Isaiah 48:20, announcing Israel's deliverance from Babylonian exile, is the same report as 53:1, and he seeks to buttress that argument in Blumenthal 3. Unfortunately, the biblical text is against him, even if I agreed with him that 52:13-53:12 spoke of Israel rather than the Messiah (which it does not). Look carefully at 48:20, which states, "Go out from Babylon, flee from Chaldea, declare this with a shout of joy, proclaim it, send it out to the end of the earth; say, 'The LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob!'" So, this is referring to our people's deliverance from Babylonian captivity over 2,500 years ago. In contrast, according to Rabbi Blumenthal, 52:13-15 speaks of Israel's future exaltation, to the shock of the nations, leading to the report of 53:1."*

*If all you meant was that in this particular case the two are separate from one another it would have been more accurate to say something like "although the prophet often uses events from the Babylonian exile to illuminate the future redemption but in this case..." The way it is written gives the impression that the mere fact that the one verse speaks of the Babylonian redemption while the other speaks of the future redemption is enough of a basis to disqualify the comparison.*

M - Yes, revisiting this, I agree with you that it would have been more accurate to say something like you suggested ("although the prophet often uses events from the Babylonian exile to illuminate the future redemption but in this case...").

So, you follow the point I was making (without agreeing with it), namely, that your argument about 52:13-15 can only make sense at the end of the age when Israel is highly exalted -- which hardly happened after the return from Babylon -- in contrast with 48:20, but I should have been more nuanced (as per your suggested wording) in making my point. Correct?

Obviously, my desire was to emphasize the contrast between the passages, but again, I totally agree with your point as to how I should have worded it.

I'm happy to move on to the next point if you are.

*Y - I am happy to continue as well. I hope you understand that I do not agree to the distinctions you are making between 48:20 and 53:1, I still believe one is being used to illuminate the other but I would rather focus on that as we get closer to 53.*

**M - 49:1-10 The Lord's servant will regather Israel and set the captives free**

*Y - Meanwhile allow me to move on with my study of your outline. You entitled 49:1-10 as "The Lord's servant will regather Israel and set the captives free." I have a few questions. First would it not be more appropriate to see the passage as ending after verse 13? Second, do you see the freed captives (of verse 9) as an entity apart from Israel or is this a reference to freeing Israel from exile? If you accept that this is speaking primarily of Israel (the position that I believe is more sound), then how do you see God's salvation reaching the ends of the earth in verse 6? And third - I would have entitled this section something like - the servant rejoices in the fact that God chose him for a mission with global impact, to have God's salvation extend to the ends of the earth. Do you see how I am reading this passage?*

M - 1) Yes, I think I should have extended my outline section to v. 13.

2) I see the freed captives of v. 9 as the people of Israel being freed from captivity. I see God's salvation reaching the ends of the earth in v. 6 similar to how I see it 42:1-4: the same servant who liberates Israel, bringing the nation to repentance, is the same one who brings salvation to the ends of the earth.

3) I see how you're reading the passage -- that it is through Israel being liberated that God's salvation reaches the ends of the earth. Do you see how I'm reading it? As for changing the outline title here, I have no objection to your title, but I'm not sure it specifically conveys some of the key dynamics of the passage, including the servant's apparent failure in his mission to Israel.

*Y - On 3 - I see your point, I want to think about it a bit.*

*On 2 - I am not sure how you see the salvation going to the ends of the earth. I see 49:6 in conjunction with 42:6, not so much 42:1-4 although these are obviously related - as in 51:4,5. I see God's salvation extending to the ends of the earth - through the report of Israel's salvation which will be heard and seen to the ends of the earth, that will bring the nations to know God - 42:10,11; 44:23; 45:14,22,23; 48:20,21; 49:13,23; 52:10 amongst others. This recognition of the true understanding of Israel's God will lead to the nations submitting themselves to God's teaching through God's servant, the Messiah, as in 42:1-4 and 51:4 and 5 - but this teaching is already in Israel's heart 51:7 at least to some degree.*

*To how much of this do you agree and how much do you disagree?*

M - I did change my outline and tentatively renamed the section, "The Lord's servant seemingly fails in his mission to Israel but will ultimately regather them and be a light to the nations." Either way, once we're done, God willing, I plan to sharpen it one final time.

Let me reflect on the verses you presented again. Of course, I've been looking at them and trying to see them afresh as well as from your perspective, but let me step back and do it again.

Reflecting on these verses, I agree with much of your perspective, meaning that God acting on behalf of Israel will bring Him glory before the nations of the world. But what jumps out at me when going through these passages again is that the theme is always the same: the focus is on the God who redeemed Israel rather than on Israel; it is on His acts, not Israel's acts. In contrast, the passages I understand to be Messianic all focus on the servant: who he is; why he stands out; what he does.

Israel will be redeemed through the Messiah, to the glory of God among the nations, and that is why the nations will also long for his words, and that is why he will be a light to the nations -- because of his special qualities and anointing (just as in Isa 11).

You see some of the relevant prophecies as referring to the prophet, but as I indicated to you previously, I cannot see Isaiah having such an exalted role. In any event, the point you make, to me, confirms the point I have emphasized repeatedly, namely the servant Messiah is the redeemer; the servant Israel is the redeemed. Can you see my point?

I have no issue with much of your emphasis; I simply don't see it as either-or. God will be glorified in the nations when He redeems Israel; the redeemer he uses himself will bring the knowledge of the God to the nations.

*Y - Thanks again for your ongoing participation in this conversation. I recognize that the passages about Israel focus more on God's glory and that some of the passages about the Messiah focus on the qualities of the Messiah. I have argued that this is not absolute (the Messiah is also portrayed as a beneficiary of redemption while Israel is sometimes portrayed as a participant in the process of bringing redemption) but at this point I'd rather focus on what we agree about than on what we don't.*

*I want to understand how you see the nations as beneficiaries of the salvation. In many verses we get the impression that they are witnesses of Israel's salvation such as Isaiah 52:10; 61:11 Psalm 98:2,3 and 102:16,17. Yet in Isaiah 49:6 it would seem as if the nations are direct beneficiaries of the redemption - unless you understand that the "salvation going to the ends of the earth" is the news of the salvation - which would dampen the point of the prophet (who is contrasting a local redemption in verse 5 over and against something international in verse 6).*

*How do you understand this?*

M - I'm glad that, in the midst of our differences, we're each helping the other see how we understand these passages.

To answer your question, yes, in keeping with my understanding of the work of the Messiah, I see his teaching going to the nations and his word of liberation going to the nations, as has been happening for the last 2,000 years, resulting in hundreds of millions of former pagans calling the God of Israel "Father." (As much as you differ with me, can you imagine for a moment how you

would see things if Yeshua was, in fact, our Messiah, and accomplishing this part of his mission more and more as the years go on?) This will continue until the end of the age.

At the same time, I see a final awakening of sorts when God vindicates His choosing of Israel and our people turn to Him in repentance (obviously, for me, this includes acknowledging Yeshua). At that time, the still-non-believing nations will realize that the God of Israel is the true God and will honor our people and turn towards the Lord.

So, I do see the elements of which you speak -- as I have previously affirmed -- but also see the direct impact of Messiah on the nations of the world, as in Isa 42:1-4. He will not falter until he completes his mission.

Can you see my perspective?

Thanks for the continuing dialogue.

*Y - Again, in keeping with the attempt to first see the similarities, it would seem, and please correct me if I got this wrong, that "salvation to the nations" is accomplished when the nations know the God of Israel which is what I believe as well. This being the case, there is not much of a difference between witnessing the salvation of Israel and coming to the knowledge of God that way as opposed to experiencing the salvation.*

*I am not trying to say that there is no difference - but that the thrust is the same – salvation = knowledge of God. Israel who experiences the salvation will know God on a different level than those who witness the salvation but all will enjoy knowledge of God and in this way God's salvation of 49:6 goes to the ends of the earth, not necessarily that the nations experience the salvation in the same way that Israel does, but by learning about it they taste it too.*

*Now for the disagreement part.*

*The problem I have with your perspective is that throughout Scripture I see the nations benefiting from the salvation only after Israel does, or only via Israel's salvation. Many passages explicitly point to this order of events, first Israel and then the nations - The order in the closing verses in Psalm 22; Psalm 69:35,36; Psalm 102:16,17; Isaiah 60:3 among many others.*

M - Re: the similarities, I don't totally agree. Specifically, why should I assume that the nations experience "salvation" in exactly the same way through history? Can't it be that, in a progressive way over time, the nations learn about the God of Israel through the Messiah? Then, at the end of the age, the nations (or parts of them) which have still not learned the way of salvation will be enlightened when Israel repents and is delivered? Why can't both be true?

This leads naturally to your second point, which, of course, I was expecting. On the one hand, I am expecting a final awakening in the nations when Israel is redeemed. I believe we've covered this adequately so far, and, to be sure, this is a common expectation among many Christians as

well. But again, I don't see this as exclusive of the Lord's salvation, through the Messiah, going to the ends of the world before Israel's final redemption. Look at Psalm 22 from my perspective for a moment. What if the proclamation of Messiah's deliverance from death is the divine act that is proclaimed throughout the world? This is unfolding as we speak and will culminate with a massive turning of Jews and Gentiles.

Or what if Isa 42:1-4 is happening in an ongoing way, to this moment, through Yeshua? Where does it say that the nations will only learn of God's salvation through him after Israel's redemption? Will there be an awakening of the nations in the future as well? Yes, for sure. Has there been an awakening among the nations for centuries thus far? Without a doubt. And to me, Isa 53 is pivotal in explaining this: We missed what God was doing through the Messiah when he came. How ironic that many in the nations were quicker to believe than us!

I know we're focused only on Scripture now, but allow me to raise this point: From my perspective, the Lord has been actively working for the redemption of the nations for the last 2,000 years, while He continues to interact with Israel. But since you deny that Jesus has a redemptive role for the world, it would seem that God has done nothing in a decisive and redemptive way for the Lord at any time since He chose Israel -- other than by choosing Israel. This seems utterly impossible to me for many reasons, but to me, I see His salvation going to the nations through Jesus as well as His hand on our people, ultimately to bring us to repentance and redemption at the end of the age, demonstrating God's glory for the world to see.

*Y - What I meant when I said that we agree is the principle that salvation = knowledge of God. I recognize that we still differ over the method - how that knowledge of God comes to the nations.*

*As for your arguments (and I paraphrase) - has God done nothing for the nations in the past 2000? years or why is it not possible that God is using more than one path to bring knowledge of His truth to the nations?*

*God is constantly moving to bring various levels of spiritual blessing to the nations of the earth and He often uses the vehicle of a crooked ideology to bring people these blessings. People have learned about justice, kindness, the value of truth, respect for human life, humility, selflessness, the general concept of One Master of all through mediums such as secular philosophy, secular literature, through men who taught fragments of these truths, through crooked religion (by your standards - such as Islam or any form of Christianity that preached anti-Semitism).*

*God has brought much physical blessing to the nations. The civilization of human society, democracy, justice, value for human life, equal rights etc. - many of these also coming through mediums that are less than Godly.*

*Going back to the spiritual blessings - I see within the Church itself that God is moving it towards truth - stepping back from the Catholic traditions, moving away from replacement theology, and moving away from anti-Semitism, the movement to find the Jewishness of Jesus*

*and to reconnect with the Jewish roots of Christianity - including the many that leave Christianity altogether in a movement towards Judaism.*

*So yes, God is blessing the nations constantly.*

*At the same time, God sometimes allows curses to spread amongst the nations both spiritual and physical. One of the worst curses that God allows is the curse of Jew-hatred and the same Church which served as a vehicle to bring certain blessings to the nations also brought them this curse. This curse still flourishes in the community of people who you consider followers of Jesus. Take Tzachi Shapira's book. It propagates the myth that it is not devotion to our God or to our faith that stands behind our rejection of Christianity, because we "know" that the Messiah is to be divine etc. and we just reject Jesus anyway - because of causeless hatred etc. I interact with people almost on a daily basis who assume that I am spiritually handicapped/subhuman. They assume this not only about me but about true spiritual giants such as Rashi and Maimonides (Shapira makes Maimonides out to be a conscious hypocrite).*

*This is not the level of hatred that perpetrates a holocaust but it is one of the road-markers on the road that leads to that destination. Not that I accuse these people of perpetrating any physical crimes or even that they are capable of doing such evil - but these myths are some of the necessary ingredients of those evils.*

*So I see the blessing that the Church brought to the nations but there is no honest way that I can see it without also seeing the curse that it brought to those same nations.*

M - Thanks for the clarification about what we agreed on, and thanks for your further thoughts re: God's actions in the world.

You know I hate what has been done to our people in the name of Jesus; at the same time, that is what sinful people have done, contrary to the words of Jesus and his emissaries.

But either way, the issue that I want to stress is God's active, supernatural, unmistakable backing of the message of Jesus the Messiah to the world. I once asked you on the phone if you thought God might back this message -- through which millions have to come to worship the God of Israel as Father and become lovers of the Jewish people themselves -- and upon reflection (if I recall) you said no.

I say the Lord has been working actively and directly to bring the nations to Himself through Yeshua, and it that action you deny. Am I wrongly understanding your view? If this takes us too far afield, I'm happy to return our review of my outline.

*Y - There is no question in my mind that God has used the medium of the Church to bring blessing to people just as He has used many other not-so-holy mediums to do the same. This is a far cry from a fulfillment of Isaiah 42.*

*At the same time there is no question in my mind that the emissaries of Jesus and the words quoted in Jesus' name (as recorded in the Christian Scripture) delegitimized and dehumanized Jews and Judaism in the eyes of many gentiles and they continue to do so - in line with the original intent of the authors. The authors had a serious motivation to do this and to believe that this was not their intent is beyond naïve. I wrote several articles on this subject - here are the links for you to consider.*

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*As for quotations - just read Tzachi's book. Here are two quotes - Tzachi describes our teachers as people who "have elected to go against the words of the Torah itself and the Prophets" (page 47) and "Radak, Shmuel Gordon, Metzodot and most of the sages of the Talmud went around and around trying to refute this as a Messianic prophecy due to the implications it presents." (page 146).*

*The attitude of Jewish teachers as people who consciously or almost consciously hide or misrepresent the truth is part and parcel of the background music of the book and the attitude is present in many conversations I have with Christians - who love Jews and Israel, but still think that Jews (especially religious ones) are in some way inherently different than other human beings in a negative way. Do you believe that this has nothing to do with the Christian*

*Scripture's portrayal of Jews and Judaism? Do you not realize that this is an important step in the path toward physical persecution?*

M - I'll interact more fully ASAP, but two quick thoughts: 1) I keep emphasizing supernatural acts of God in Jesus, like raising the dead or healing cripples or the like. Is God doing these to back the preaching of Jesus? 2) You take strong offense by what Tzahi says (which is a separate issue) yet make even worse claims about the writers of the NT (or other early Church leaders). Do you find know irony there?

One more thing. You know how deeply I deplore what professing Christians have done to our people over the centuries, so nothing I say here is meant to diminish that in the least.

I just want you to realize that for 47 years, I have been called every foul name by our people -- from mamzer to paid liar to about anything else. I have been spit in the face and threatened with strangulation; last year, as you know, I was arrested after false charges from an Orthodox Jew (which were laughed at by the police, in the end); I have friends in Israel whose congregation was firebombed by religious Jews; the son of another colleague was blown up by a bomb planted by a religious Jew (but he miraculously survived).

You say, "It's wrong, but it's because of 2,000 years of Christian history, and that's what these people are reacting to."

But this is how Jesus and the first Jewish believers were also treated by some of our leaders 2,000 years ago. Why is that?

Again, I'm simply giving the perspective of what it's like to be a Messianic Jew in the midst of our people. (And shall I tell the stories of my friends who were kidnapped by Orthodox Jews when they first came to faith? Or of the one who was beaten by his haredi family and then drugged for more than 2 years to subdue him?)

Despite all this, I do my best to defend our people and even defend the Talmud, and I make no complaints about the little I have suffered. It's tiny, and it's what I expect. I just think it's important to share honest perspectives when we're being as candid as we are, most importantly, the charge I constantly hear from religious Jews that I'm a liar, that I'm intentionally deceiving other Jews, and that I'm doing it all for money.

*Y - You don't have to reassure me that you deplore what Christians have done - I know that you do much to promote an understanding of Jews and Judaism amongst Christians and I truly appreciate and admire that - no need to reassure me.*

*I hope that I don't have to reassure you that I deplore the treatment that you and other members of your community have received at the hands of members of my community - but in case you need that reassurance here it is - I deplore the treatment that you and other members of your community have received at the hands of members of my community.*

*However there is an important piece of the puzzle that you seem to be missing. Missionaries like yourself are actively causing pain, deep pain, to members of my community. When a family member goes over from our community to your community, the pain he/she leaves behind is deep. This is compounded by the fact that in most of the cases, the person who was persuaded to change communities did not really understand what they were doing (how many Jewish people that joined your community had a solid understanding of Judaism before they decided to turn their backs on it?). It is wrong to dehumanize someone who is causing you pain and it is certainly wrong to dehumanize an entire community of people even when they are causing you pain - but such dehumanization has nothing to do with the holocaust, inquisition and Crusades. The centuries of active persecution of the Church is built on the dehumanization of a nation of people who are minding their own business, studying their own texts, serving their own God and believing in their own Messiah - and not causing anyone any pain.*

*But there is a deeper difference between the Christian Scripture's dehumanization of the Jew and the Jewish dehumanization of missionaries. And to illustrate the difference I ask you to imagine the following. Think of the worst names that you were called by members of my community, the most dehumanizing names. Now imagine if someone were to write those names in a book recording them as your inherent qualities. And then this person would take that book and elevate it to the status of righteous, virtuous and infallible religious text.*

*Do you see the difference?*

*If you want to get back on track with our study of Isaiah I am fine with that (if you want to continue this track I am fine with that as well - although I do want to move forward with Isaiah). I just hope that you see why I can't see Jesus as a fulfillment of Isaiah 42 (even without getting into the textual considerations).*

M - Thanks for continuing the discussion, and yes, for sure, I know how you feel about the treatment I and others have received.

As to the pain that's caused when one of your people comes to my side, yes, I know it's acute. The same happens when someone leaves my side for yours. But when you ask how many had a solid understanding of Judaism, I can tell you frankly that those who had the most solid, thoroughly frum understanding of Judaism are the one who are treated to most hatred and scorn (and, sometimes, violence). Shouldn't you rather say to them, "I respect your decision, since I see it is not based ignorance, and you know how serious a price you are going to pay in leaving our community"? Can you see my point?

Back to your question re: dehumanizing statements about our people written in a book (the NT). And it is here that I must take strong exception. First, having dealt with anti-Semites for decades, I can tell you that they find ample fuel for their fire in the words of our prophets about us, as I noted in *The Real Kosher Jesus*. Second, they find infinitely more offensive to them what they believe are libels against Jesus and Mary in the Talmud. (For the record, while you and other

Jewish scholars debate whether these texts speak about Jesus, these Christians believe they do, as do MANY from Jews with whom I've spoken over the years.)

Third, and of most interest, "Christian" anti-Semitism is primarily an Anglo phenomenon. I have spoken to countless Asian Christians (who now number in the hundreds of millions) and African Christians, among others, and they have been staggered to hear about this history. (As an Iranian Christian said to me once, "It is impossible to be a Christian and hate the Jews!") Not only so, evangelical Christians, who read the NT literally, are Israel's best friends, also shocked to hear of "Christian" anti-Semitism. But where I do encounter it is in nominal Christian circles (or extremely traditional Catholic circles), and it is ugly and shocking. (I'm debating a Catholic scholar about this on Friday.) But, in total candor, I see no evidence of genuine Christian faith in these people at all. The same can be said for the Crusaders and others. Most of them probably never read a page of the NT in their lives. And it was the Nazis who produced a new version of the New Testament, removing all positive Jewish references from it -- and there were many to remove.

In stark contrast, the message of Jesus has brought liberation and transformation to hundreds of millions of people worldwide, and as this continues, we will see Isaiah 42 reach its fulfillment. Right now, it has gone far in the direction already.

As for the sins of the church -- and they are many and ugly and deep -- this is exactly what Paul warned about in Romans 11, telling the Gentiles not to become arrogant against the Jewish people, who remain chosen and loved by God, even while these Jews were persecuting them for their faith.

At this point in our dialogue and friendship, I hope you take this rather long email as an expression of honor to you as an esteemed rabbi rather than as an attempt to debate or be contentious.

*Y - At this point in our dialogue and friendship I take this e-mail of yours (which isn't so long - just to be contentious) as an expression of honor and I hope you take mine the same way. I also hope that you do not take the delay in my response in a bad way - this is a very busy time of the year so please understand,*

*Imagine a city standing there on a hill. A group of people pour gasoline on that city approximately once a week for many centuries. And then the city burns to the ground. There is no honest way to separate the gasoline pourers from the fire.*

*For centuries upon centuries and in many countries, Christians have learned about the inherently evil nature of the Jew. They heard about this from the teachers of almost every denomination of Christianity who were reading it straight out of the gospels. And when the holocaust came, Christians from many nations participated. In many countries, this was active participation, in others it involved closing borders and being apathetic about it in general. Yes,*

*there are other places from which anti-Semites drew their fuel from but none were as actively propagated under the title of religious instruction and moral truth as were the Christian Scriptures and none were anywhere near as successful at implanting into the minds of many nations that the Jew was a human being that stands apart in a negative way. The other sources (Jewish Scripture and Talmud) did not give the Europeans the moral backing that the words of the gospels gave them, they were not used on the sheer scale and scope that the words of the gospel were used - both in the sense of how widespread and how deep the message went and in the sense of how comprehensive a picture was painted, - arguably the Jewish Scripture and the Talmud would not have talked to them this way had they not first absorbed the message of the gospel, and finally, there is no question in my mind that the authors of the Jewish Scripture and the Talmud did not mean to spread a message of the dehumanization of the Jew - at the same time there is no question in my mind that whoever wrote the gospels - did intend to spread a message of dehumanization of the Jew.*

*This is not the teaching that the islands are yearning for.*

*It is true that much good came through the message of the gospel - but for many more centuries and for many more people the good in the gospel was laced with a horrible evil.*

M - Of course, I understand that you're extra busy these days, and I take your email in the same honoring way you took mine.

This past weekend, I spoke at an Israel conference about the very things you wrote about here, and as happens whenever I address this, there is pain and shock. You know where I stand on this.

But here's a whole different perspective for you. It's been 47 years for me, and with the rarest of exception, wherever I go around the world and in churches throughout America, there is incredible love for the Jewish people. Nation after nation. Tribal regions where people live in huts. Christians in Asia and Africa. Committed evangelicals in Europe and America and Mexico.

I have wished for years that I could take my traditional Jewish friends with me on these trips. These are people who believe the NT literally. They read the words of which you speak, and there is no poison, no venom, no animosity. Only love and prayers. How do you explain this?

It is only a perversion of the NT message that produced Jew-hatred, a departure from the Jewish roots of the faith (leading to massive apostasy and compromise) that produced a "Christian" Europe that supported a Holocaust (and, for the record, slaughtered true Christians who defended their Jewish neighbors and friends).

I have seen the former idol worshipers who now love God through Jesus. I know personally the former terrorists -- one, an Egyptian man, used to kill our people; now is an incredible friend of Israel, to the death.

The problem is not with the message or the Messiah. The problem is with imposters and hypocrites who misused his message for their own purposes.

Those who embrace the words of the NT see indeed the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy on a daily basis. I wish you could see this for yourself too.

With honor and esteem,

*Y - You ask a good question. I don't have a clear answer although I could give a few suggestions (which I will do shortly). I will however say that a few decades of one reading of the book do not outweigh centuries of another reading. The literary style of the Christian Scriptures utilizes the inhumanity of the Jew in the same way that a painting uses dark and light for contrast and emphasis. I can't believe that it is coincidental.*

*Now to your question - why do some receive the Christians message and come to love the Jew? Perhaps it is only to the Western mind that thinks in a certain way that the message comes across that way? And the book was written by the Western mind for this very audience. Perhaps in a world where the concept of human rights is well known - then people cancel out the negative message? Perhaps the people that are delivering the message live beautiful lives and their actions speak louder than the words of the book that they are carrying? (I would vote for this answer)*

*Either way, it is hard for me to believe that anyone comes to love the Jews on the basis of the gospel message. What I could believe is that people read the entire Christian Bible - including the Jewish Bible and the total message is one that exalts the Jewish people. But I can't fathom how anyone could come to love the Jewish people just by reading the book of John.*

*I have no problem going back to Isaiah - if you want to put this aspect of our conversation on the back-burner for now. You mentioned that you had some questions for me on Isaiah - what were they?*

M - Here's my last comment, feel free to respond if you like, then we can return to Isaiah. As for my questions -- I'll need to refresh my mind. Off the top of my head, I can't recall what they were.

Again, I'm reading the NT as an insider, you from a different perspective, of course. And yes, many Christians get a heart for Israel reading the entire Bible, not just the NT. But I can't tell you how many received a love for our people reading Romans or Matthew. More importantly, I can't tell you how many I met who told me of the supernatural change of heart they received the moment they were born again. As one of my friends in the USA said (and he grew up in mixed neighborhoods with Jewish friends), the moment he came to faith, he wanted to hug every Jew he met.

Do you realize how impacting it is when people realize that their Savior is a Jew? That they are indebted to Israel for their salvation? That all the first apostles were Jews? And I see this constantly outside the West (and, in fact, the NT is not a Western book). I also see it at different levels through Church history, just not in the major, most organized (and often, most corrupt) parts of the Church.

I'm dealing on a regular basis with people who are convinced that the Talmud sees Gentiles as inferior and even sub-human. It is clear as day to them and they accuse me of obfuscating when I try to explain context and the like. Others then chime in, "I lived next to a Hasidic neighborhood and they treated goyim like trash. It was sickening." And then others explain how the Haredim are famous for cheating the system and making their own laws -- and they're sure it's because of the Talmud.

My point is you would say they are abusing their own traditions. I say the same with anti-Semitic Christians and the NT.

In any case, thanks for engaging, and be assured that every time I try to clarify a myth about traditional Jews, I have you in my head as the kind of positive example I am pointing to.

**49:11-26 God comforts His discouraged who will be gloriously regathered with the help of the nations**

*Y - In your outline of 49:11-26 you wrote that Israel is gathered with the help of the nations.*

*I feel that the words - "with the help of the nations" gives the impression as if this is a joint project in which the nations give their contribution out of the goodness of their hearts. But the prophet seems to be saying that the nations will see the glory of God and realize that it is their greatest blessing to bring Israel as a gift to God (66:20).*

*This is not a matter of "help" - this is more like the nations see the truth in a way that leaves them with no choice. Do you hear my point?*

M - I see (and accept) your point. How would you suggest wording things, since the nations are involved with Israel's restoration?

*Y - I am not sure if I would mention the point of verse 22 in a one-sentence synopsis of 49:14-26. I don't see that concept (that God will bring about that the nations should bring Israel back to the land) as the central focus of this passage. I see the end-phrase of verse 23 as more central to the focus of the passage - the encouragement that their hope has not been in vain, and that this knowledge, that hope to God is never in vain. I see this concept as central to this passage which begins with the despair of those who hope to God as the exile is prolonged and ends on a similar note - that all will know that God was Israel's savior all along. This in addition to the "veyada'at" - "and you will know" which implies that this knowledge is the very purpose of why God is accomplishing this.*

*So my one sentence synopsis would read something like - "God comforts the discouraged who will be gloriously regathered, vindicating their hope to God."*

*If I would want to mention the point of verse 22, I would word it along the lines of - "God's glory will be revealed over Israel to such a degree that the nations who witness this revelation will want to honor God by bringing His people back to their ancestral land."*

M - I was reviewing my emails and saw that I did not respond to this (although you had not asked me a question). Is that why you haven't sent me anything further on Isaiah?

My apologies if that's the case, but in any event, I've been waiting for your next email on the subject.

As for your point here, yes, I agree in large part; the problem is to take your second, expanded thought and reduce it a short, outline clause.

### **50:1-3 Why the Lord judged His sinning people**

*Y - You entitled 50:1-3 as "Why the Lord judged His sinning people"*

*My understanding is that this segment is placed here to explain why Israel is still in exile, that the fact that they have not yet been redeemed is not a sign of God's weakness, and not a proof that God abandoned His people. It's a sign that Israel has not yet returned to God- it is a call for Israel to put their hope and trust in God.*

*This being the case I would use something like "Why Israel is still suffering"*

M - Yes, I see your viewpoint, but doesn't this beg the question: Why is Israel still in exile? Wouldn't that suggest that Israel has still not repented, and perhaps that should be part of what's stated in the outline?

Also, I recently listened to Isaiah on audio (for the first time, in English), and I was struck again at how the polemics against the idols (as in ch. 47) are speaking to Israel as well (as in 48) and not just rebuking the nations. We discussed this at some length when reviewing these sections, but again, I can't away from the fact that much of the anti-idol polemic was in rebuke to Israel, at least as much as to Babylon and the nations.

*Y - Of-course Israel is in exile because of her sins - that is what the prophet is explicitly pointing to in these verses - and I see why my suggestion for an outline for these verses that leaves out Israel's sin wouldn't capture the spirit of these verses - so perhaps it should be "It is Israel's sin that is delaying redemption, Not God's inadequacy"*

*My original point was that the thrust of this passage was a statement more about not thinking the wrong reasons (God's inadequacy or Israel's abandonment) than it is about thinking the right reason (Israel's sin and failure to repent - although the point behind shooting down the wrong*

reasons is to shoot down the excuses Israel might have for not repenting - and thereby to call them to repentance).

As for your point about idolatry - yes Israel is rebuked for idolatry - but to say "at least as much as to Babylon and the nations" is to miss the spirit of this entire segment. The entire segment contrasts those who worship idols over and against those who hope to God. Babylon and the nations worship idols in way that defines the nation as idolatrous and apart from God but Israel, although she sins, but her idolatry doesn't redefine her as a nation in a way that removes them from God. - As you yourself stated - Israel is the subject of redemption, they are the ones being redeemed, this means that they are being called in 49:23 "those who have hoped to Me" - this is not a title given to any other national entity. Even chapter 48 which speaks of Israel's idolatry still contrasts Israel who is called God's servant (in verse 20) over and against the "wicked" in verse 22 who will not see redemption. Does the word "wicked" include members of the Israelite nation? Yes, but not the national entity as a national entity.

Do you see my point?

M - Re: your suggested, improved outline title, I agree. That expresses things clearly.

Re: your response to my point about idolatry, you're absolutely right about the contrast. What I intended to say in speaking of Israel being rebuked "at least as much as to Babylon and the nations" is that, when it comes to the intent of the verses -- why did God put them there? Who were the intended readers? -- the Lord had Israel in mind just as much, since much of the polemic was designed to wake them up.

So, they are not rebuked in the same way, and your distinction is absolutely right. But do you the point I was getting at too?

When you answer that, feel free to move on to your next concern, since we're close enough on all this.

Y - Yes, I agree, the primary audience of the book of Isaiah is Israel and all of the rebukes, including the ones directed at the other nations are intended for Israel to learn from. So I see this section of Isaiah as speaking to an Israel who knows about trust in God to some degree - and is encouraging them to make that trust in God fill their hearts. (In a certain sense this is the message of all Scripture). This lesson is partly brought out by pointing to the futility of trusting in other entities as exemplified by Israel when she turns from God and by other nations such as Babylon.

**M - 50:4-11 The servant of the Lord suffers for His obedience; will His people listen?**

Y - You entitled 50:4-11 as "The servant of the Lord suffers for his obedience will his people listen?"

*I would say "The servant of the Lord has the strength to bear his suffering because he trusts in God, and he encourages his people to do the same"*

*Do you hear my point?*

M - I believe I see your point, but the end of the chapter is such a strong rebuke. Is the servant merely encouraging his people to follow his example, or is questioning whether they will? Also, upon further reflection, I'm wondering if I need to say something about the how in tune the servant is with the voice of God.

*Y - I see your points (both of them - my outline doesn't reflect verses 4,5 and 11) - let me reconsider.*

M - We remain fairly close either way, since the passage is not particularly controversial. I'm interested, though, to hear your conclusions, of course.

*Y - Sorry again for the delay - here is my proposal for a title for these verses (50:4-11).*

*"The Lord's servant describes his own unwavering faith in God in the face of his challenges and he exhorts his people to do the same"*

*I realize that this doesn't include every last concept that is contained in these verses but I feel that this is where the prophet placed weight and emphasis. I took out the word "suffering" and put in "challenges" because the word "challenges" brings to mind mission-related pain as opposed to the word "suffering" which implies pain that is not necessarily related to any mission. And the servant is describing suffering that is brought upon him by his mission.*

*I changed the word "encouraged" to "exhorts" because you rightly pointed out that verse 11 implies that a large percentage of the people are not listening - so I felt that exhort is a better word because it implies that his people are not necessarily listening while "encourage" would imply that they are.*

*What are your thoughts?*

M - Yes, this makes good sense. In light of your comments, I would make one small adjustment, and change "his challenges" to "opposition," so, ""The Lord's servant describes his own unwavering faith in God in the face of opposition and he exhorts his people to do the same."

This way, we can see even more specifically that the challenges of which you speak (and the suffering of which I spoke) are actually the result of the opposition he experiences for his mission.

But overall, we're in sync.

*Y - I agree that your tweak better captures the theme of these verses - let's move on to 51.*

## **M - 51:1-8 Words of encouragement for the faithful; victory is near**

*Y - You wrote - "Words of encouragement for the faithful; victory is near" - I feel that perhaps the greater emphasis in this passage is not the nearness of the "victory" (although it is mentioned in verse 5) but rather the all-encompassing and eternal nature of the "victory." I would propose - "Words of encouragement for the faithful; they stand with the eternal and Almighty God."*

*What do you say?*

*One quick question on this subject - would you agree that the faithful of this passage are the same as "those who fear the Lord" in verse 10 of the previous chapter?*

M - Re: your quick question, yes, it appears that the faithful in ch. 51 are the same as those addressed in 50:10. (It depends, of course, on how much the chapters are directly related and follow one another; we know that subject matter can switch.)

Re: your proposed wording change, I'm honestly not sure. It seems that God is encouraging the faithful that He will work on their behalf; He will intervene with compassion -- more than saying, "Yes, you are standing with God." That is understood in my reference to "the faithful"; but the stress is on his activity. Why do you feel the distinction is important?

*Y - It seems that I wasn't clear in making my point. My point was that the encouragement to the faithful places a greater emphasis on the scope of the victory (that it will be eternal and far-reaching) rather than on*

*the timing of the victory (it is near). I see how the words I chose would cause confusion.*

*So 1 - Do you agree that there is a greater emphasis on scope than on timing and 2 - If you agree to #1 then would you perhaps accept that a more accurate outline of these verses (51:1-8) would be; "Words of encouragement to the faithful, their victory will be eternal." or 3 - If you don't agree with 1 or 2 - could you please explain why?*

*Thank you*

M - Thanks for clarifying. Yes, this works fine.

## **51:9-11 The arm of the Lord will bring deliverance to captive Israel**

*Y - Moving on to the next segment which calls upon the arm of the Lord to awaken - do you see any significance in the parallel language here (51:9) and in 52:1? And if yes, what are we to learn from this?*

M - Yes, the parallel seems too striking to ignore, so I would see significance. In the first instance, God is speaking of His saving arm to act once on Israel's behalf. In the latter, God is calling on Israel to step into its destiny and role in response to God's actions.

*Y - Continuing our discussion - you entitled 51:9-11 as "The arm of the Lord will bring deliverance to captive Israel"*

*- Isn't the tone of these verses more pleading and praying rather than a confident tone - even if you assume that the last of these 3 verses is speaking with confidence but the first two are certainly not, so it is possible to read verse 11 as; 1- an answer to the plea expressed in verses 9 and 10 or; 2 - as a continuation of the prayer - in the sense of "and then (after the arm of the Lord is aroused) the redeemed of the Lord will return etc." Either way, wouldn't a more appropriate heading read something like - "a plea for the arm of the Lord to deliver Israel"*

M - Yes, I agree with your rewording. The only thing is that v. 11 clearly speaks with confidence that this WILL happen. Anyway we can nuance the wording to include that? Or not necessary?

*Y - Our last discussion focused on verse 11 (of 51) I suggested that it could be either the end of the prayer of verses 9 and 10 or the response to that prayer expressed in those verses. You insisted that it is the confident response to the prayer - and I feel that it could go either way - so I won't insist on changing the wording of your title for these 3 verses.*

**M - 51:12-14 But Israel has forgotten her Maker**

**51:15-16 The Lord has put His words into His messenger's mouth**

*Y - As we approach verses 12 through 16 we are touching upon verses that we have already discussed both in public and in private so I expect the going to be rougher and slower - but this is the path to truth and no one said it will be smooth.*

*You divided verses 12-14 from 15-16 entitling the first set "But Israel has forgotten her Maker" and you entitled the last set "The Lord has put His word into His messenger's mouth"*

*These two titles do not imply any connection between these sets of verses - do you feel the connection between these two sets of verses is so dim that it does not need to be reflected in a brief outline?*

*One more question - doesn't verse 15 seem to be a continuation of the power of God spoken of in verse 13?*

M - As to vv. 12-16, I have read them over and over again, in micro-form and in their larger context, and I feel that my outline description is correct, except that I could clarify that the message the Lord has given His servant is a message to Zion, so it does build well after the previous verses. While looking at the verses in one English translation, I saw this translation note, with which I concur: "The addressee (second masculine singular, as in vv. 13, 15) in this verse is unclear. The exiles are addressed in the immediately preceding verses (note the critical tone of vv. 12-13 and the reference to the exiles in v. 14). However, it seems unlikely that they are addressed in v. 16, for the addressee appears to be commissioned to tell Zion, who here represents the restored exiles, 'you are my people.' The addressee is distinct from the exiles. The language of v. 16a is reminiscent of 49:2 and 50:4, where the Lord's special servant says he is

God's spokesman and effective instrument. Perhaps the Lord, having spoken to the exiles in vv. 1-15, now responds to this servant, who spoke just prior to this in 50:4-11."

This makes very good sense to me and reinforces my understanding of the text.

As for the connection between vv. 13 and 15, yes, it's clearly there as the Lord speaks of Himself as the Creator, hence the one who will redeem the exiles and the one who puts His powerful word of redemption in His servant's mouth.

I hope you can see where I'm coming from here.

*Y - So if you agree that the two sets (12-14/15,16) are connected - how do you see verses 15 and 16 as a response to the fear described in verse 12? And do you believe that the "word" of verse 16 is different than the word of 40:5 and 8? One more question - did you notice that the exact same words appear in our verse 15 and in Jeremiah 31:34 - do you see any significance to this?*

M - Before I reply, do you see my basis for saying that the verses are speaking first to the exiles then to the messenger, about the exiles and their return?

*Y - You (and this writer who you quote) focus on the point that it is difficult to understand how Zion is given a word for Zion - I see this as one factor out of many that ought to be considered - I see no reason why this factor should be assigned more weight than some of the other factors that are relevant here.*

M - All clear. I just wanted to be sure that you saw the basis for my views and how these factors should be taken into consideration. I'll respond to your other email ASAP.

It would appear that vv. 15-16 bring assurance that God, through the word of His messenger, will indeed redeem Zion, hence answering His people's fears.

As for the "word" of v. 16, it's certainly possible that it is the same word of comfort and redemption from 40:5 and 8. I would have to think about it more to be sure, but the overall themes keep repeating themselves in these chapters, so it's certainly very possible.

Re: the parallel to Jer 31:34(35), it appears that in both passages, God, the creator and ruler over nature, is the one who will preserve His people.

What is clear to me, as I read the text yet once more, is that the messenger in vv. 15-16 is distinct from the people -- his people -- to whom he brings the message.

*Y - Would you then accept that the "you" in verse 15 (as in "your God") is the nation? Or do you believe that the personal "you" in verse 15 addresses the messenger?*

M - Most likely the messenger, who is being addressed in these two verses and who is given a message for his people.

*Y - 1. Is there anything in verse 15 (without verse 16) that tells you that the messenger is being addressed?*

*2. Don't you think that it is strange that God points to His mastery over nature in verse 13 addressing the nation and in verse 15, He continues to describe His mastery over nature but is now addressing a different audience?*

*3. Did you notice the words that God rebukes Israel for fearing the enemy - "Who are you that you fear mortal man and you have forgotten your Maker" - The words ("who are you") indicate that there is something essential about Israel that contradicts their fear - what is this property that Israel has that does not fit with their fear?*

M - 1. In itself, no, the addressee becomes clear in v. 16. However, there is a hint of a possible shift in the opening ve-anoki, as in Jer 3:19.

2. Why would I consider it strange? I don't follow. It's the same God, describing His same power, talking about delivering His people from exile, first addressing the nation, then giving His messenger words to speak to the nation. Don't you think you're trying to make something out of nothing here?

3. First, there are Jewish translations (such as the New JPS Version) that understand "who are you" differently, rendering, "What ails you that you fear man who must die?" Major lexicons list other verses where mi has similar meanings. But if I read it in the more common sense (as you do and most translations do), the most obvious answer to your question is this: GOD is comforting YOU. Who, then, are YOU to be afraid?

My question for you: Do you not see the very close parallel wording between 49:2 and 52:16, both speaking in the first person, both with "put" and "mouth" and "shadow" , and both with words for "hide" or "conceal"? And both have a message/mission to/for the nation.

*Y - 1. Does the audience really shift in Jeremiah 3:19? - 3:18 addresses Israel in the plural while 19 changes to singular but it is the same audience. Furthermore, the "anochi" here serves to connect it to the opening of verse 12 as if this is a continuation of that thought. What do you see in Jeremiah 3:19?*

*2. Does the messenger need to be personally reminded about God's mastery over nature?*

*3. So do you believe that the word "osecha" "your Maker" of verse 13 is NOT referring to the specific "making" of Israel as a nation unto God?*

*Or do you accept that it IS referring to that specific creation of Israel as a nation unto God but you see it as disconnected from the rebuke of verse 12?*

*To respond to your question:*

*Of-course I see 51:16 and 49:2 as connected - this is my whole point. My understanding is that the very same word that is concentrated in the prophet is present in the righteous remnant of Israel, this can be understood on two levels (not mutually exclusive - I believe both are true) 1- The prophet is granted a detailed message while the nation (as in the righteous of the nation) carry the general message, and 2 - The nation keeps the word granted to the prophet for future generations. (I think that the theme of chapters 40-52 give more weight to the first of these two options - but again, they are not mutually exclusive) Note, the individual servant is never clearly identified - he is called by Israel's name (49:3) showing a unity of purpose and function.*

*Once we are on the subject allow me to explain why I don't have a problem with the nation being granted a word for the nation. 1 - This could be the righteous remnant who is commissioned with a word for the nation in general (such as the opening verse of this entire segment (40:1) which commissions a group of people to address the nation). 2 - The word itself is not "tell Zion you are My nation" rather the reason the word was granted to the nation was to proclaim this truth - that Zion is God's nation - but that is not the word itself. (I think that this option is the one most clearly supported by the big picture of the text from 40 through 52).*

M - 1. I wasn't pressing this as an exact parallel as much as the words indicating a shift in thought. Jer 3:18 culminates a promise of return; 3:19 God speaks of what He had hoped would have happened before exile. In Isa 51, even if vv. 12 and 15 are joined with anoki -- which is possible but not certain -- what does that prove? It's the same God speaking about the same redemption. Nothing more.

2. God elsewhere speaks of His mastery over nature, including to His messengers. But the messenger is not the only one listening: all the readers of Isaiah are listening too.

3. Yes, I see this as referring to God as Israel's maker in v. 13. Not sure what the point is, though re: vv. 15-16.

Re: your argument about the righteous remnant, the point is we have God commissioning an individual in Isa 42 and 49 and 50; that individual is a given a message of redemption for the nation (including for the righteous remnant). Why not just accept the text at face value? You too have to posit a change in who is being addressed in these verses, from the nation to the righteous remnant. Why not just accept that it's an individual who is being spoken to -- one of us! -- to speak to the rest of our people?

Finally, the most straightforward reading of 52:16 is that the message put in the prophet's mouth for Zion is, "You are My people!"

To me, this makes the addresses in vv. 15-16 to be overwhelmingly clear, and in keeping with changes of subject or addressee elsewhere in these chapters. (You yourself posit a change from the Messiah to the prophet in ch. 42, correct?)

At the very least, then, you should be able to see the justification for my outline description and the fact that I push back strongly against your reading of the text in which God puts words in Israel's mouth for the planting of the heaven and the founding of the earth.

*Y - 1. We have a unit of text (verses 12-16), the Author of the text has you thinking "Israel" as the audience down through 15, nothing indicates a shift in the audience until you get to the last phrase in verse 16. This is certainly not typical. This is more strange according to you than it is according to me - because according to you the function of these passages is to create a contrast between Israel and the individual servant and the literary structure conflates the two (assuming 16 is talking to the individual servant) and not creating a contrast.*

*2. As far as I can see, in the passages that address the individual servant, God's mastery over nature is not presented directly to the servant as it is here with the words "your God" - furthermore, the context indicates that God's mastery over nature is being pointed to as a rebuke for Israel's fear - God's mastery of nature in 42:5 for example is not presented as part of a rebuke. Again, to remind you, as you read from 12 through 15 - the Author didn't do anything to change the direction of the conversation.*

*3. My question isn't yet about verse 16 - first let us try to understand the verses that we agree about beyond the superficial. If you agree that the term "your Maker" refers to the specific creation of Israel as a nation unto God - wouldn't it follow that this is part of the rebuke expressed in verse 12? ("who are you"). And if it is (which I understand that you accept that it is part of the rebuke) let us try to understand - what is it about God making Israel for a nation unto Him that would stand in the way of them fearing mortal man? And whatever your answer is - do you see this as part of the theme coming from chapter 40?*

*I believe that if we carefully follow the leads of the text in the verses leading up to 16 - we will better understand the Author's intent for verse 16.*

*The straightforward reading of verse 16 is coming from verse 12 is that you will not dream of a change in the audience until you hit the last phrase in verse 16 - at this point you can go back and change your reading of verse 16 (and perhaps verse 15 as well) which has nothing to do with "straightforward" - or you can ask yourself - what does the Author mean with this? And did the Author explain Himself in the chapters leading up to this passage?*

*Let me remind you - you yourself read these verse as referring to Israel until - to use your words you "sought to dig deeper" (from an e-mail from August of last year)*

*I understand that the rebuke of 12 and 13 as directed at the righteous remnant addressed in 51:1 and 7 who are clearly in a position to fear the enemy and need God's encouragement.*

*I already pointed out to you that the change in addressee in chapter 42 is clearly indicated by the text, there is a change in format (second to first person), there is a new introduction, there is a*

*paragraph break - and all of this for a change in addressee that has no real theological ramifications - meaning - from my perspective, the roles of Messiah, prophet, righteous remnant and people of Israel are all fused together and these chapters in Isaiah highlight their fusion and not their contrast. For you, the contrast between the one (Messiah) and the others is of paramount theological significance, yet in this text (51:12-16) the Author goes out of His way to have them flow one into the other.*

*I believe that there is a lot of depth to this passage that we have not yet touched on and I hope that you will bear with me on this fruitful journey as tedious as it will be.*

M - One quick note (then, I'll try to respond to each point specifically later today or tomorrow): We previously discussed the translation of the verses, and as rendered in the NJPSV, things change dramatically, as it is God doing the speaking: "For I the LORD your God- Who stir up the sea into roaring waves, Whose name is LORD of Hosts- Have put My words in your mouth And sheltered you with My hand; I, who planted the skies and made firm the earth, Have said to Zion: You are My people!" Rendered like this, the need for a change from the nation to the prophet is not as necessary and, overall, of less theological consequence.

*Y - I have only one problem with this translation - it ignores the "lamed" (3 of them) - The Lord put His words in Israel's mouth for the sake of/purpose of planting the heavens, establishing the earth and declaring to Zion, you are My people. - do you see my point?*

M - Yes, I see the point, but Hebrew scholars have an explanation for the usage, hence the translation. (Can't write in more detail now; will try to give the grammatical justification later.)

1. Again I don't find it so jarring to see the shift in vv. 12-14 and 15-16 anymore than the shift in 48:15-16, where the prophet suddenly speaks in the first person in the midst of God speaking in the first person. There are passages in Jeremiah just like this, where you assume the prophet is speaking (or, God is speaking), only to read further and to ask yourself, "Who was speaking after all?" (See Jer 8:23-9:2).

2. When I speak of the individual servant here in Isa 51, it could be the prophet or the Messiah (or, the prophet as the prototype of the Messiah, as likely at the beginning of Isa 61). Why would it be inappropriate for God to remind the prophet of His mastery over nature? And again, the prophet/servant is not the only one hearing these words. They are being read by the people as a whole, just as the idol-worshipping people also hear God's rebuke of Babylon for its idolatry.

3. I also believe "your Maker" refers to God as the Creator of all people, here with reference to Israel, not solely the Creator of the nation Israel. The larger meaning seems more obvious based on how the Lord's self-description as Creator of the universe. As for fearing man, I see this man-centered mentality being rebuked early on in the book (in chapter 2, culminating in 2:22). It was the downfall of Zedekiah, who feared the people and therefore failed to walk in the fear of God, and in the context of national rebuke, would make sense in that way. Because you fear man and

have forgotten your Creator, you walk in the ways of the flesh rather than follow His ways. In the context of the exile here, where fearing the enemy is in view, Israel is called account for lack of faith, since with God on their side to help them, there was no need for fear.

All that being said, I too agree that there is a real and intimate connection between the nation as a whole, the righteous remnant, and the Messiah -- the ultimate righteous remnant of one -- and that's why the identity of the individual messenger comes into light as we continue to read. The focus gets clearer: not the nation as a whole; not even the righteous remnant; but the messenger of the Lord, called to bring this important prophetic word.

I'm simply allowing the Author to sharpen my focus as I read each line.

On another note, I did a re-read of all of Isaiah in rapid form last week, and as happened when I listened to it on audio, I was struck in these chapters by the depth and persistence of our sin, the consistent rebukes for our idolatry and failures, at the special role of the righteous servant, and at the incredibly rich expression of God's tenacious love towards us, regardless of our guilt.

*Y - 1. It could happen, but the more natural read would have us thinking Israel right through 16. - I would ask - why do you insist that verse 15 is speaking to the individual servant?*

*2. I am not saying that it is "inappropriate" - I was assuming that you believed that this individual is the Messiah who you believe to be guiltless and I thought you would find it strange to have him partake of a rebuke directed at the sinful people. I now realize that you accept that the individual servant may be the prophet and not necessarily the Messiah - so I hear how you are ok with this flow of the prophetic conversation.*

*3. This is interesting - you do not see the "osecha" as parallel to the very same word in 44:2 where Israel is also encouraged not to fear? Do you not see this "osecha" concept as related to 43:1; 44:21; and 54:5 - all in which the concept of Israel's particular creation is pointed to for encouragement not to fear? Or 43:21 where this same concept (Israel's particular creation) is called upon for the purpose of rebuke?*

*Are we supposed to forget that Israel is a special creation of God when we read this rebuke (51:12,13)? This coming right after 51:7 and 8 where Israel is called upon not to fear precisely because of their unique calling in God's scheme (a nation with God's teaching in their heart)?*

*Does this (that the "osecha" of 13 is not personal to Israel) sit well with you?*

M - 1. I only "insist" that v. 15 is speaking of an individual messenger because of v. 16. So, again, since the servant is one with his people, it's not a jump to me to see the change in focus. In fact, it's less abrupt than the example I gave you from Isa 48. To turn this around, then, if you read v. 16 on its own, would you think, "This is the righteous remnant (or the nation", or "This is the prophet"?

2. All clear.

3. You list a number of other verses with similar verbs (so, here "maker"; elsewhere, "creator" or "the one who formed"), but I understand your point and have no problem with your point. Why, though, must this change my reading of 51:15-16? I know this is important to you, and perhaps I'm missing your emphasis, so please feel free to point out what you might feel I'm missing.

To me, it seems you're emphasizing the importance of certain expressions while downplaying the depth of parallelism between 51:16 and 49:2, not to mention the appropriateness of the mission of 51:16 for the prophet/servant. Moreover, if I'm understanding you correctly, you also have a shift in subjects from the nation to the righteous remnant, yet without an explicit indication in the text (please correct me if this is not your view).

Again, my reading, in the larger context and specifically here, makes much better sense to me, and interestingly, critical scholars see vv. 15-16 as insertions into the text that jar the flow a bit -- that's how much a transition seems clear to them (although they're obviously missing the larger points).

*Y - 1. Even assuming that 16 is talking to an individual I would read the section as follows:*

*12 - It is I who comforts you, who are you to fear man that dies and son of man that turns into grass? 13 - And you have forgotten the Lord your Maker who stretches the heavens and establishes the earth, and you are constantly, all day, afraid of the fury of the oppressor, but where is the fury of the oppressor? 14 - The exiled prisoner is quick to be unbound, he will not die to be utterly destroyed and his bread will not be lacking (This is a continuation of the rebuke of verse 13 - the point being that the trouble you are facing is not so permanent that it should cause you so much fear). 15 - (Continuing the rebuke -) And I am the Lord your God who stirs up the sea and its waves roar, the Lord of hosts is His name (and if I, the all-powerful am your personal God, you should not fear). 16 (Now turning to the prophet so that the people can hear -) And I have already put My word in your mouth to plant the heavens and establish the earth and to declare to Zion you are My nation ( and if God already planted His redeeming word in His prophet's mouth, why should His people fear the enemy?) In other words - even if 16 is talking to the prophet - I still see 15 as talking to the people.*

*As for your point - that if verse 16 is read alone we would think it is talking about an individual; This is true but at the same time, from a literary standpoint we would know that the individual had to have been previously identified, in other words the verse (16) assumes you know who it is talking to because it doesn't identify the audience.*

*3. You asked/implied a few questions in this section; A - What do I think you are missing, B - I am downplaying the connection to 49:2, C - I too see a shift in the text (from nation to remnant) and D - There are scholars who see 15,16 as a separate literary unit from 12-14*

*Let me first reply to "B" - I addressed this in a previous letter, I guess I wasn't clear. I believe that the primary audience coming from 51:1 is the righteous remnant, there is NO shift in the audience between 14 and 15.*

*My reply to "D" is that if anyone sees 15,16 as disconnected from 12-14, they did not begin to understand what the prophet was talking about starting in chapter 40. And to explain, I will address "A" - The entire theme of all of these chapters is that God is the only true power and that His word is the only true force in this world. Israel is the witness to this truth and as such, if they would only appreciate the power of their testimony and bring their lives in line with the truth of their testimony, their troubles will end. The fact that they bear this testimony, then even before they fully appreciate the power of the testimony, is a source of comfort for them, because this testimony (that God is the only power) is the only constant in the universe and this testimony is the truth that will light up the world and melt away all the falsehood that stands in the way of this testimony, and when this happens, the bearers of this testimony will be vindicated to the eyes of those who denied this testimony.*

*When Israel is rebuked for forgetting its Maker, it is being rebuked for forgetting the One who implanted this truth into their hearts, and by doing so, set them apart from all other nations. To miss this is to miss the entire thrust of the comfort that has been spoken from chapter 40 until here.*

*And to respond to "B" - No, I am not downplaying the connection between 49:2 and 51:16. The point of both of these is that the bearer of God's word is empowered with the power that is inherent in God's word. The underlying theme of all of these chapters is that God's word is the only true force in the universe and as such those who bear His word (whether in a general sense, such as the nation; whether in a more particular sense, such as the prophet), those who live His word (such as the righteous) and the one who administers His word (the Messiah), are all blessed because of their connection to God's word. The parallel between 49:2 and 51:16 is here, not to create a contrast between the prophet and the nation, but to have them flow one into the other, both are bearers of God's word and the difference is in degree and concentration as in more or less, rather than in yes and no.*

*So as it relates to verse 16 - Israel has had God's word placed in their mouth (43:12). This word, that God is the only power, is the word that plants the heavens and establishes the earth, and it is this word that declares to the world that Zion is God's nation. And with a word as powerful as this planted into their mouth, they have no reason to fear.*

*I think that this is abundantly clear from the text.*

*Do you understand how I see the text?*

M - Thanks for taking the time to clarify and expand on your views. Honestly, while I agree that Israel is called to be a witness nation, I see "the word" being put primarily in the mouth of the

individual servant, the one who succeeds where the nation fails, the one who does the redeeming (as I have often emphasized) while it is the people who are to be redeemed.

I see Israel by its very existence as a people delivered from exile as a witness nation to the one true God -- not so much because of a word that is in their hearts but because of God's action of their/our behalf -- whereas it is the individual servant who brings God's word to the nations. And to me, these chapters culminate in the exaltation of this servant, himself rejected by his people only to redeem them, who is then a microcosm of the nation, which was rejected by the nations.

As for v. 16, even when applied to the individual servant, I'm not sure that the NJPSV is wrong (in terms of planting the heavens, etc.). I just need to dig deeper into parallel grammatical usages of infinitive constructs and haven't had the time to do so.

In short, it seems to me that you have an overexalted view of Israel's role here, especially with the "word" that is allegedly put into Israel's mouth, which heightens our differences in perception.

May God guide us into the truth beyond our biases and shortcomings.

*Y - Do you reject the idea that a word of God was put into Israel's mouth?*

*Do you reject the idea that Israel carries that word throughout the exile?*

M - I don't reject the idea that God put a word in Israel's mouth, even in exile, but that word is primarily spoken through the prophets in Scripture.

I do reject the idea that God putting a word in Israel's mouth -- as opposed to the servant's mouth -- is a clear, dominant, and self-evident theme of Isa 41-53. And again, I do not see Israel being a "witness" in these chapters as related primarily to the words Israel speaks in exile.

*Y - Would you agree that the word put into Israel's mouth is the truth that there is but One God and that He is the only power?*

M - Based on the Isaiah texts, I would say that is the lesson God is trying to teach His people as opposed to the word He has put in their mouth.

I believe if we start in chapter 40 and read inductively, that's the conclusion we would come to.

*Y - I don't understand what you are saying - is this a response to my question? I asked if you acknowledge that God planted the truth - that He is the only power - into Israel's mouth. Do you agree with this statement or not?*

M - I do NOT see that as a major theme in these chapters -- namely, that God planted the truth in Israel's heart that He is the only power and that this is the message Israel to bring. I DO see that He is trying to teach them the lesson that He is the only power.

*Y - Thank you for clarifying. So would you say that 43:10,12;44:8 are not central to the theme of these chapters? The concept that Israel was "created" for a nation unto God - a concept that appears so often in these chapters - do you believe that it is something different than having this truth taught to them by God?*

M - These are central themes, for sure, but where do you see a word planted in Israel's mouth in these verses? I do see the word placed in the servant's mouth, for sure. And I see Israel as a witness nation, albeit largely deaf and blind in these chapters, who by God's dealings with our people demonstrate to the world that He is the only God. And, to repeat, it is the prophet/servant who declares this message.

I hope this is clear.

Can you please show me where the text says explicitly, before 51:16, that God put this word in Israel's mouth?

*Y - 43:12; 44:8;*

M - We are reading these differently. I see God trying to teach Israel this lesson, wanting them to witness this truth to the world. You see God as planting these truths in Israel's mouth as a prophetic messenger. Do you see the difference?

*Y - God is declaring that Israel IS His witness - not that they will become His witness. Do you not acknowledge that Israel was taught this truth (Deuteronomy 4:35)? Do you not acknowledge that in the midst of their sin they carry this truth (Psalm 78:5)?*

*Do you believe that the concept that Israel is created a nation unto God - is not related to the planting of this truth in their hearts? Do you believe that 51:7 is talking about a different teaching - that stands apart from this truth? Do you believe that the bearing of the vessels of the Lord of 52:11 is unrelated to the bearing of this truth?*

M - Yes, Israel IS His witness simply by being called out as His people. They witness to His glory and justice when they are judged for disobedience or blessed for obedience. And much is by doing, not speaking. The prophets within the nation -- and ultimately the Messiah -- are the messengers with a word. Again, this seems quite self-evident from the text.

And YES, God taught Israel from day one that He alone was God, and He proclaimed that message through the prophets of Israel and through Israel as a witness nation (as just explained), just as Nadab and Abihu were witnesses to God's holiness by their death (so also the prophesied destruction of the Temple in 2 Chr 7 serves as a witness to His holiness).

You seem to be missing the point, though, that in these chapters, it is the servant who has the word in his mouth (quite explicitly) and who brings the message of God to the nations, thereby fulfilling Israel's mission. I'm just going by what the text says. You are reading other concepts

into it. Even 51:7 does NOT speak of Israel declaring the Torah, nor does 52:11. I see these verses speaking more of Israel's calling to obedience to God, which would then be part of Israel's witness to the world.

*Y - You are limiting the concept of Israel being a witness nation to the idea that God's dealings with them teach the world God's ways. But that is not what 43:12 and 44:8 is saying. They explicitly talk of knowledge that was granted to them and to them alone. The text calls them witnesses and witnesses are called upon to testify - they are called upon as a contrast to the testimony of the idol-worshipping nations (43:10 vs 43:9).*

*You claim that Israel is a witness "simply by being called out as His people"? What does it mean to be called out as His people? Is it not that they were given exclusive knowledge? And when you say that 51:7 and 52:11 speak of Israel's calling for obedience to God - isn't obedience to God a way of declaring to the world that God is the only power? And don't the "vessels of the Lord" all serve as a sanctuary for God's word?*

*Furthermore, what is the "strength of Zion" that Zion is called upon to gird herself with (52:1)? Is it something apart from this truth that God is the only power?*

*I acknowledge fully (as I wrote in a previous letter) that the sinful nation is called upon in these chapters to fully appreciate this truth - that God is the only power. But this is a calling to appreciate and to live up to the truth which they have already been granted - and the prophet consistently reminds them that they have already been called by God. The comfort of these chapters is the emphasis on the fact that they already possess the redemptive truth. The contrast of these chapters is not between the prophet and the people (who are fused together with so many literary devices), rather the contrast of these chapters is between all of God's servants (to whatever degree they serve Him) versus their enemies who stand in their way and oppose the truth that they carry. The former are vindicated and comforted while the latter are confounded and put to shame.*

*One more question - do you think that 49:23 is describing an event that stands apart from 60:1-3?*

*M - Again, I'll reply in detail later, God willing. Thanks for writing at such length. But I see no contradiction between what you wrote here and my emphasis that Israel gets God's message out to the world through the prophets/Messiah. That is how the message is delivered. If you have a minute to add to this email, please show me where in the text the nation -- as opposed to the prophet/Messiah -- will deliver this message to the nations (representing Israel, of course).*

*Y - As it relates to the point I am making - it makes no difference if Israel declares the word herself or if the word she carries goes to the world through the prophet and Messiah. The righteous of Israel join with the Messiah and prophet in this segment of Scripture (40-52) in the task of bearing God's word and thus are called God's servant.*

*Isaiah 60:1-3 is one place which gives us to understand that that truth will emanate from Israel to guide the world. The fact that they are called witnesses in 43 and 44 is another. But the most important one is that they are called "those who hope to the Lord" in 49:23 - it is in this way that their hope, which is the expression of them living the truth that God granted them, is part of what God will use to teach the world. In other words, the hope to God that the righteous of Israel maintained in exile is a teaching tool that God will use to illuminate the world in the Messianic era.*

M - So sorry for the long delay. I got slammed with a few things unexpectedly that have been massively time consuming. Back to you ASAP!

I'll respond to each of your points in order.

With regard to Israel being a witness, as per 43:12 and 44:8, you keep ignoring the fact that witnesses testify in many different ways. When it comes to bringing God's message to the world (or to a sinful Israel), it is the individual servant/Messiah who is entrusted with that message, time and again. This is plain and cannot be denied. As for Israel, the nation testifies to their calling by the one true God by being judged and exiled because of sin, then being delivered from exile because of God's special love, thereby serving as a witness to His character, all without saying a word. And when Israel repents and is blessed by God, this further bears witness to His character and will. Do you deny these truths? And, as I requested, can you supply for me an explicit text in these chapters that speaks of the nation speaking as a witness? That's what I've been asking for you, but instead you say that the word "witness" implies this. Ideally, of course, a repentant Israel will bear witness with its words, and it is those words we read in Isaiah 53.

Re: the vessels of the Lord serving as a sanctuary for God's Word, first, at best, that would mean keepers of the Torah. Second, it is a major jump to say that because they were entrusted with carrying the Temple vessels, this meant they were verbally declaring a message. The argument continues to strike me as specious, as reading something into the text to support a larger argument you want to make (and I keep trying to see the text as you do; I'm simply not convinced).

Re: the strength of Zion, I would take to be faith in God, the confidence that Israel is called by His name and will be redeemed and restored, rather than a message about Him. But either way, even if Zion's strength was recognizing that God is the only true power, where does it say that Zion is now declaring this message?

Re: the comfort that God brings to His people, yes, I see this as God's promise to deliver Israel and destroy Israel's enemies. But I don't see how this ties with Israel bringing a verbal message. Moreover, while the prophet/Messiah is clearly joined to his people, he is also distinct from his people, called to do something the people have failed to do (or cannot do).

Re: 49:23 and 60:1-3, if we see this as eschatological, then yes, these would likely speak of the same event. If applied in a lesser sense to the return from Babylon, Isa 60 certainly does not speak about that.

Re: your statement, “The righteous of Israel join with the Messiah and prophet in this segment of Scripture (40-52) in the task of bearing God's word and thus are called God's servant,” I see nothing at all in these texts or our interaction thus far to support that. To the contrary, the contrast between the people (even the righteous remnant) and the individual servant become ever more distinct in 49 and 50, preparing the way for 52:13-53:12.

Re: 49:23 and your point, “In other words, the hope to God that the righteous of Israel maintained in exile is a teaching tool that God will use to illuminate the world in the Messianic era,” that is certainly possible. But the lesson is that God is faithful despite Israel's unfaithfulness, and that those who looked to Him in brokenness and repentance, hoping that He would keep His promises, would not be disappointed – because of His covenant faithfulness.

As for your statement that, “Isaiah 60:1-3 is one place which gives us to understand that that truth will emanate from Israel to guide the world,” I need to understand what you mean. Is this the parallel to 2:1-4, in which case the truth comes from the God of Israel in Jerusalem/Zion? More specifically, does this truth come from the Messiah himself, who will be ruling over the nations and adjudicating righteously, as per ch. 11? And even if we assume that Israel at that time will be obedient – as I too assume – that will be because Israel is a different people then, quite distinct from the sinning servant that needed to be redeemed by the righteous servant, from Babylon and through the ages.

*Y - Here is my response to your letter. The context of this discussion (which addresses the question - in what way is Israel God's witness) is related to 51:16. Can we say that this verse is speaking of the word that God put in Israel's mouth? You acknowledged that God did put a word in Israel's mouth (from an e-mail back in August) it's just that you don't see that as a theme in these chapters. I do, and I will tell you why.*

*I pointed to 43 and 44 where Israel is called God's witness and you dismissed this argument because you claim that the type of witness that Israel is - is a passive one, unrelated to the truth that they have been granted.*

*In other words, you see Israel as a witness in the same way that someone could point to an animal in the zoo as a testimony to the care and compassion of the zoo-keeper. The animal in question is not actively testifying to anything, it is an object that serves as an example.*

*I don't believe that this is the testimony that the prophet is talking about. I pointed out to you that Isaiah 43:12 and 44:8 both speak of God talking to Israel and to Israel alone in the context of appointing them as His witness. This is a testimony which involves the acquisition of certain knowledge. How do you read these two verses?*

*Furthermore, even if I were to accept your version of Israel being a witness nation, it would still give us Israel as a nation that carries a God-given truth that the nations are supposed to learn. You point to the cycle of disobedience and curse back to obedience and blessing as described in Psalm 78 and Nehemiah 9 amongst other passages. In these passages Israel is described as praying to God and God answering their prayer.*

*This would then mean that Israel has the knowledge of who it is that they ought to be directing their prayers to - the very knowledge that the nations need to learn. This is the knowledge they teach the nations as described in Isaiah 49:23 - not necessarily by going out and teaching the nations - but by living this truth on this minimal level - hoping and turning to Him when they are in trouble.*

*This testimony is a foundational part of the redemption process as evidenced in Psalm 22:25; 69:34; 102:18; Isaiah 25:3,9 - and as these texts indicate - this testimony is a foundational part of what God wants to teach the nations.*

*So to summarize, there is no question that a very powerful and foundational truth was planted in Israel's mouth - the knowledge that there is but one God and that all trust and worship ought to be directed to Him (Deuteronomy 4:35; Psalm 78:5). You want to argue that this is not what Isaiah was talking about in 51:16. I pointed out to you that Isaiah 43:12 and 44:8 both speak of God telling something to Israel in the context of Israel being God's witness. Furthermore, 44:8 puts this fact together with God's encouragement to Israel not to fear - directly parallel to this same encouragement in 51:16. 49:23 reassures Israel that the hope to God that they have will be vindicated - and we know that the vindication of this hope is a central feature of the redemption process (the Psalms and the passage in Isaiah that I referenced above) - and this hope requires the knowledge that the nations are lacking (and this lack of knowledge on the part of the nations is so vividly described in these chapters - specifically 44) - that they ought to be praying to God and to Him alone.*

*Let me remind you that you yourself have read 51:16 as addressing Israel (at least from a literary standpoint) until very recently. So on what basis should we not read this as addressing Israel?*

*You take issue with my statement that the righteous of Israel join with the individual servant in the task of bearing God's word in this segment of Isaiah (40-52). You say that you see "nothing at all in these texts ... to support that."*

*I don't know how you can say that - I see the prophet going out of his literary way to conflate the nation and the individual servants (prophet and Messiah). Both are called "My servant" (41:8; 42:1), both are called "Israel" (49:3), both are chosen (41:9; 42:1), both are "called by God" (41:9; 42:6), both are "formed by God from the womb" (44:2; 49:5), God will "glorify Himself" with both of them (44:23; 49:3), both give their bodies over to suffering (51:23; 50:6), both are "blind and deaf" (42:18; 42:19), both have God holding their hand (41:12; 42:6), both have*

rulers bowing to them (49:7, 23) and both have their enemies consumed by the moth (51:8; 50:9). These are but some of the literary devices that the prophet uses to fuse the nation and the individual servant together.

If you are looking specifically for the "task of bearing God's word" - you have the fact that Israel is called God's witness through God giving them exclusive knowledge (and this is presented as a parallel to being God's servant 43:10). You have the righteous of Israel identified as a "nation with God's Torah in their heart" - that is a pretty comprehensive way of bearing God's word. The contrast between the idol-worshippers and Israel in 44:21 makes it clear that the knowledge that God is the only one to be worshiped is what makes Israel God's servant - and carrying this knowledge is carrying the core of God's word.

You claim that the prophet is creating a contrast between the individual servant and the righteous remnant which you say becomes "more distinct" in 49 and 50. Can you please give me chapter and verse where you see the individual servant contrasted over and against the righteous remnant?

These two are actually most intensely conflated in 51 and 52 even if you don't attribute 51:16 to the righteous remnant - and if you do, as I have argued above and as you yourself have accepted in the past - then this conflation is sealed tight.

I realize that I have not responded to every point you raised in your recent letter - however it would help me to know your answers to my questions before I continue. To recap and to put my points into simple questions:

1 - On what basis do you insist that 51:16 is not addressing the righteous remnant of Israel? (- bearing in mind the Scriptural evidence that I have presented above and bearing in mind that the grammar and context lead us to this conclusion as you have accepted in the past)

2 - How could you say that the righteous remnant is not tasked with bearing God's word if they are called "a nation with My teaching in their heart"? (- together with the other passages I quoted)

3 - Where do you see the righteous remnant contrasted over and against the individual servant?

M - I believe I can answer your three questions with one lengthy response. To do so, I will look at the role of the individual servant (whom I take to be the Messiah in the key passages and you take to be the Messiah or the prophet) in contrast with the role of the righteous remnant. That, I believe, will provide you with my reasoning. It is also worth asking: If Israel as a nation failed in its role as God's servant but the righteous remnant was faithful to that calling, why raise up another individual within Israel with a major, specific role (either the Messiah or the prophet)? Why couldn't the righteous remnant accomplish everything that needed to be done? Why the need for another servant?

Let me first summarize what the individual servant does in the passages we agree on (either the prophet or the Messiah in Isa 42, 49, and 50):

- 1) He will teach the true way to the nations and the distant isles will await his teaching
- 2) He will persevere until he brings forth justice in the earth
- 3) He will set the captives and liberate the prisoners from their dungeons
- 4) He will regather scattered Jacob and restore scattered Israel
- 5) He will be a light to the nations, bringing God's salvation to the ends of the earth
- 6) He will bring the captives into a place of rest and blessing
- 7) He will be beaten and insulted yet will not be ashamed
- 8) People are called to listen to his word

Now, let's look at what is said about the righteous remnant in 51-52, since you point to the intense focus on them here (I'll weave in my understanding of 51:15-16 as we go):

- 1) In 51:4, teaching goes forth from the Lord (as with the individual servant), not from the righteous remnant, and it is His justice that goes forth to the nations, not justice brought by the righteous remnant to the nations, again in stark contrast with the individual servant who brings justice and light to the nations; accordingly, the coastlands will look to Him in 51:5, whereas they waited for the individual servant's teaching
- 2) Throughout 51, the righteous remnant is encouraged to look to the Lord who acts and delivers; the remnant does not bring the deliverance. Instead, the righteous remnant is called out of captivity whereas the individual servant is the one who liberates the captives.
- 3) Right up through 51:15, the remnant is being delivered, is encouraged to trust in the Lord, is weak and needing help, so if vv. 15-16 refer to the remnant, then it would best work as rendered in the NJV (which we have discussed): "I, who planted the skies and made firm the earth, Have said to Zion: You are My people!" Yes, God has put His words in the remnant's mouth (similar to 59:20-21) -- which I could understand as referring to the words of Torah and prophets, deposited in the nation -- but He is the one who speaks to Zion. That would be in keeping with the entire context. God is acting and speaking and delivering, encouraging the weak, righteous remnant that they are His people, with His words in their mouth. Otherwise, with the sudden changes in subject we have discussed, this would be the individual servant (in keeping with your translation), since he is consistently doing these very things -- speaking words of deliverance -- and it is the remnant that is receiving the deliverance.

4) We next see the righteous remnant in 52:7-12, having been freed from captivity, they come with a message of God's kingship to Zion, and they are called to keep themselves separate as they carry the vessels of the Lord.

In sum, the individual servant is not only distinctly different from the sinning, national servant as a whole, but also from the righteous remnant. He stands out as the deliverer, called to bring God's light and justice to the nations, called to regather the people and set the captives free (including the remnant). In contrast, the weak, struggling remnant receives deliverance and mercy and is called to bring the joyful news to Zion.

As for the parallels you seek to bring between the remnant (and or nation) and the individual servant, they break down as well. For example, the suffering of the nation in 51:23 is due to God's wrath; the suffering of the servant in 50:6; and the individual servant, in contrast with the nation, is not blind and deaf (you cite 42:18-19, which is quite surprising; surely v. 19 speaks of the nation; the individual is never called blind and deaf; to the contrary, the servant boasts of his ability to hear in 50:4-5; was that an error on your end?)

And while you claim that Israel as a nation speaks (which I do not totally dismiss), the point is how the nation speaks. These passages make clear that, in being a light to the nations and proclaiming liberty to the captives, that is the calling of the individual servant -- who, in turn, fulfills Israel's mission and calling (49:3).

I believe this answers the 3 questions you asked.

*Y - Thanks for your response - I hope to respond in detail in the near future - at this point I am trying to understand your position. From this response of yours it would seem that you have no problem reading the text (51:16) as God addressing the righteous remnant in the opening phrase (I have set My words in your mouth) – it's just that you cannot accept that the righteous remnant is commissioned to deliver a message to Zion (you are My nation). In other words out of 5 possible interpretations (listed below) you only fully reject the one that has the remnant addressing Zion. Is this correct?*

*- here are the 5 possible interpretations*

*a - God put His word in the remnant's mouth and they are commissioned to plant the heavens, establish the earth and declare to Zion*

*b- God put His word in the remnant's mouth so that God Himself could plant the heavens, establish the earth and declare to Zion*

*c - God put His word in the remnant's mouth so that the word can go forth and accomplish the planting of the heaven, establishing the earth and declaring to Zion.*

*d - God put His word in the remnant's mouth and He identifies Himself as the One who plants the heavens establishes the earth and declares to Zion.*

*e - God put His word in the individual servant's mouth - and the rest of the verse can be read with any of the above readings on the end of the verse (the servant, the word or God Himself will accomplish the planting of the heavens or God describes Himself as the One who plants the heavens)*

*The way I understand your response is that you only reject explanation "a" but have no problem any of the other explanations - is this correct?*

M - Actually, I question c as well as a, but a most strongly.

Re: God Himself planting the heavens, etc. (in harmony with the NJV and other translations), the infinitives would be understood as gerunds (planting rather than to plant).

*Y - Again, before I launch into a lengthy dissertation - the arguments that you presented only work against "a" - how do you see them working against "c"?*

*Furthermore, what did you mean when you wrote "Otherwise, with the sudden changes in subject we have discussed" - which changes in subject are you talking about?*

M - I didn't get into extensive arguments re: c, but in short, throughout Isaiah (and in related verses), it is God who identifies Himself as the Creator, stretching out the heavens, etc. It would be without any scriptural precedent that God planted the heavens by means of putting His words into His servant's mouth -- unless it was pre-existent, divine Servant.

Re: sudden changes, I thought I had referenced earlier how many subject changes there were in the chapter, so, e.g., the opening verses speak to the remnant, through v. 8, then vv. 9-10 speak to the arm of the Lord, then the remnant returning from exile starting in v. 11, then the verses we're discussing about the servant, then Jerusalem starting in v. 17.

*Y - Thanks for the clarification - I understand the heavens and earth to be the new heaven and earth to be planted and I remembered what you wrote about the change between the remnant, the arm of the Lord and Jerusalem - I just did not realize that that is what you meant by "sudden changes"*

*- in any case, I am working on a more complete reply to your response and I will just finish here by expressing my appreciation for your ongoing participation in this discussion*

M - You're very welcome, and thank you for being such a faithful, challenging study partner. I believe we are both closer to the truth through this lengthy engagement.

I will await your full reply before saying more, but the obvious objections to the "new heavens and earth" interpretation would be: 1) there is no mention of such anywhere in the surrounding

text; 2) the verbiage is virtually identical to other texts which clearly speak of the present heavens and earth, identifying God as the Creator.

*Y - In your most recent response you set up what you see as various points of contrast between the individual servant and the righteous remnant. I understand that you presented this list as a response to my challenge -*

*"- Where do you see the righteous remnant contrasted over and against the individual servant?"*

*It seems that you misunderstood my challenge. In all of the instances that you quote, it is not the prophet that is creating the contrast. And the prophet knows how to create contrast. Creating contrast is a literary tool that the prophet uses quite a bit throughout this segment of his book (40-52). My challenge to you was to find where the prophet uses the literary tools at his disposal to create an explicit contrast between the individual servant and the righteous remnant.*

*I hope to give you a list of contrasts that the prophet presents as contrasts but before I do that allow me to explain why this is important and where I disagree with your take on these chapters.*

*We both agree that there are several separate entities described here; the righteous remnant, the individual servant (the prophet and the Messiah, or the Messiah alone) and Israel as a whole. By virtue of being separate entities there will have to be distinctions between them and I agree that there are important distinctions between each of these entities. It is possible to take any distinction and turn it into a contrast. The question is - is this what the prophet is doing? In other words, I see all of these entities as players on the same team. Yes, there are distinctions between them, each entity plays a different role on the team - and sure - it is possible to zoom in on any of these distinctions and turn them into a "contrast over and against" - but that is not what the prophet is doing in these chapters. I see the prophet going out of his literary way to highlight the common denominators that these entities share, and at no point does the prophet present the distinctions between them as a "contrast over and against."*

*Here is a partial list of contrasts "over and against" that the prophet presents in these chapters. 40:8 - flesh vs. the word of God; 40:30,31 - those who possess human vigor vs. those who hope to God; 41:16 - Israel's victory vs. the defeat of her opponents; 44:25,26 - the sorcerers vs. the prophets of God; 45:16,17 - the shame of the idolaters vs. the absence of shame in Israel; 45:20,21, The dead idols vs. the true God; 46:1-4 - the nations carrying their idols vs. Israel being carried by God; 49:24,25 - the strength of the human warrior vs. the power of God; 51:6 - the transient nature of the heaven and earth vs. the eternity of God's salvation.*

*Do you see how the prophet is doing this? He explicitly pits one against the other. These are clear and sharp contrasts, there is no doubt that the prophet is presenting a contrast "over and against." The prophet uses his words to make sure that we see these as entities that are not only distinct from one another but are in some way opposite of one another, they travel in different*

*directions. And by making these contrasts so clear, the prophet teaches us that the understanding that these entities are opposed to each other is thematic to this prophecy.*

*In sharp contrast, at no point does the prophet pit the righteous remnant over and against the individual servant. Yes, the prophet does assign different roles to these two entities, but not as opposites, rather as "more and less."*

*Let us take your own list. You point out how the distant isles await the teaching of the individual servant as opposed to the righteous remnant who do not have this role assigned to them. But the prophet does tell us that the righteous remnant carry God's teaching in their heart. In other words, the individual is tasked with spreading the teaching that the righteous are already bearing in their heart to some degree.*

*The second item on your list speaks of the individual bringing justice to the earth - and again, this is not the task of the remnant. But here again, the remnant is described as a group that already knows justice (51:7). So again, the individual is tasked with the role of applying a justice with which the remnant is already familiar to some degree.*

*The individual servant is to be a light to the nations and chapter 60 graphically describes the nation of Israel as a light to the nations. We can certainly deduce that the individual servant goes further than the nation in accomplishing this task, but the prophet's explicit words highlight the common denominator.*

*You point to the fact that the individual servant is beaten and insulted and is not shamed. But the righteous remnant is encouraged to do the very same (51:7). In other words the individual is ahead of the remnant on the spiritual scale but the individual is calling the remnant to follow him. They are traveling in the same direction and the prophet is highlighting the commonality that they share (the individual has the confidence while the remnant is called to emulate that confidence).*

*You wrote that; "Throughout 51, the righteous remnant is encouraged to look to the Lord who acts and delivers; the remnant does not bring the deliverance. Instead, the righteous remnant is called out of captivity whereas the individual servant is the one who liberates the captives."*

*You wrote further; "Right up through 51:15, the remnant is being delivered, is encouraged to trust in the Lord, is weak and needing help."*

*But the individual servant is not described as someone who needs no salvation. He too needs to be saved, the distinction between himself and the remnant is that he is already completely confident in the salvation of God that is to come (50:7,8) and he encourages the remnant to follow his example. Furthermore, the individual servant speaks of his own need for God's encouragement (49:4) thus further minimizing the distinction between himself and the remnant.*

*So while distinctions exist between the individual servant and the remnant and these distinctions are important, but these distinctions are not highlighted by the prophet. The prophet is highlighting the similarities between the individual servant and the remnant.*

*In my letter to you I gave you a partial list of the parallels that the prophet creates between Israel and the remnant on the one hand and the individual servant on the other hand (I listed 11 parallels). You responded with the claim that these parallels "break down." You substantiate your claim by presenting arguments against 2 of the parallels that I listed (giving over the body for suffering and being called blind and deaf).*

*Let us assume for a moment that I erred when I listed those two parallels, how would that affect my argument? Are you trying to say that the prophet is not creating literary parallels between the individual, the remnant and the nation? Are you not aware that the list I presented to you is far from an exhaustive list? Are you not aware that many of the parallels are repeated by the prophet more than once? Even if there would only be 9 parallels between the individual and the remnant (and there are actually many more), wouldn't that still be a weighty emphasis? - especially in light of the fact that the prophet did not once create an explicit literary contrast between them.*

*In any case, I never said that the remnant and the individual are carbon copies of one another, my point is that the prophet uses various literary tools to highlight the similarities. The prophet uses the same noun to describe how the remnant gives their body for suffering as he uses for the individual servant. This does not mean that every aspect of their experience is exactly the same. It does mean that the prophet wants us to link them together and not see them as opposites. It is not common for the prophet to describe (even the righteous of) Israel as actively giving itself to suffering yet he does so precisely in this setting (51:23) - using a word that he has just used to describe the individual servant doing the same.*

*And you claim that 42:19 is talking of national Israel. I wonder, where else in Scripture is Israel described as a messenger (malach) that is sent by God? And if this is talking about national Israel, then we have another parallel being created between Israel and the prophets who are called by the title "malach" (44:26).*

*The concept that seems to be so foundational to your read on the text, that Israel fails and the individual is called in to take Israel's place - is nowhere to be found in the text. The prophetic text presents a picture of a nation that in a general sense hopes to God (those who don't are written off by the time we get to chapter 40 - with their "write-off" mentioned in chapter 65 as well). There are those amongst them who are more righteous and obedient than the rest and then there are individuals (prophets and Messiah) who lead the nation and represent her cause and the cause of her God in a more elevated and concentrated fashion. But they are all traveling in the same direction, all looking forward to God's salvation and the glorification of His name to the eyes of the nations.*

*When we approach 51:16 - the grammar and the context give us no room to say that this verse is not addressing the same remnant that was being addressed in the previous few verses. The same masculine audience is being directly addressed. The theme is the same (encouragement) and the manner of encouragement is the same as the encouragement in previous passages (such as 51:7,8 where the remnant is described as repositories of God's word as a reason that they should not fear and 44:8 where the fact that they are God's witnesses is the reason they should not fear).*

*The idea that God planted His word in the remnant's mouth is nothing new in this segment of Scripture.*

*The objection that is raised against this interpretation - namely - that the parallel language to 49:2 would have us identify the audience of 51:16 as the individual servant, is no objection. There are so many parallels between the righteous remnant and the individual servant that this one does not stand out.*

*Many Christian commentators accept that this is talking to the righteous remnant. One commentator who has this verse addressing the individual servant comes up with the preposterous idea that this verse somehow wandered here by an unknown accident. Doesn't this tell you that the interpretation he is proposing is not supported by the text?*

*I don't see a literary, contextual, thematic or theological reason to justify the argument that this verse is addressing anyone other than the remnant that was being addressed since verse 12.*

*The question as to how to read the second half of the verse (plant the heavens, establish the earth and have it be proclaimed to Zion that she is God's nation) - is this something the remnant is called upon to accomplish, God is going to accomplish, the word is going to accomplish or are these descriptions of God?*

*Again, the straightforward literary read on the text tells us that it is the word that will accomplish these things. I say this on the basis of 55:11 where it is God's word that is put here on earth in order to accomplish His purpose (see also 40:6-8 - note the parallel "chatzir" with 51:12).*

*In light of the fact that a few verses earlier how the natural heavens wither away (51:6) implying a need for a new set, and in light of the fact the verbs the prophet uses point to the future, I understand that the heavens being planted and earth being established are the new heaven and earth.*

*Again, I will end with specific questions:*

*1 - Do you still stand by your more recent interpretation that has the opening of this verse addressing the individual servant?*

2 - *If you do - what literary, contextual, thematic or theological factors are strong enough in your eyes to overturn all of the evidence that supports the interpretation which has this phrase addressing the remnant?*

3 - *Can you point to a passage in 40-52 where the prophet himself creates an explicit literary contrast (over and against) between the individual servant and the remnant?*

4 - *Do you not see the prophet's effort to create many literary parallels between the individual servant and Israel/remnant?*

*Looking forward to your reply*

M - Thanks for your detailed and clear response. Before I respond in detail, and in keeping with your recent emails asking for clarification before you responded in detail, I have a couple of points and a major question.

First, yes, of course, Israel and the remnant and the Messiah (and the prophet) are all on the same team. That is a major point to me as well, yet I feel when I argue for the Messianic role of the servant you respond as if I'm putting him on a different team, perhaps, unconsciously, because you hear Jesus when I say individual servant. But again, yes, of course, same team.

Second, this leads to a major point: the nation, in sin, is both encouraged and rebuked; the remnant, weak and hurting, is encouraged; the Messiah fulfills the mission, bringing blessing to all, especially the remnant.

Here's my question. Please correct me if I'm wrong, but to date, I can't recall you giving me a clear statement as to why there needed to be an individual servant. The way you speak of the remnant's mission and calling (way beyond what the text says, in my view), it almost leaves no need for a Messiah. If you've made explicit statements about this, please forgive me for losing track of them in our exchange.

In any case, before I answer, your answer would help me.

*Y - I am happy to clarify.*

*I thought that what I presented in the third segment of our debate answered your question. - Why did we need David? Is it because we failed? I don't believe so. The way nations function is that they need leaders to bring them all together, to inspire, to guide, to put their destiny in front of them and this is what David did. Until today he leads Israel with his Psalms - the Psalms inspire, guide and lead us to our destiny. The Messiah will do all this and much more - what David did for Israel the Messiah will do for the world. I understand that this is what the prophets meant when they called the Messiah - "David." As a king the Messiah will administer God's justice, as a priest, he will teach God's Torah, as a prophet, he will bring God's word and be a beacon of*

*God's holiness - all on an international scale and to a degree that no king, priest or prophet ever did - I see this in Isaiah 11, Psalm 72 and various prophecies in Ezekiel.*

*Although the people also teach, serve as a beacon of light and of God's holiness as Isaiah prophesied (60:1-3; 61:6) - but it is the Messiah that leads the people as David, Moses, Solomon and Hezekiah lead them - but above and beyond - touching not only the Jews but the entire world.*

*To remind you - I wrote the following in my third segment:*

*"This debate was about the real Jewish Messiah. What does the Scripture teach us about the real Jewish Messiah? The most important word that the Scriptures gave us to describe the Messiah is "David." The Scriptures called the Messiah by David's name 6 times (Jeremiah 30:9, Ezekiel 34:23,24, 37:24,35; Hosea 3:5). The prophet describes our yearning for the Messiah as yearning for our King David (Hosea 3:5). There is no person in all of Scripture that we know as well as David. David's heart is the most open heart in all of Scripture. His heart is bare for all of us to read in the Book of Psalms.*

*Everyone agrees that if you want to know what the Messiah is all about then you need to read the Book of Psalms. But I encourage you, don't read the Psalms like Dr. Brown, searching for a word or a phrase that you could exploit to support what the Church would have you believe.*

*Instead read the Psalms as the followers of David have been reading them for 3000 years, feeling David's heart. Open your heart to the song and to the spirit of the Book of Psalms.*

*When you open your heart to the Book of Psalms you will discover the personality of the Messiah. You will see a king who leads with humility, emphasizing his own utter helplessness before God and his total dependence upon God. You will not see a king who emphasizes his supposed superiority over other people. You will see a king who recognizes that every breath of air that God grants him is an expression of God's love and he encourages you to look at your existence the same way. You will find a king who brings every fear, every worry, every problem and every sin directly to God and to God alone and he directs you to do the same.*

*In the Psalms you will see a king who directs all of mankind's devotion and worship towards God and he doesn't divert an iota of that devotion towards himself. And you will see a king who does not stand apart from other men, emphasizing the differences that separate him from others.*

*Instead, you will find a king who stands shoulder to shoulder with mankind inviting all of humanity to sing God's praises together with him.*

*The Messiah will sing David's song. He will take that same song and bring it home to all of humanity. The Messiah will make David's song resonate in every heart. The Messiah will take the same message of David and make it the message of all mankind.*

*Psalm 148 gives us a taste of the Messiah. In that Psalm David invites all of creation to sing the praises of God together with him, the heavens, the earth and all of mankind. And when the Messiah comes he will bring all of mankind to join in David's song of praise to the God of Israel."*

*Does this answer your question?*

M - Thanks for reposting this and providing additional thoughts, and yes, of course, I remember well your pointing to David in our video debates. To me, this is key in your statement: "Although the people also teach, serve as a beacon of light and of God's holiness as Isaiah prophesied (60:1-3; 61:6) - but it is the Messiah that leads the people as David, Moses, Solomon and Hezekiah lead them - but above and beyond - touching not only the Jews but the entire world."

That's a point I'll try to open up in my next response to you, explaining where I feel you are overestimating the role of the remnant/nation in our chapters and underestimating the role of the individual servant.

This is helpful.

I'll answer your three questions directly and then interact with some of the points in your response to me.

You asked, "Do you still stand by your more recent interpretation that has the opening of this verse addressing the individual servant?" I still see that as a distinct possibility, and it's interesting that neither the LXX or one of the DSS manuscripts has the initial "and" to 51:15. That being said, I do not have a problem reading the text with reference to the righteous remnant, but only with the translation caveats I have mentioned. Again, I see nowhere in the Word where the righteous remnant is tasked with establishing the heavens and the earth, and everything in my reading of Isaiah says that the text is not speaking of a new heavens and earth (see also the parallel language in texts like Jer 31:35, speaking of the present heavens and earth). I'm aware that some commentaries, both Jewish and Christian, see a reference to the new heavens and earth here, but all the expressions seem to point to God's creative work in the establishing of the existing heavens and earth.

You asked, "If you do - what literary, contextual, thematic or theological factors are strong enough in your eyes to overturn all of the evidence that supports the interpretation which has this phrase addressing the remnant?" I answered that in part, above, noting the readings in the LXX and DSS, in which case a new subject was being introduced. Also, again, I see the closeness of the parallel to Isa 49 and God putting words in His servant's mouth in a prophetic way that transcends the role of the righteous remnant. And, there is the fact that the one being addressed here has a message for Zion, which applies better to the prophet/Messiah than the remnant (although, as we have discussed that is not possible). That being said, I concede that it is quite

natural to read this with reference to the righteous remnant, but, to repeat, not in the exalted way that you call for.

You asked, "Can you point to a passage in 40-52 where the prophet himself creates an explicit literary contrast (over and against) between the individual servant and the remnant?" I appreciate your clarification in terms of what you meant by contrasts, here in terms of "explicit literary contrasts." So, the answer is no in terms of polarities, since the difference between the Messiah and the righteous remnant is not the contrast say, between the Lord and idols. But that's what makes the differences between the two all the more important. They are both of the same kind, both appointed by God for a mission, both representing the larger nation of Israel (and even called Israel), yet one fails where the other succeeds. One needs redeeming and the other redeems. To me, this is also a major strategy of the prophet.

I have sought to emphasize this many times in our interaction, including in our lengthy online posts. And I have yet to hear a cogent refutation of my position -- or, really anything that would lessen the force of my argument. To quote your words again, "Although the people also teach, serve as a beacon of light and of God's holiness as Isaiah prophesied (60:1-3; 61:6) - but it is the Messiah that leads the people as David, Moses, Solomon and Hezekiah lead them - but above and beyond - touching not only the Jews but the entire world." Yes, yes, yes. He also leads them out of captivity. He also suffers for them vicariously. He is also exalted far above them all, as the midrash to Isa 52:13 points out -- higher than Abraham, Moses, and the ministering angels. (Obviously, I don't quote the midrash to "prove" something to you but rather to say it rightly understood the degree of exaltation spoken of in the biblical text.)

You asked, "Do you not see the prophet's effort to create many literary parallels between the individual servant and Israel/remnant?" Yes, of course, and those parallels only help underscore the differences, as I just noted. The Messiah stands out among his own people. Just look at the description in Isa 11. Is that not far above and beyond anything spoken of the righteous remnant?

Of course there are real and deep parallels between the individual servant and Israel/remnant. That's a New Testament theme as well (see, for example, Matthew's quotation of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15). That's because Yeshua was one with his people -- not some outsider; not some goyyische savior; not some pagan deity. And that's also why he stands out so transcendently, as well as why our people have prayed for the Messiah's immediate coming and longed for that day for centuries. He is one of us, but he stands out from us in extreme form.

You wrote: "Let us take your own list. You point out how the distant isles await the teaching of the individual servant as opposed to the righteous remnant who do not have this role assigned to them. But the prophet does tell us that the righteous remnant carry God's teaching in their heart. In other words, the individual is tasked with spreading the teaching that the righteous are already bearing in their heart to some degree."

Again, this underscores my point. The individual servant does what the corporate servant cannot do (or, does not) do, despite similarities.

It's the same with your next comment: "The second item on your list speaks of the individual bringing justice to the earth - and again, this is not the task of the remnant. But here again, the remnant is described as a group that already knows justice (51:7). So again, the individual is tasked with the role of applying a justice with which the remnant is already familiar to some degree."

Yes, the remnant is familiar with justice to some degree, but it is only the individual servant who carries this to the earth.

And again, here, as you wrote, "The individual servant is to be a light to the nations and chapter 60 graphically describes the nation of Israel as a light to the nations. We can certainly deduce that the individual servant goes further than the nation in accomplishing this task, but the prophet's explicit words highlight the common denominator."

The commonality between them underscores the depth of differences between them. I could go point for point through your list (e.g., the sufferings of the servant in chapter 50 are on a whole different level than what is described in 51:7, which you cite -- and note the reproach and blasphemies spoken of there could well be on account of Israel being in exile rather than because of Israel's obedience, whereas the servant suffers because of his obedience -- but each time, your counter-arguments only buttress my arguments. Thus I reject your claim that, "So while distinctions exist between the individual servant and the remnant and these distinctions are important, but these distinctions are not highlighted by the prophet. The prophet is highlighting the similarities between the individual servant and the remnant." To reiterate: There is a reason you pray daily for the coming of the Messiah.

You wrote: "But the individual servant is not described as someone who needs no salvation. He too needs to be saved, the distinction between himself and the remnant is that he is already completely confident in the salvation of God that is to come (50:7,8) and he encourages the remnant to follow his example. Furthermore, the individual servant speaks of his own need for God's encouragement (49:4) thus further minimizing the distinction between himself and the remnant."

Again, I see great contrast between the individual servant's attitude in 49:4 and the despair (and fear of the remnant). The individual servant simply states that his labor to restore Israel has been in vain; nonetheless, he puts his trust in God, who then assures him of his success, along with his mission to the nations. And I do not see the individual servant needing "salvation" in 50:7-8.

You wrote: " And you claim that 42:19 is talking of national Israel. I wonder, where else in Scripture is Israel described as a messenger (malach) that is sent by God? And if this is talking

about national Israel, then we have another parallel being created between Israel and the prophets who are called by the title "malach" (44:26)."

Actually, I'm surprised by you pushing back here. Who is addressed in 42:18? It is the deaf and the blind in the plural! And would you actually claim that the individual servant (in your eyes, either the prophet or the Messiah) is described in 42:20? Perish the thought. And 42:22, which follows on the heels of 42:21, makes clear that this is the nation being spoken of here. So, yet again, the parallel language only distinguishes the individual servant from the national servant, as I have been emphasizing in thread after thread.

You wrote: " The concept that seems to be so foundational to your read on the text, that Israel fails and the individual is called in to take Israel's place - is nowhere to be found in the text. The prophetic text presents a picture of a nation that in a general sense hopes to God (those who don't are written off by the time we get to chapter 40 - with their "write-off" mentioned in chapter 65 as well). There are those amongst them who are more righteous and obedient than the rest and then there are individuals (prophets and Messiah) who lead the nation and represent her cause and the cause of her God in a more elevated and concentrated fashion. But they are all traveling in the same direction, all looking forward to God's salvation and the glorification of His name to the eyes of the nations."

But of course it is found in the text, everywhere, in fact. Israel is guilty and in exile. Israel has sinned and God's name is being mocked. Israel is blind and deaf, in captivity. The individual servant leads the blind and deaf out of captivity. They need to be redeemed. He is the redeemer. In fact, the very concept of the Messiah underscores how pervasive this concept is. Only with his redemptive help can Israel fulfill her destiny.

You wrote: " Even if there would only be 9 parallels between the individual and the remnant (and there are actually many more), wouldn't that still be a weighty emphasis? - especially in light of the fact that the prophet did not once create an explicit literary contrast between them."

Once more, you miss the point. To give an analogy, yes, they all play on the same team; yes, they all have the same goals; yes, they are called and appointed by God. Unfortunately, several of the team members are sick, others crippled, and others, under discipline because of rebellion. Only one player is healthy, and he must play and win for the whole team. You could give me 10 million parallels between the players. They would only underscore just how much one player stands out uniquely among them.

I have done my best to feel the force of your arguments and have read the same verses over and over again for many weeks, as I trust you have as well. To me, the arguments I'm making are so clear as to be indisputable. I hope that, at the least, you do feel the force of them.

*Y - I feel that the discussion is getting a bit out of order (and please feel free to correct me). I was under the impression that we will first discuss your original outline – you will revise it as*

*you see fit – and then we will (publicly) compare and contrast our two outlines to try see which of our outlines is actually reflecting the letter and spirit of the prophet and which is not. We have not yet finished reviewing your outline and our discussion has already moved into the stage of “compare and contrast.”*

*In that spirit I will focus my response on the Scriptural texts and save my “compare and contrast” arguments until we finish discussing the text.*

*1) You accept that it is - “quite natural to read this (51:16) with reference to the righteous remnant, but, to repeat, not in the exalted way that you call for.”*

*I am not sure what you mean when you say “the exalted way.” Do you believe that I read this verse as if the righteous remnant is tasked with planting the heavens, establishing the earth and proclaiming to Zion?*

*If that is the case – then let me remind you that this is not the way I read the verse.*

*Or do you perhaps (rightly) recognize that I read this verse as telling us that God’s word will accomplish these tasks (planting, establishing and proclaiming) but you still feel that this is too exalted a role for the remnant?*

*If the second option is true (in other words – the idea that God’s word planted in the remnant’s mouth is called to plant, establish and proclaim) – then why would you say that this is too exalted a role for the remnant? It is God’s word that is accomplishing and not the remnant.*

*Is it perhaps that you believe that the word that was planted in the remnant’s mouth is not the word that is called to accomplish these things?*

*Can you please clarify?*

*2) You point to the DSS and LXX lack of the word “and” in the beginning of verse 15 and you state “in which case a new subject was being introduced.”*

*Would you then say that the lack of the word “and” in the beginning of 42:5 tells us that “a new subject is being introduced”?*

*3) You say that you do not see the individual servant needing salvation in 50:7,8.*

*The servant speaks of being “helped” in the future, in other words, he is not being helped now, but is confident that he will be helped in the future. Do you disagree with this read on the verse?*

*Or do you agree with my read but you see a distinction between “helped” and “saved” and it is on this basis that you say that the individual servant needs no salvation? (but does need help).*

*Another related question; don't you argue that Psalm 22 is speaking of the same individual servant as is Isaiah in these chapters? If a mark of Isaiah's servant is one who does not need salvation – then how do you see this same servant in Psalm 22?*

*4) You argue against my interpretation which sees an individual in 42:19 because verse 18 addresses the plural.*

*I understand that the nation in 18 is being directed to look at (consider) the individual servant (or servants) within the nation in verse 19.*

*But either way, if you read verse 19 as descriptive of Israel then who was Israel "sent to"? And what is the message that they were appointed to bring?*

M - I'm not totally clear on your point re: "getting a bit out of order," as I have been simply been responding to your questions in the order in which I have received them. Can you clarify?

I have answered your questions, below, as you have posted them.

Thanks for your response.

I feel that the discussion is getting a bit out of order (and please feel free to correct me). I was under the impression that we will first discuss your original outline - you will revise it as you see fit - and then we will (publicly) compare and contrast our two outlines to try see which of our outlines is actually reflecting the letter and spirit of the prophet and which is not. We have not yet finished reviewing your outline and our discussion has already moved into the stage of "compare and contrast." In that spirit I will focus my response on the Scriptural texts and save my "compare and contrast" arguments until we finish discussing the text.

1) You accept that it is - "quite natural to read this (51:16) with reference to the righteous remnant, but, to repeat, not in the exalted way that you call for."

I am not sure what you mean when you say "the exalted way." Do you believe that I read this verse as if the righteous remnant is tasked with planting the heavens, establishing the earth and proclaiming to Zion?

Yisroel -- yes, in particular, " as if the righteous remnant is tasked with planting the heavens, establishing the earth" -- a concept which I find nowhere else in Scripture.

If that is the case - then let me remind you that this is not the way I read the verse.

Or do you perhaps (rightly) recognize that I read this verse as telling us that God's word will accomplish these tasks (planting, establishing and proclaiming) but you still feel that this is too exalted a role for the remnant?

Yisroel -- yes, I understand your point but do not believe that the Word God put in the remnant's mouth is the word that plants the heavens and establishes the earth. God simply takes credit for this with similar language in v. 13 and elsewhere (and note that he is not speaking of the new heaven and earth there).

If the second option is true (in other words - the idea that God's word planted in the remnant's mouth is called to plant, establish and proclaim) - then why would you say that this is too exalted a role for the remnant? It is God's word that is accomplishing and not the remnant.

Yisroel -- yes, I see it is God's word in your view, but I do not see that the word God puts in the mouth of His remnant is the word by which He created the heavens and earth. And since there are other, grammatically plausible ways to read this passage, I favor them.

Is it perhaps that you believe that the word that was planted in the remnant's mouth is not the word that is called to accomplish these things?

Yisroel -- yes, that is correct.

Can you please clarify?

2) You point to the DSS and LXX lack of the word "and" in the beginning of verse 15 and you state "in which case a new subject was being introduced."

Would you then say that the lack of the word "and" in the beginning of 42:5 tells us that "a new subject is being introduced"?

Yisroel -- generally speaking, I don't recall "Thus says the LORD" being introduced by "and," but even if that were common (I have not looked it up), the lack of "and" certainly makes possible that a new subject is being introduced. Context, along with parallel language in Isa 49, make that highly unlikely to me, especially when 42:1-4 relates so closely to what follows.

3) You say that you do not see the individual servant needing salvation in 50:7,8.

The servant speaks of being "helped" in the future, in other words, he is not being helped now, but is confident that he will be helped in the future. Do you disagree with this read on the verse?

Or do you agree with my read but you see a distinction between "helped" and "saved" and it is on this basis that you say that the individual servant needs no salvation? (but does need help).

Yisroel -- yes, I see a difference between saved and helped, especially when the larger contexts are compared. In other words, sometimes the words can be used in nearly synonymous ways but at other times, the differences are great, as in, "Can I get some help?" when I come to the door with bundles in my arms vs. "Save me!" when I'm about to drown.

Another related question; don't you argue that Psalm 22 is speaking of the same individual servant as is Isaiah in these chapters? If a mark of Isaiah's servant is one who does not need salvation - then how do you see this same servant in Psalm 22?

Yisroel -- I see Ps 22 as finding its fulfillment in the Messiah. It is the psalm of the righteous sufferer -- as you know, some rabbinic commentaries see it as speaking of Israel corporately -- only finding full meaning and realization in the Messiah. His cry is because he has taken on the burden of our sins and is suffering accordingly.

4) You argue against my interpretation which sees an individual in 42:19 because verse 18 addresses the plural.

I understand that the nation in 18 is being directed to look at (consider) the individual servant (or servants) within the nation in verse 19.

But either way, if you read verse 19 as descriptive of Israel then who was Israel "sent to"? And what is the message that they were appointed to bring?

Yisroel -- yes, again, it seems self-evident to me that v. 19 is speaking of the nation, blind and deaf in exile. But surely you know that I agree that Israel was called by God to be a priestly nation and to declare His glory to the ends of the earth. Instead, we were languishing in exile, deaf and blind and in captivity, needing deliverance and restoration. It is only through the Messiah's help that we fulfill our mission and task.

*Y - What I meant by out of order is that the discussion about the Messiah - what he is supposed to accomplish and why we need him - should logically come after our discussion of this text (I. 40-52). And, yes, you were responding to what I had said, but I only said what I said because you brought this subject into the discussion. Just as an example - in the course of your argument in describing the role of the Messiah you used - "He also suffers for them vicariously." That is out of order. You only know that based on your interpretation of 53 - which you admit should only come after we examine the themes that emerge from 40-52.*

*My question to you now as it relates to 51:16 - if you acknowledge that Israel is commissioned to bring the message of One God to the nations (based on your interpretation of 42:19) - then do you believe that the word of God - that there is but One God - is too small a word to accomplish the planting of the heavens, establishing the earth and proclaiming to Zion that it is God's nation?*

M - All clear about the order of things.

Re: your question, again, I'm not convinced that the remnant is being addressed (I've said it is natural to read the text in this way, but there are reasons against it), but if the remnant is being addressed, I still don't read the verse as saying that the heavens and earth were created by means of the word put in their mouth. Rather, in keeping with other verses in Isaiah (and the NJPS

translation), I see this as God describing Himself as the Creator, who also says to Zion, "You are My people."

Conceptually, is it possible that the word that there is one God is the word by which He created the universe? Yes, it is possible. I simply don't see that concept taught elsewhere.

Can you share any other passages that teach this? Or do you find that revelation primarily here?

*Y - As I mentioned, I believe that the planting of the heavens and establishing the earth is future - as the grammar indicates. How do you explain the grammar that puts these accomplishments in the future?*

*(forgive me if you answered this question already).*

*And theoretically, if this would be referring to the future planting, establishing and proclaiming - would you accept that the word that there is One God is powerful enough to accomplish these things?*

M - Yes, of course, if your reading of the text was right, the word that there is One God is powerful enough.

As to the verbs being future, where do you see that? 51:13 has just of God as the one who spreads out the heavens and the establishes the earth -- with most obvious reference to His initial work of creation; that is who He is ; 51:15 describes Him as the one who stirs the sea -- speaking of His present activities in this current world; and 51:16 uses the vav-conversive to start, so, "I have put My words in Your mouth and sheltered you with My hand," then the infinitives, which I understand to function as with the NJPS (as stated numerous times): "I, who planted the skies and made firm the earth, Have said to Zion: You are My people!"

Where, then, is there anything future in the text about the heavens and the earth? Even if I read it your way, I would understand it to mean that the creation of this present universe was accomplished by the word put in the remnant's mouth.

While reviewing some of my Hebrew commentaries tonight, I noticed this explanation from Amos Hacham (Mosad HaRav Kook), which seems to understand the infinitives as does NJPSV. (See attached.) From a different angle is the explanation of A. B. Ehrlich (who has random notes on the Tanakh, rather than a commentary; also attached).

I did note that some traditional rabbis interpret v. 16a with reference to Isaiah, but of course, that is a minority view.

Just passing this on.

(Dr. Brown attached copies of these two commentaries)

*Y - I appreciate you sending me the two commentaries - I could now see where you are coming from. However - one of the two commentaries clearly stated that it is only because he can imagine no other way of reading the verse that he reads it this way - it is not natural and typical - generally we would say that the "lamed" in the beginning of the words makes it future just as in a verse like Jeremiah 1:10. This is certainly the more natural and common usage of such grammar. The only reason these commentators are rejecting this is because they cannot imagine how to apply the verse in the more natural way.*

*But if you understand the new heaven and earth as a reference to the Messianic age when mankind will see existence in a new light - and that new light is the knowledge that every iota of existence belongs to God (Deuteronomy 32:39 - as well as the many Scriptures which speak of a future - "and they will know that I am the Lord") - together with the knowledge that it is God's word that accomplishes His work on earth - so why not read the verse naturally? Don't you see how it fits in thematically with 40:5,8; 45:14; The "you are my witnesses" passages; and 55:11?*

*If you believe that this word - that God is One - has the power to accomplish these things - then why reject the natural reading of the Hebrew grammar?*

M - I appreciate you staying focused on this verse, which you obviously see as very important. Re: Ehrlich, he enjoyed tweaking traditional commentaries and claiming to have the real insight - he was quite brilliant too -- so that should be factored into his rhetoric. But Hacham, along with NJPSV, and others, are fully aware of your understanding of the text, including all the major rabbinic commentaries and the like, yet feel it is most natural to read the text as they do. Why?

There are certainly examples of concepts being continued across clauses or even verses, so I do see this as a very viable way to read the verse, nothing forced about it. And, reading it yet another way, for an infinitive to function as a gerund (hence, "planting" and "founding") is a recognized grammatical category.

Does the TLV (to give another example) strike you as so impossible? " I have put My words in your mouth, and covered you with the shadow of My hand-I who set the heavens in place, who laid the foundations of the earth, and say to Zion, 'You are My people.'"?

As I did some more digging, I found more Jewish and Christian commentaries interpreting this with reference to the new heavens and earth, but for the reasons I have previously stated, that to me is not the most natural reading of the verse, and, in fact, I never read it like that personally until I saw others arguing for it. Having read it the verse again and again, I can see the possibility of reading it in that way.

But then that pushes me back to saying that this is addressed to the individual servant, since only he succeeds in this momentous mission, and it is only through his success that the rest of the nation succeeds. In other words, Isa 45:14 only happens because of the work of the servant.

All that being said, in all of our discussion, I have never said to myself, "Let's see how Yisroel's interpretation will lead into Isa 53," thereby prejudicing my views. I'm doing my best to read each text as it stands, watching to see how our micro-reading will unfold, seeing if your arguments will change any of my understanding. So, my issues here are simply issues with my understanding of the verse in light of other verses about Israel, the righteous remnant, and the individual servant.

However, for the sake of argument, let's say I embrace your reading of the text. Will it affect our exegesis of 52:13-53:12? I guess we shall see.

*Y - BTW - Ehrlich and Hacham don't seem to be saying the same thing. Hacham reads the planting as referring back to God (I God, who has planted the heavens) - while Ehrlich seems to read it as referring to the word - I have put My word in your mouth that same word by which I planted the heavens" - this interpretation would read the word - "word" as reference not to a specific word but to the word of God in general encouraging the remnant by pointing to the power of God's word that has been planted in their mouth.*

*Is this how you read Ehrlich?*

M - Yes, I read Ehrlich the same way, although, to be candid, I sometimes have to read his stuff through a few times to be clear on what he is saying. Then again, he often has great insights. My understanding, as you have seen, is closer to that of Hacham.

*Y - Would you agree that even according to Hacham's reading of 51:16 – the point is that I, God have put My word in your mouth, and that the word I have put into your mouth is emanating from the God who created the heaven's and earth, implying that the word itself carries some of that potency.*

*The reason I am proposing this is because otherwise what would be the point of describing God with the same description that described Him just 3 verse earlier. - Do you see what I am saying?*

M - I don't see Hacham saying that, but either way, on any reading of the text, God's words are God's words, whether related to His creative power or not. As for why He says this again about Himself, that's an interesting question, and you could be right. It's also possible that the reason this section is included here -- among other shorter sections, as we discussed -- was because it also highlighted God as the Sovereign Creator, so the two passages were joined together.

*Y - I understand that Hacham was not saying that - I was just suggesting that this would be the connection between the beginning and the end of the verse (16) - this (the potency of the word) is the underlying concept.*

*I am not sure what you mean by "this section" - do you mean the unit of verses 15 and 16? Or do you mean the entire unit beginning in verse 12? (I am trying to understand your sentence that begins with "It's also possible")*

M - Re: "the unit," I was referring specifically to vv. 15-16.

*Y - Regarding 51:15,16 - so what did you mean by - "It's also possible that the reason this section is included here -- among other shorter sections, as we discussed -- was because it also highlighted God as the Sovereign Creator, so the two passages were joined together." - which 2 passages are you referring to? Are they 12-14 and 15-16/ Do you still see these as two paragraphs that share a vague common theme and were "joined together"?*

M - Yes, I was speaking about vv. 12-15 and suggesting that the similar imagery of God the Creator, joined with the word of hope to Zion, connected the two passages -- but that was just a suggestion in answer to your question about why God would be spoken of in similar terms so closely together. That being said, the passage flows fine as is, but the oracles may have been delivered separately at some point, then edited in one chapter, as I believe happened with many other prophetic passages.

*Y - 12-16, Wouldn't you agree that an interpretation that sees this paragraph as a cohesive unit is more natural than an interpretation that sees two independent oracles that were stitched together in an editing process - or would you not agree?*

M - 12-16 -- yes, generally speaking, I would agree; however, many scholars recognize a number of distinct units in Isa 51, and stitching different passages together is often done with great effect in the prophets (see Jer 20, for a great example). Since we're doing an in-depth analysis, it's only fair to consider this possibility.

### **51:17-23 God calls on drunken and slumbering Jerusalem to wake up; He will judge her enemies**

*Y - Let's move on now to 51:17-23 - you entitled this segment - "God calls on drunken and slumbering Jerusalem to wake up; He will judge her enemies"*

*Two questions*

*1 - Do you see the wake up call as a call to arise from a slumber? or as a call to the remnant come to herself as the calls of 51:9 and 52:1?*

*2 - "drunkenness" gives the connotation of immoral and self-imposed stupor - But isn't the drunkenness of this passage referring to a confusion induced by suffering? Isn't the suffering of the remnant more of a factor that deserves to be mentioned in the title as opposed to the metaphor of drunkenness?*

M - As for your questions here: 1) I see drunkenness as more than slumber. The nation is both drunk and asleep, but here, I see as a sobering wake-up call, which then connects with the call to "come to herself." 2) God uses the images of drunkenness, and they are certainly not neutral here. The nation is in exile because of sin and is only redeemed from exile by grace. That being said, how would you propose I word this section in my outline?

*Y - As it relates to 51:17-23 - there is no question that Israel is in exile for her sins but that is not the focus of this passage - this is a passage of comfort. The drunkenness is not being used as a metaphor for her sin - it is being used as a metaphor for their suffering - this is how I see it - do you see it differently? Furthermore, the anger of the Lord is about to be turned on her enemies, so Jerusalem is not provoking God now - by calling her suffering "God's anger" she is being reminded that her sins were the original cause of her suffering - but again, this is not the thrust of the passage.*

*I would entitle the passage; "God calls on suffering Jerusalem to wake up, her cup of suffering will be taken from her and given to her oppressors"*

*Either way, do you see this as a reference to Deuteronomy 30:7?*

M - As for the image of drunkenness, which is plainly connected to Israel's sins in the passage -- drunk with the cup of God's wrath and with His rebuke -- I feel it's important to leave that in the outline, hence modifying yours to read, "God calls on slumbering Jerusalem, drunk with the cup of God's wrath, to wake up, as her cup of suffering will be taken from her and given to her oppressors."

My question for you would be: Why do you leave out of your outline something that God stresses repeatedly in these verses, namely, that Jerusalem is drunk and slumbering because of God's wrath? Why did the prophet bring it up if there was not a reminder of sin in the midst of the word of comfort?

*Y - As it relates to 17-23*

*I do not deny that the drunkenness is connected to sin in that the original cause of the suffering is God's wrath for sin - but the metaphor of drunkenness focuses on the suffering - you don't believe that the prophet is saying that God will take Israel's sin and give it to their tormentors. It is the suffering that changes hands not the sin.*

*It is a cup of suffering not a cup of sin.*

*In any case - you do agree that this is a passage of comfort - the cup is being taken away from her - that means she no longer deserves to drink it - yet somehow it is the same cup that is given to her oppressors. How do you understand this? How do you understand the fact that the same cup of God's wrath can be taken from one people and given to another? Shouldn't each nation suffer for their own sins?*

*I see Israel bearing God's wrath in this comfort context - where the cup is described as having been taken away from them already - something like Psalm 88 where the sufferer can rightly beseech God to have this cup taken from him - and that is why I did not include the word "wrath" in my outline - I felt that the nuance gets lost in an outline - Still and all - I have no problem with an outline that says - "God calls upon slumbering Jerusalem, drunk with the cup of God's wrath, to wake up, this cup of God's wrath has been taken from her and will be given to her oppressors." - by using more of the prophet's words - the original context can be retained.*

*Why in your outline did the cup change from a cup of wrath in Israel's hand to a cup of suffering in the hand of her tormentors?*

*And - Do you or do you not see the connection to Deuteronomy 30:7? How about Psalm 88?*

M - Re: vv. 17-23, I failed to mention in my last email that, having gone through many (if not all) the references to drunkenness in the Tanakh, I found none that were neutral in meaning, and hence here, when connected directly with drinking the cup of God's wrath, I felt it important to leave the word intact, rather than just replace with "suffering."

I believe Isaiah is saying that just as Israel has suffered God's wrath because of sin, now the foreign nations that sinned against His people will suffer His wrath for their sins. Israel has done nothing redemptive here -- or even repented -- but her time of suffering is over, by God's grace, and it is time for the punishing of the nations. So, I don't know that Israel no longer deserves to drink of this cup; instead, the Lord is intervening graciously (as in Isaiah 59, for example) and saying, "Enough! I will now judge your enemies."

You asked, "How do you understand this? How do you understand the fact that the same cup of God's wrath can be taken from one people and given to another? Shouldn't each nation suffer for their own sins?"

I don't follow you here. It's the same cup of wrath and due punishment, not the same sin. Each one is recompensed by God for their sin, so each nation is suffering for its own sins, just as Israel suffered for its sins. Please help me understand what I'm missing in your questions.

Re: your proposed outline, I fully concur, although it's more wordy than most of the rest. But perhaps expansion is better throughout, adding clarity?

Re: the parallel to Psalm 88, that doesn't hit home for me, since the sufferer is simply crying out in agony, asking for help, without any hint of another drinking his cup, and without a clear statement that he is suffering unjustly (in contrast, say, with Psalm 44). Deuteronomy 30:7, though, is certainly an apt parallel, other than the larger context of Deut 30, which speaks of repentance coming first before v. 7, whereas there is no mention of repentance in Isa 51. In fact, even if the call to "wake up" from drunken slumber is a call to repent (which is not what I have

to understood until now), that call already presupposes that God is saying "Enough" -- hence, the suffering of exile is coming to an end even before there has been repentance.

*Y - Regarding 17-23.*

*Drunkness - is sometimes used as a metaphor for sin (e.g. Isaiah 28:3) and other times as a metaphor for suffering (e.g. 63:6) - here (51:21) it is being used as a metaphor for suffering and not as a metaphor for sin. Yes, the suffering is because of sin as the words "anger and "rebuke" denote - but the drunkness is being used as a metaphor for suffering. I think that it is important that if the word "drunkness" is used in the outline - that this nuance is preserved.*

*My statement about Israel no longer deserving to suffer - I am coming from 40:2 which clearly states that her sin has already been appeased - through her own suffering.*

*About the same cup - Do you see no significance in the fact that the prophet says that the very same cup of God's wrath that Israel drank will be the one the nations drink?*

*Regarding the parallel to Deuteronomy 30:7 - you point to the fact that no repentance is mentioned in this passage in Isaiah so the larger theme of Deuteronomy 30:1-10 is absent. But my question would then be - if Israel is still sinning to the same degree that they did when they were in the land then how was their suffering the length of time of the exile an "appeasement" to her sin? (40:2)? Doesn't this tell us that something changed? In the context of chapter 51 where the audience is a nation with My teaching in their heart, knowers of justice and pursuers of righteousness - doesn't this give us to understand that we are not talking about a nation steeped in sin?*

*Regarding the parallel to Psalm 88 - what would you say to seeing this segment of Isaiah (51:17-23) as the answer to the prayer of Psalm 44 (note the parallel of verse 13 with Isaiah 52:3, and verse 24 with Isaiah 51:9), Psalm 74 (note the parallel of verses 13,14 with Isaiah 51:10), Psalm 79 (note the parallel of verse 6 with Isaiah 51:23), Psalm 80 (note the parallel of verse 17 with Isaiah 51:20) and Psalm 102 - do you see this segment of Isaiah as an answer to those prayers?*

*And I do not understand the call to wake up as a call to repentance - I see it as a call to Israel to take up her position as a recipient of God's blessing.*

M - Re: drunkness, even in 63:6, it is a result of divine wrath, so it is hardly just a metaphor for suffering. I never said that drunkness was only a metaphor for sin, but it is more than just a metaphor for suffering, as the context makes clear.

Re: Isa 40:2 and Deuteronomy 30, I didn't say that the nation was sinning to the same degree, but there was certainly no sign of national repentance. Ezekiel 36 makes that plain, as does the condition of Israel after exile, reflected in Ezra and Nehemiah, and then later, in Malachi. Even the ongoing judgment and rebuke passages in the last 10 chapters of Isaiah indicate ongoing sin. So, Israel did pay for its sins in exile, and there were certain changes, but there was not serious,

national repentance. You are positing one extreme or other (equal sin or deep repentance); I'm saying it was more likely somewhere between those two extremes, but in my view, leaning more to the sin side (as per Ezekiel 36). That's why God addresses the righteous remnant while calling for the nation to awake from slumber.

Re: the cup -- why wouldn't be the same cup? Does the Lord many different cups of wrath? And, recognizing that this is all metaphorical language anyway, I see nothing more than God saying to the nations, "I will not judge you the way I judged My own people. You will drink the cup of my wrath, as they did."

Re: your suggested parallels, I will give them more thought, but as first glance: 1) no, don't see 51:17-23 answering Ps 44, since there's no hint in Isaiah that Israel's suffering was not deserved, whereas Ps 44, as I understand it, is the prayer of intercession of the righteous remnant; 2) as for Ps 44:13, the first parallel that comes to mind for me is Isa 50:1, which could be responding to Ps 44; 3) as for Ps 44:24 and Isa 51:9, there's certainly a parallel there, but could God be answering Ps 44 in Isa 51:17, saying, "I'm not sleeping, you are!"? 3) as for Ps 79:6 with Isa 51:23, yes that could be an answer to that prayer; 4) as for Ps 80:17, is that the right verse? I don't see a prayer there; 5) re: Ps 102, while it is an individual prayer, on the one hand, it also stands clearly for the nation, on the other hand, but in that sense, I would see many prophetic passages as answering this cry for help for the people.

Re: the "wake up" call, is there no call for repentance in that? If Israel is not walking in realization of her calling and on some level, remains asleep, does not the awakening include repentance of some kind?

*Y - 17-23*

*In 63:6 the word for drunkenness is parallel to "va'avus" - "and I will trample" does that word have anything to do with sin? - I am not talking about the cause - I am talking about the connotation of the word.*

*About the same cup - I see significance in this detail of the metaphor (that they drink the same cup) - I hope to get back to this point in the future.*

*About repentance - I agree with you about Israel being "in between" - I never posited "serious national repentance." I see repentance as an ongoing multi-faceted process - and on a national scale, affecting some people more than others - not an "all or nothing" process. I understand that the passages of comfort in Isaiah are focused on those who are closer to God. Ezekiel never addresses Israel as a nation with God's law in their heart - Ezekiel is addressing a broader audience than is Isaiah. When Isaiah does explicitly address the extreme sinners - he writes them off, he doesn't comfort them. My point with quoting the various Psalms is to show that just because someone is experiencing the wrath of God does not mean that they are extreme, idol-worshiping sinners. They can well be people who are facing God in hope and prayer and asking*

*forgiveness for their sins. And from the fact that they are being comforted by the prophet with the concepts such as the ones described in Deuteronomy 30:7 and Psalm 79:6 is enough of an indication that we are not dealing with a group of idol-worshipping rebels against God -we are dealing with a people who know God to some level.*

*About "awakening" - The Malbim actually says that 52:1 is the response to 51:9 - in other words the call to awaken is a call to repentance - but even then I see it more as a call to put more trust in God's comfort and strength (as in 50:10; 51:12 and Exodus 14:15) than a call to turn from general sin.*

*But I think that the call to awaken is more naturally understood a call to assume an ideal state of being - in the case of Jerusalem this means awakening to joy and blessing as opposed to the slumber of pain and affliction and in the case of the arm of the Lord it means awakening to action as opposed to the slumber of inaction. The prophet speaks of the cup of affliction as something that has already been taken from her - which to me makes no sense without some minimal level of repentance as I wrote above.*

M - 17-23 -- I don't follow. Why did God trample people? Why was He angry with them? Sin.

Re: the same cup, I await your further comments which, hopefully, will clarify why you feel this is so important.

Re: repentance, I never said that all the people being addressed were extreme idol worshipers and rebels. It seems we are both hearing one another's positions in more extreme terms than we intend. That being said, I see no indication within the text that, on a national level, the repentance called for Deut 30 was taking place or, just as significantly, that the hearts of the people were then circumcised by God. Can I accept some minimal level of repentance, yes, certainly. And could God, in His mercy, be reaching His people right there, saying, "Wake up! You've been judged and are in a drunken stupor as a result of your sins and My judgment. But the time of mercy is at hand. Wake up and receive God's grace."

Does this include a call to enter into the ideal state of being you speak up? Yes. Does it include further repentance? I would say so.

*Y - It seems that we are not that far apart from each other on our understanding of this passage.*

*Drunkenness - I agree that the cause behind the suffering was sin - my point was simply that in this context (51:21) the word "drunkenness" connotes "suffering" - as opposed to the drunkenness of a passage like 28:1 where the drunkenness connotes sin itself - not just the suffering that is the punishment for sin. From what you wrote I understand that you agree with this - please correct if I misunderstood.*

*Repentance - we both agree that the audience of Isaiah in this passage (51:17-23) isn't standing on either end of the spectrum (extreme righteousness or extreme sin) - I would say the following*

- you mentioned Ezra, Nehemiah and Malachi - no national wave of repentance is mentioned in relation to Israel's return from Babylon (some point to the fasting in the book of Esther) - not in the dramatic (but not necessarily as deep) sense that we get from passages such as 1Kings 11;17; 2Chronicles 29; 2Kings 23, and not in the less dramatic sense (but deeper) such as in 1Samuel 7:2 - but still and all we can see that Israel moved upward in a spiritual sense from where they were at the end of the First Temple - first of all - no mention of idolatry in these books - and the significance of that cannot be overstated, and we see how the people were listening to the leadership of Godly men such as the prophets and Ezra and Nehemiah - the people had moved forward. Why are you so sure that this is not the repentance of Deuteronomy 30 (before the circumcision of the heart)? And can you not see this moving forward in expressions like "a nation with My torah in their heart," "seekers of the Lord," "pursuers of justice" - who seem to be the audience in this segment of Isaiah? - and yes - those were addressing the righteous remnant while this passage (17-23) doesn't specify that it is addressing the righteous remnant - but the prophet is clearly fusing the remnant and the nation together such as in 51:7

M - Yes, we are not that far apart. Re: the drunkenness in 51:21, because it is such a negative word, to me it speaks not only of the suffering of sin but of still being in a sinful state to some degree, but clearly, this is the time to rise out of that into God's intended state, as you say. So, we are fairly close here.

As for the depth of repentance in Israel, yes, for sure, idolatry was purged, which was massive. But what is reflected in the books written after the exile? Look at the confessions in Neh 9 and Ezra 9. Look at the severe rebukes throughout Malachi (including the wish that the Temple doors would be closed!). Is this a Deuteronomy 30 people? A people with circumcised hearts?

Re: the specific audience in Isaiah that mentions "a nation with My torah in their heart," "seekers of the Lord," "pursuers of justice," yes, we agree that this is the righteous remnant being addressed. But we also recognize that the remnant is part of a slumbering nation, and the wake-up call goes to the nation as a whole. I do agree, then, that there is a fusing of the righteous remnant with the whole people, but that does not lessen the sin or responsibility of the people as a whole. Rather, the righteous remnant must help stir them up.

*Y - About repentance - I was speaking about the repentance that is described in Deuteronomy 30 that takes place BEFORE the circumcision of the heart. I understand that this could take place on different levels and the return from Babylon included a level of repentance.*

*But again, we are not that far apart - I am ready to move on to the next segment.*

M - One last note on Deut 30. As I have always read it, when there is a certain level of national repentance in exile, at that time, God will then take His people even deeper, circumcising their hearts. So, in my mind, we will know that the former has happened when the latter happens as well.

*Y - it relates to Deuteronomy 30 I understand that even the circumcision of the heart can and was fulfilled on a miniature scale - I understand that the eradication of idolatry was a two step process, beginning with the people and ending with a circumcision as it relates to idolatry (this is my take on a certain teaching of the Talmud) - which is spoken of in Scripture as the entirety of the Law.*

M - Re: Deut 30, the language is very clear: "And you return to the LORD your God, and you and your children heed His command with all your heart and soul, just as I enjoin upon you this day, then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and take you back in love." This hardly sounds incremental or gradual to me.

*Y - Deuteronomy 30 - But it would have to be incremental because it is still followed by a circumcision of the heart - meaning it was not perfect. "All of your heart and all of your soul" means to the best of your human ability - which is always incremental.*

M - Do you actually believe that the repentance in the exile equaled "with all your heart and all your soul" on a national level? Was it really to the best of Israel's human ability? And was there clear evidence of a divine circumcision after that? Certainly not in my view.

*Y - Just from the idolatry angle - there must have been something important. And as I mentioned - idolatry is in considered the entire Torah - here are some references - Deuteronomy 11:28; 17:2,3; 28:14. Regarding the circumcision of the heart - Haggai 2:5 (which evokes Ezekiel 36:27) gives us an element of that and Jeremiah 24:5-7 would also point in this direction. These Scriptures lead me to believe that something happened at that time (return from Babylon) - a spiritual barrier was broken - which I believe was the repentance from idolatry.*

M - Yes, I certainly recognize the significance of idolatry, and since we're not that far apart on this, we can easily move on. I wonder, though, if you would see anything that could be incremental in the new covenant in Jer 31? Does that relate to Deut 30?

*Y - I believe that all of the promises that were given to the prophets about the future redemption happened in the return from Babylon in a miniature format - including the new covenant promise of Jeremiah - and I see its miniature fulfillment in the turn from idolatry.*

M - All clear on your understanding, which I share in part.

### **52:-1-10 God calls desolate Jerusalem to arouse herself as He brings backs the exiles in the sight of the nations**

*Y - In 52:1 Israel is called to enclothe herself with her strength - the grammar indicates that this strength already belongs to her - in your opinion -what strength is this referring to?*

M - Re: Isa 52:1, the strength is the calling and identity that God has for the city. You are chosen! You are holy! You are set apart! Wake up to your true identity (or, as you put it earlier,

your "ideal identity"). This would be similar to the call in Isa 2:5, following on the vision of 2:1-4. In light of your great calling and glorious future, walk in God's light today!

*Y - 52:1 - would you agree that Israel's calling in this passage is invoking Exodus 19:6 - being that royalty is associated with "oz" (1Samuel 2:10; Ezekiel 19:11,14; Psalm 99:4) and garments of glory with priesthood (Exodus 28:2; Psalm 132:9; 2Chronicles 6:41)?*

M - Re: yes, I would agree that these images come to mind in association with Zion's high calling, maybe not as the full meaning of the text, but certainly a good part of it (for example, the reference to "strength" does not immediately call to mind priestly identity). Either way, though, since the city is being spoken of rather than the people, the reference is metaphorical.

*Y - Isaiah 52 - I was associating the "might" with the word "kingdom" and the garments of glory with the priesthood.*

M - All clear on "might" equating with kingdom and garments of glory with priesthood, but again, it's speaking of the city not the nation (in terms of imagery).

*Y - I agree that we can move on - On 52:1 - you mentioned that the city is spoken of and not the nation - how do you see the difference?*

M - Re: the difference between the city and the people, obviously, the city can stand for the people and represent the good or bad qualities of the people. At the same time, the image cannot be pressed too far, since they are still distinct entities.

For the people to be clothed in priestly splendor means one thing. For the city, not necessarily the same thing.

*Y - Would you say the same when it comes to the city suffering (as in 51:17-23)? Also - do you see a difference between "Jerusalem" and "Zion"? And if yes - what is it?*

*Another question - when the city is called upon to clothe herself in strength and splendor - do you see this as a call to actuate a possession that she already has? Or is she being called upon to acquire something that stands outside of herself?*

M - Yes, the city can represent the people but is not identical with the people (the same in 51). Would you differ with that?

Re: Jerusalem and Zion, they are often synonymous, but sometimes it appears Zion can refer more broadly to the nation.

When the city is called to clothe herself, she is called on to actuate a possession that she once had and has lost, but can recover through repentance. (Of course, on a certain level, she possesses her heritage, but I don't believe she can be fully clothed with glory and splendor without God's help.)

*Y - My understanding is that when the nation is being addressed by the name of the city it is not talking to the people as individuals but as a united entity - which is almost always the case when the nation is being addressed - but I understand that each name has a slightly different connotation. "Jerusalem" addresses Israel as a civil society, a culture, a civilization, a political entity, while "Zion" addresses the nation as an entity with whom God shares an especial closeness. I base this on the fact that when we are talking geographic location - "Jerusalem" refers to the city at large while "Zion" refers to the more narrow area within the city where the Temple itself stood.*

*As it relates to the glory of Zion and Jerusalem - we seem to be in agreement that the glory consists of the promises such as found in Exodus 19:6 and Deuteronomy 26:19 (amongst others). I take it that you would also agree that this glory is a reflection of Israel living out the Torah that God has given to her. We also agree that in her exilic state she has not been observing God's Torah to the degree that these blessings should be fulfilled and the prophet is calling upon her to live up to her calling, give her heart to God and shine with the blessings that follow from that loyalty. But wouldn't you agree that Israel is being called upon to live up to a message that she has been carrying all along? Look at Psalm 78:5 or Isaiah 51:7 - wouldn't these imply that Israel possesses the word of God and they are being called upon to live up to that message that they are already carrying?*

*And I certainly agree that none of this can be done without God's intervention - not the carrying of the word and not the living it out - we need God's help every step of the way and the most important step that humans can take is the step of acknowledging that we cannot do this (anything) on our own and appealing to God for His mercy.*

M - Thanks for providing these further thoughts. To be candid, I have not through some of these distinctions deeply enough over the years (re: Jerusalem vs. Zion), nor I have read through every reference to each in succession to gain a deeper perspective. So, you may well be right. I just need to think this through. Re: the geographical distinction, yes, that is clear.

As for the glory of Zion and Jerusalem, yes, I'm in fundamental harmony with what you wrote. In terms of the message Israel has been carrying all along, again, I only disagree in part, in that, through different periods of history, it appears that the masses were not carrying the message and many of the religious leaders were corrupt, resulting in paganism and idolatry. So, the message was always there in the Scriptures -- to the extent they were known -- but for the most part, not within the hearts of many (most?) of the people.

Again, though, I think we're fairly close in our views here.

*Y - Yes, we can move on.*

*How do you see the significance of the closing phrase of verse 1 - that no uncircumcised or unclean will enter Jerusalem? Do you see this as connected to 35:8; 52:11 and Joel 4:17?*

M - Yes, I see it as similar to those verses, and thus, clearly speaking to the city. And this points to the nature of the prophecies in these chapters, as we have often discussed: a contemporary reader of Isaiah would have expected the full and final redemption of Israel after the return from exile, but the return from Babylon was only the harbinger of greater things to come.

This would also be similar to Jeremiah 31:38-40, which at first reading would appear to be a promise of final redemption for Jerusalem after the exile.

In my mind, this is an important prophetic principle which explains the nature of Messianic prophecy as well, as you know from our interaction over the years and from my Jeremiah commentary. What was promised happened gloriously, but only in part; the final, even more glorious fulfillment, is yet future.

*Y - I understand that this is end-time, my question is - how are we to understand this prophecy of no unclean person entering Jerusalem if we have prophecies like Isaiah 2:3; 56:7; Zechariah 14:16,17? Why is the ideal state of Israel/Zion/Jerusalem to stand separate from the nations? Isn't the Messianic vision a vision of no distinctions between nations?*

M - Yes, the nations too will be redeemed with Israel, and so, there will be no unclean Israelite or Gentile who will enter the redeemed Jerusalem.

The nations will come to Jerusalem to learn from the God of Israel, but not in a state of rebellion or uncleanness.

*Y - Will the nations be circumcised? If there are no unclean people then what is the point of this prophecy? And Joel 4:17 simply says "strangers" - how do you read that passage?*

M - Great questions. Before I answer, how, then do you understand Isa 2:1-4 or Zech 14 with Sukkot? Clearly, the nations will be entering Jerusalem.

*Y - My understanding is that although the nations will worship with Israel - with one shoulder Zephaniah 3:9 - but there will still be a distinction between Israel and the nations. And this prophecy of strangers not coming through Jerusalem is to be understood as not coming through as on equal footing with Israel as if they are citizens of Jerusalem - Israel/Jerusalem/Zion will stand apart - as they serve God together with the nations.*

*How do you understand these passages?*

M - I take uncircumcised in a more metaphorical sense, especially given the beauty of passages like Isa 19, which speak of a beautiful equality with Egypt, Assyria, and Israel. I also see this as the spirit of Mal 1:11. In the future, Israel will fulfill its priestly destiny, bringing the knowledge of God to the nations in the millennial kingdom, under the Messiah's direction. And the nations of the world, no longer "unclean" or "uncircumcised," will worship Him in Jerusalem.

It's possible that the words connote something less, such as, "no hostile foreigner will ever invade your city again," but I think it's more than that.

Against your view are: 1) nowhere does Isaiah mention "equal footing"; 2) Isa 2 and Zech 14 plainly state that the nations WILL physically enter Jerusalem.

*Y - The passages that speak of equality are balanced by passages which speak of Israel's standing separate in the Messianic age and the emphasis in this general segment (40-52) is on the uniqueness of Israel - such as 40:30,31; 41:1-7 contrasted with 8-16; 43:1-8 (note especially verse 4); 43:9 contrasted against 10; 43:12; 43:21; 44:1,2,8,21,23,24; 45:4,14,17,25; 46:3,13; 48:12,20; 49:13,23,26; 51:1,7,16; 52:9,10.*

*I don't see the equality theme in these passages - certainly not to the degree that the separateness is emphasized. Therefore in a passage which speaks of the strength and the glory of Zion and Jerusalem - in the context of this segment (40-52) I think it is right to read it that even though there is an equality in the sense of one worship but in this role of strength and glory Israel stands alone and is not joined by the nations in this function of projecting strength and glory.*

*Do you believe that Zion enclothing itself in strength and Jerusalem in glory is something that the nations participate in? Do you believe that a passage such as 62:2,3 is not speaking of Israel as separate from the nations?*

M - What troubles me about your reading of the text is that: 1) Isaiah 2 and 19 have already been stated. The reader already has this understanding. 2) Your interpretation still flies in the face of the plain sense of ch. 2 and Zechariah 14, among other texts, as previously mentioned. Even for the Gentiles to carry the Jews back from exile speaks of contact and physical entrance to Jerusalem. 3) Israel can remain special while still sharing with the nations as spiritual partners.

So, the physically uncircumcised WILL enter Jerusalem, but with circumcised hearts.

As to your questions: 1) The nations benefit from Jerusalem clothing herself with strength and beauty. 2) Isa 60:2-3 explains what 62:2-3 will look like. The nations will bask in Israel's light.

*Y - Again - we are not that far apart. Both of us see Israel alone projecting glory and strength while the nations benefit from that projection (when I wrote of separateness - I did not mean that the nations are not there - I meant that in the role of projecting, Israel is not joined by the nations - the nations are the beneficiaries but not the projectors) - the only difference between us is how to read the closing phrase in this verse (52:1). You read it as telling us that no individual that is not open to Israel's message will enter the city of Jerusalem while I read it as telling us that no outsider will join Israel in the act of projecting strength and glory (but outsiders will benefit from that act).*

*I have no theological problem with your interpretation - as I said we both see the same scene, my question to you is - how is the closing phrase a reason for the opening phrases? in other words -*

*why is it important that no uncircumcised of the heart enters Jerusalem in order for Jerusalem to project its glory?*

*According to my reading - the point is that Israel will stand separate in order to be able to fulfill this function just as the priests and Levites camped separately in the wilderness in order to be able to more perfectly fulfill their priestly functions - again - not separate in the sense of no contact - because it is clear that the entire calling of Israel to project glory and strength is to be a blessing to the nations - but in the sense of no intermingling - a clear and defined community in the sense of identity and purpose.*

*As an aside - the early chapters of Isaiah speak of the togetherness in the Messianic age (10:9,10 also come to mind) but at the same time - the separateness in the sense of clear identity is also emphasized - 10:11,14; 25:6-8; 26:2; 35:9,10 come to mind.*

*So to get back to my question - how according to your reading is the closing phrase of 52:1 a reason for the opening of the verse?*

M - In short, I take it to mean that Jerusalem will never be defiled again. No foreign invaders. No foreign domination. No foreign pollution.

As you say, though, we are not that far apart.

*Y - So we are in agreement about the gist of the phrase - that Jerusalem will be able to project her glory because there will be no foreign pollution that would dilute or corrupt her in a way that would prevent her from assuming her ideal state of being. - please correct me if I misunderstood.*

*If its ok with you - let's move on - why is it important for us to know that Israel has not been sold for money? (verses 3,4 and 5)*

M - Yes, it is both a promise of comfort and a promise of future unsullied glory.

As for not being sold for money, we know already from 50:1 that Israel was "sold" into captivity because of her sins (in fact, if I'm correct, only in 50:1 and 52:3 is *nimkartem* used in the entire Tanakh.) So, this is not an issue of guilt of innocence. We agree that the exile was because of sin, even if the nations overdid the punishment.

What, then, is the significance? Could it be as simple as one commentary states it? "God received nothing when he allowed his people to become the slaves of the Babylonians. He took no price for them (see ch. 50:1), and therefore is free to claim them back without payment (comp. ch. 45:13). He has but to say the word; and he is about to say it."

Another puts it like this: " Vers. 3-6. The foregoing promise of a restored Jerusalem is now accounted for by explaining that the honor of Jehovah Himself demanded the restoration. For, says the LORD, ye were sold for nothing. *הָנִיחַ* here can only mean that in surrendering the holy

people, the holy land, and the holy city, the LORD received no corresponding indemnification. [Comp. Ps. 44:12.] For there was given to Him no other holy people, land, or city for them. Therefore He had, as it were, in respect to earthly possession, got only injury, yea, as ver. 5 even says, mockery and scorn to boot (comp. 48:9 sqq.). That cannot go on so. The infamy, that has in this way come on the name of the LORD, must be washed out by His making those nations, (who might mock after the fashion intimated Num. 4:15 sq.; Deut. 9:28; Ezek. 20:14), feel His power in such a way as simply to compel them to surrender the people of Israel. This is the meaning of and ye shall be redeemed without money. Vers. 4, 5 give the historical proof that Israel was sold for nothing."

Do you concur?

*Y - I concur - the upshot of both of these commentaries is that returning Israel from exile is not overturning anything essential, no serious financial transaction or exchange needs to be done - it is returning things to the state that they ought to be in.*

*I see this concept reflected in the next verse as well - where God says "it is I who says "here I am" - in other words God's presence is hidden when Israel is in exile - it is revealed when they are redeemed - the commonality is that the return from exile is a return to the way things ought to be it is not undoing a natural order - it is restoring a natural order.*

*Are you with me on this?*

M - It is interesting that some of the rabbinic commentaries understand sold into exile "not for money" to mean "because of sin" and redeemed "without money" to mean "by repentance." But that aside, since that's not how I read it, yes, overall, I agree with you. Honestly, I hadn't really thought of it in terms "going back to the natural, correct order," but yes, I believe you're correct - although I'm not sure I fully get that from the "without money/cost" concept. It's not crucial to pause here, and again, we're in fundamental agreement. I just need to think about your suggestion more in terms of the meaning of those words.

But we can move on.

*Y - I think that the teaching of the rabbis on this is in harmony with the idea I am proposing - sin, after all is a departure from the natural order and the word for repentance simply means return - implying a restoration to what things were (or ought to be)*

*Would you understand the idea of "My nation will know My name" (52:6) - in the same way as Exodus 6:3,7, where "knowing God's name" means seeing and becoming familiar with the full scope of God's power, control and will? - do you have a different understanding of this phrase?*

M - Your explanation of the rabbinic comments makes sense. As for knowing God's name -- yes, it certainly means understanding His character and nature and covenant-keeping power.

*Y - Would you agree that the joy described here (52:7-10) is the same joy described in Psalms 96 through 99? (note the parallel - 52:10 - and Ps 98:3)*

M - Yes, I would see it as the same (or, at the least, similar) joy.

*Y - So you would see that one of the ways that the nations absorb the news of "God has reigned" is described as "He has made known His salvation to the eyes of the nations, He has revealed His righteousness. He has remembered His kindness and faithfulness to the house of Israel"? (Psalm 98:2,3)*

*Would you see this as parallel to the report that goes to the ends of the earth in Isaiah 48:20? - although the one speaks of the redemption from Babylon and the other speaks of the future redemption but the theme of the nations learning about God by hearing about Israel's salvation seems to be the same. Would you concur?*

M - Yes, I concur that this is one of the ways.

### **52:11-12 A word to the exiles to keep themselves pure as they leave Babylon**

*Y - Would you agree that the image of God walking before Israel in 52:12 is parallel to the exodus description of Exodus 13:21 and 14:19?*

M - Yes, with the obvious contrast of leaving in haste in the exodus but not leaving in haste from Babylon, and also noting that in Exod 14:19, it's the angel of the Lord who goes before the people.

*Y - In your outline you entitled this segment (52;11-12) as "a word to the exiles..." - Do you accept that "the exiles in general are called "the vessel bearers of the Lord"? And if yes - why? Why is the nation - or the remnant called by this name?*

M - The exiles are the Israelites as a whole, and among them were the priests and Levites, who were responsible for bearing the vessels of the Lord.

*Y - So you would see the first half of the verse addressing all of the exiles while the second half addresses the narrower audience of the priests and Levites who carried the vessels?*

M - Not really. The nation as a whole has the assignment, and it is carried out by one particular group within the nation.

*Y - This would certainly flow better - But why is this detail - carrying the vessels brought in over here?*

M - I take it as a reminder of their sacred calling as they return from exile and separate themselves from the unclean.

*Y - Would you agree that the sacred calling of carrying the vessels somehow epitomizes or represents the calling of the nation as a whole?*

M - Yes

*Y - How do you see this? In what way is the nation as a whole called to "bear the vessels of the Lord"?*

M - Again, because a part of the nation does so literally, the whole nation is seen as the keeper of the Temple and the bearers of the Temple vessels. I'm not sure where we're differing here.

*Y - If you were to encapsulate the role of the nation - would you use such a sentence - "bearers of the vessels"? is this such an important task that if some of us are doing it - we see this as the nation is doing it? In other words - what is so central about this vessel bearing that it applies to the nation as whole?*

M - It's just one thing the nation does, as it returns from exile, but it's a very big thing. Being the people who are responsible for God's holy Temple is no small thing. To me, you're overfocusing on it. Of course, if you wanted to expand the image metaphorically to emphasize that Israel alone has the revelation and Word of God, I wouldn't argue with that at all. I simply don't see it in the text. (Ibn Ezra prefers it but acknowledges the priests-Levites interpretation.)

Ezra 1:7–8; 5:14–15 speak to this directly as well, in a literal way, and as you know, Rashi sees that part of the verse speaking specifically to the priests and Levites. (As I read the verse again, it could well be speaking of a subdivision within the people.)

*Y - I have no problem with priest/Levite interpretation - if you see the role of the priests and the Levites who carry the Temple vessels as representing the role of the nation - in other words their work (carrying the vessels) is central to what the nation is called upon to do here on earth. I understand that this reflects Israel's responsibility for God's dwelling place on earth (see Ezekiel 37:27,28) - and as the Temple was a sanctuary for God's word (because that is what was in the holy of holies) - it is all of Israel's role to bear that word and preserve it - in a physical sense - by "camping around the sanctuary" - Numbers 2:2 and in a spiritual sense - Psalm 78:5*

*This understanding of the verse will fit with 52:1 - which we agreed is encouraging Jerusalem to live up to her calling by pointing to the fact that she will no longer be polluted by untoward elements.*

*Now that we have reached this step in our study - and I have been asking all the questions - I would ask if you want to ask some questions before we move to the next step (which I believe should be to try to recap and find a single thread or theme that unifies all of the prophet's words from 40 until this point - and please feel free to suggest another next step)*

M - I do feel you're overplaying the "word" aspect of things, since that was not central to the Temple's functions (which related more to worship, prayer, atonement, and cleansing), but we are fairly close at this point.

*Y - Would you then say that the nation is being characterized in this verse as the bearers of the cosmic "hub of worship, prayer cleansing, and atonement"?*

M - You could potentially say that, at the most, meaning, it might be overstating things to say that the verse presupposes that much. But possibly, yes.

*Y - So according to your understanding - if the prophet is highlighting the contrast between passive Israel and the active individual servant - and all this to prepare us for the correct understanding of the most critical passage in Scripture - why then is the last description of Israel before this critical passage "bearers of the vessels of the Lord"? - which means either - bearers of the sanctuary of God's word and/or bearers of God's provision for worship, prayer, cleansing and atonement? And do you think that the prophet was unaware of the connotation "armor bearers of the Lord"?*

M - Once again, as we have discussed before, I feel you are putting way too much emphasis on the phrase. This speaks of the responsibility of the exiles could be returning to the Land. They have been in sin and have been judged for their sin, and now they are returning, carrying the Temple vessels with them. You see this as exalting them; I see this as calling to live up to their calling on their way to redemption.

*Y - Regarding 52:11*

*I simply asked a question – If the literary lead up to Isaiah 53 that the prophet is trying to create (according to you) is that of passive Israel in contrast to the active individual why then is the very last description of Israel merely 2 verses before the critical chapter “bearers of the vessels of the Lord”? – To quote your own words – “Being the people who are responsible for God's holy Temple is no small thing.” So again, how does this fit with your idea that the prophet is exerting himself to have us see Israel as passive and inactive?*

*Furthermore, being the literary genius that he was, do you seriously think that the connotation “armor bearers of the Lord” completely escaped Isaiah’s mind? Wouldn’t this be a connotation that he would want to avoid?*

*Try to see the prophet as a world-class painter putting down colors with his words instead of with a brush and paint. Is this the expression that creates the contrast that you claim is foundational to our understanding of the most critical text in Scripture? Can’t you see that this expression “bearers of the vessels of the Lord” points away from the contrast that you see as so important?*

*After everything is said and done you did not answer my question. Instead you accused me of "putting way too much emphasis" on this expression. I'll let you decide how much emphasis to put on this phrase, but you cannot erase it from the portrait painted by the prophet. However much you emphasize or deemphasize, it still points in the opposite direction of the contrast that you speak of. So again, here is my question, why does the prophet use this expression to describe Israel immediately before the critical passage?*

M - I do have some questions for you. 1) Looking back, how would you sum up the main differences between the individual servant, on the one hand, and the nation as a whole and the righteous remnant, on the other hand? 2) Would you agree with my emphasis on the individual servant playing an active role in Israel's redemption and Israel being the redeemed? 3) Is there anywhere in these chapters where the nation of Israel is explicitly presented as being righteous -- not seeking it, but living it? 4) Do you agree that some sections/chapters flow logically from one into the next, while others reflect more distinct changes in subject?

I might have more upon reflection, but let's start with these.

*To answer your questions*

*Y - 1 - First of all I see more than one individual servant in these passages.*

*Second I see that the prophet is fusing all of these entities together in these passages and not setting them apart from each other in a clear distinct way - the lines between them are intentionally blurred - starting from the fact that they are all called by the same name - "My servant" - and going on to the fact that they share many of the same descriptions as I listed earlier so I don't believe that a central theme of these chapters is built on the distinction between the entities.*

*Still and all - the one individual servant is to administer justice to the nations (42:1-4).*

*A second individual servant who figures more prominently in these passages is charged with declaring God's word primarily to Israel but eventually to effect the nations - 42:5-9; 49:1-9; 50:4-9; - by doing so (declaring God's word) he stands as a covenant to the nation and a light to the Gentiles - he opens the eyes of the blind and sets the captives free.*

*The third and fourth servants (i.e. the remnant and the nation) are more closely fused to together because the remnant is just doing what the nation is called to do - when we see Israel being praised (such as in 51:1) we assume that it is addressing those within Israel who maintained a loyalty to God - but there seem to be specific groups within the nation that are given distinct callings - such as joining the prophet in bringing words of comfort to the nation (40:1,2) or bringing God's word out - 44:26, This group would be identified by their fear of God and obedience to the prophet - 50:10.*

*Alternately we can understand that 40:1,2 and 44:26 are addressing a small group of people directly associated with the prophet - while segment (40-52) in its entirety addresses the remnant and a section of the nation that goes beyond the remnant - but is still associated with the remnant - I say this because in 65:5 we get the idea that not everyone will be comforted only the remnant and those who are comforted in the merit of the remnant - so 40 - 52 would be addressing the remnant and those associated with the remnant (who are saved in their merit).*

*2 - The servant is part of Israel and as such waits for redemption himself - as is evident in 49:4 and 50:7-9. I understand that you insist that there is a distinction between "helped" and "saved" - perhaps - but the prophet is certainly not highlighting this detail. At the same time the remnant/Jerusalem is actively called to exert her strength and glory (52:1) in words directly parallel to the same call to the arm of the Lord, as well as calling them bearers of either God's word and/or the cosmic hub of worship, prayer, cleansing and atonement - I don't believe that the prophet is highlighting Israel's inactivity. (this is aside from 51:16).*

*3 - the righteousness attributed to the remnant/nation is hoping to God (40:31 and 49:23) which happens to be the righteousness that the individual servant calls upon the nation to produce (51:10) and that the individual servant exemplifies (50:7-9) - carrying God's Law in their heart (51:7) is also a manifestation of righteousness (Deuteronomy 6:5; Proverbs 4:4; Psalm 119:80).*

*4 - I accept that some segments flow logically from one to another while others reflect a distinct change in subject - but I believe that they are all thematically connected*

M - At last, here are my responses to your responses, below.

To answer your questions

1 - First of all I see more than one individual servant in these passages. Second I see that the prophet is fusing all of these entities together in these passages and not setting them apart from each other in a clear distinct way - the lines between them are intentionally blurred -starting from the fact that they are all called by the same name - "My servant" - and going on to the fact that they share many of the same descriptions as I listed earlier so I don't believe that a central theme of these chapters is built on the distinction between the entities.

Still and all - the one individual servant is to administer justice to the nations (42:1-4).

-- It seems to me, consistently, that the very fact that there is more than one servant when we would have just expected Israel as the nation to be THE servant is an indication that the individual servant has a unique and transcendent role. As I've sought to point out repeatedly, the nation needs to be redeemed; the individual does the redeeming. Yes, they are related, in that the individual fulfills the destiny of the nation, and both are Israel (just as you and I are Israel), but I see the opposite of blurring.

A second individual servant who figures more prominently in these passages is charged with declaring God's word primarily to Israel but eventually to effect the nations - 42:5-9; 49:1-9; 50:4-9; - by doing so (declaring God's word) he stands as a covenant to the nation and a light to the Gentiles - he opens the eyes of the blind and sets the captives free.

-- In light of that, I don't see why you minimize the profound differences between the nation (blind and captive) and the one who liberates the blind and the captive. And how can this individual be any less than the Messiah?

The third and fourth servants (i.e. the remnant and the nation) are more closely fused to together because the remnant is just doing what the nation is called to do - when we see Israel being praised (such as in 51:1) we assume that it is addressing those within Israel who maintained a loyalty to God - but there seem to be specific groups within the nation that are given distinct callings - such as joining the prophet in bringing words of comfort to the nation (40:1,2) or bringing God's word out - 44:26, This group would be identified by their fear of God and obedience to the prophet - 50:10.

-- I would agree that the remnant and the nation are more closely fused together, which, in turn, separates the individual all the more from both.

Alternately we can understand that 40:1,2 and 44:26 are addressing a small group of people directly associated with the prophet – while segment (40-52) in its entirety addresses the remnant and a section of the nation that goes beyond the remnant - but is still associated with the remnant - I say this because in 65:5 we get the idea that not everyone will be comforted only the remnant and those who are comforted in the merit of the remnant - so 40 - 52 would be addressing the remnant and those associated with the remnant (who are saved in their merit).

-- That is possible and doesn't materially affect the major points I have sought to make.

2 - The servant is part of Israel and as such waits for redemption himself - as is evident in 49:4 and 50:7-9. I understand that you insist that there is a distinction between "helped" and "saved" - perhaps - but the prophet is certainly not highlighting this detail. At the same time the remnant/Jerusalem is actively called to exert her strength and glory (52:1) in words directly parallel to the same call to the arm of the Lord, as well as calling them bearers of either God's word and/or the cosmic hub of worship, prayer, cleansing and atonement - I don't believe that the prophet is highlighting Israel's inactivity. (this is aside from 51:16).

-- The individual servant certainly does not need saving in 49:4; he simply commits his cause to the Lord when it seemed that he failed in his mission to redeem and regather Israel. But even here, in this very passage, we see the massive distinction between the one regathering and those who are scattered; the one sent on a mission to the people and the people themselves. Again, I fail to see how this distinction is not glaringly clear and fully intended by the prophet. Re: 50:7-9, here too the individual servant does not need saving the way the nation does. He is not blind or

in captivity. Rather, he is expecting God to help him stand strong in the midst of opposition. This is the difference between the warrior, so to say, being helped by God as he goes on his mission to save his captive people. As for the remnant (or nation) in 52:1, they are being called to step into their destiny and calling, as we have discussed -- but they still do not become the redeemer; rather, as the redeemed, they come out of captivity. Again, the contrast in roles between the individual servant and the nation or even the remnant is quite clear and definitely intended by the prophet.

3 - the righteousness attributed to the remnant/nation is hoping to God (40:31 and 49:23) which happens to be the righteousness that the individual servant calls upon the nation to produce (51:10) and that the individual servant exemplifies (50:7-9) - carrying God's Law in their heart (51:7) is also a manifestation of righteousness (Deuteronomy 6:5; Proverbs 4:4; Psalm 119:80).

-- I don't see how the texts you cite describe hoping in God as Israel's righteousness (although I don't reject the concept out of hand; I simply don't see it in the texts). And did you mean to cite 51:10 in this context? If so, could you kindly elucidate? But either way, again, the individual servant stands distinct, helping the nation reach its goal.

4 - I accept that some segments flow logically from one to another while others reflect a distinct change in subject - but I believe that they are all thematically connected

-- So then, if the general themes included the redemption and deliverance of the nation through the instrumentality of the individual servant, whose success will bring exaltation to the nation in the light of the nations of the world, to the glory of the only true God, would that be an acceptable way of reading these texts? And would changes in subject matter then fit within these parameters?

*Y - As it relates to your critique of my responses to your questions. The short version of my response is that I quoted the prophet and you did not - please allow me to elaborate.*

*I - (about the servants spoken of in this section of Isaiah) You put in 4 paragraphs*

*In your first paragraph you make 4 points.*

*a- That we should be expecting one servant and the fact that there is more than one tells us that the individual transcends Israel*

*- On what Scriptural basis do you put this foundation of expecting one servant? Doesn't Scripture depict Israel as a nation that contains priests, prophets kings and regular individuals - all of whom serve God's purpose each in their own way?*

*b- You speak of the nation as redeemed and the individual as redeemer*

*- This belongs in "2" - see below*

*c - You say that the individual fulfills the destiny of the nation*

*- can you please provide chapter and verse?*

*d - You say that you see the opposite of blurring between the various servants*

*- I provided a lengthy Scriptural list of literary connections that the prophet creates to blur the various servants - what is the Scriptural basis for your "seeing" the opposite of blurring?*

*In your second paragraph you make two points*

*a - You ask how I can minimize the profound differences between the individual and the nation*

*- I responded to this many times by demonstrating the prophet goes out of his literary way to fuse them (individual and nation) together so you should be asking the prophet this question. To remind you - the prophet uses the literary tool of creating an explicit contrast many times in these chapters (40-52) and he uses this tool to highlight the difference between entities that are very different from each other and entities that neither he nor any other prophet ever fused together. And not once does he create an explicit contrast between the individual and the nation - yet you want to argue that this supposed contrast that the prophet never found the space to put into writing and between two entities that he fused together with so many literary devices is the most significant feature of these chapters (40-52)?*

*b - And you ask "how can this individual be any less than the Messiah"?*

*- What do the Scriptures teach us explicitly about the Messiah that would tell us that this individual is the Messiah? And why can the prophet not be assigned a glorious role? Do you not believe that the word of God uttered by the prophet accomplishes God's purpose in this world - Jeremiah 1:10; Isaiah 55:11?*

*c - In passing you you "remind" me that the nation is "blind and deaf" while individual is not. Please allow me to remind you - that 42:19 is either attributing the qualities of blindness and deafness to the individual or it is referring to Israel by a phrase we associate with the individual "My (God's) messenger that I send." Either way, the prophet again blurs the distinctions between the individual and the nation.*

*Your 3rd and 4th paragraphs do not argue with the points I made*

*2 - (about the question if Israel is exclusively redeemed and the individual exclusively a redeemer) 1 paragraph and several points*

*a - You make the statement that in 49:4 the individual servant does not need saving - first of all, the prophet uses the word "salvation (yeshua) in relation to the individual servant's situation (verse 8) - it does not seem that the prophet is going out of his way to avoid the picture of the individual needing salvation. And second - the words the individual uses in verse 4 to explain*

why he moved away from seeing his mission as a failure are the very same words that Israel uses to express similar feelings - the words "mishpati" (my justice) is used by Israel in 40:27 and the word "pe'ulati" is used in the plural form in 61:8 in relation to Israel - again - the prophet is not creating a contrast - he is fusing together.

b - You use the words "massive distinction" to describe the difference between the one saving and those being saved - In this section the prophet describes the individual servant's experience of despair and encouragement - having his prayer answered by God (verse 8) - This section is from the few descriptions we have of the individual servant throughout this whole segment of Isaiah (40-52) yet the prophet found the need to depict the individual as someone who needs help (if not "salvation") I don't see the prophet creating this "massive distinction"

c - You finished your paragraph with the sentence - "the contrast in roles between the individual servant and the nation or even the remnant is quite clear and definitely intended by the prophet."

As I have repeatedly pointed out there is a massive difference between a "difference" or a "distinction" on the one hand and a "contrast" on the other. The words "difference" or "distinction" do not denote "opposite" but "contrast" does. Despite the fact that there are clear differences and distinctions between the various individuals servants and the nation - the prophet goes out of his way to fuse them together and not once does he create a "contrast" between them.

3 - (On the righteousness of the remnant)

First I need to apologize for the typo - I meant 50:10 not 51:10 where the individual calls upon the nation/remnant to emulate him and put their trust in God. I am sorry for the inconvenience it caused and I will try to be more careful in the future. Second - Do you not recognize that trust in God is a measure of righteousness? - see 2Kings 18:5; Psalm 78:7; Job 31:24-27; And third, let me point out that 65:4 has Israel saved in merit of the remnant (compare the language with 37:35; 63:17)

4 - (on the question if a subject change is acceptable in interpretation within the larger scope of the general theme)

I think it is premature to discuss what is an acceptable interpretation if we do not yet agree on the general theme

Let me recap what I see happening here.

In our debate you were trying to present a picture of how you see 40-52 leading into 53 and showing us that the subject of 53 is the individual and not the nation. You wrote - "So, by the time Isaiah 52:13 is reached, the spotlight is on a person, not a people," - In other words you understood that in order to create the literary "pointer" to tell us that 53 is all about the individual - you would want the nation to fade into the background by the time we get to 53. However, the prophet does precisely the opposite - His focus on the nation intensifies as he

*approaches 53 - and the individual is not mentioned even once in the last 35 verses before 53. To paraphrase your words - "So, by the time Isaiah 52;13 is reached, the spotlight is on a people, not a person."*

*Not only that, but the very qualities that you insist the nation is lacking (in order to create your supposed contrast over and against the individual) are the qualities that the prophet does attribute to Israel - "bearers of the vessels of the Lord." Then you have the prophet addressing Israel with the very same words that he has just used to address the arm of the Lord calling on Israel to gird herself with strength. And then you have 51:16 - whichever way you slice it, the grammar gives us to understand that the nation plays a cosmic role in God's plan - the very point that you are arguing that the prophet is trying to downplay. If this is the concept that the prophet is trying to avoid - then this would be a terrible choice of words. But according to you - this is not merely a concept that the prophet is trying to avoid - he is trying to paint the very opposite picture. Note, that in all of Scripture it would be difficult to find a concentration of such a complimentary depiction of Israel. Aside from the 3 points I mentioned above the prophet uses "pursuers of justice," "seekers of the Lord," "knowers of justice," "a nation with My (God's) teaching in their heart," "enclothed with "her garments of splendor" and "holy city" to describe Israel. All this in the last 35 verses before 53. So how do you come to the conclusion that by the time we come to Isaiah 53 the prominent "contrast" that we have in our mind is not the glory of God and the vindication of those who trust in Him versus the shame of the idols and the shame of those who trust in them. This contrast created by the prophet explicitly, forcefully and many times over should not be at the forefront of our mind as we approach 53. Rather we should be "overwhelmed" by the "massive difference" and "contrast" between the various servants of the One true God. A "contrast" that the prophet found no room to put into explicit words in these 14 chapters. A distinction that the prophet goes out of his literary way to blur over many times in these chapters and he does so most heavily in the 35 verses immediately preceding 53. And this is the thought that should be foremost in our mind as we approach 53?!*

M - Re: your critique of my response to your responses, I believe I already contrasted the callings of the individual and the group several times over in our various documents, including our lengthy online articles already published. I didn't realize you wanted me to do that again, but if you feel it's important, I'm happy to do it.

With regard to your specific questions:

a- That we should be expecting one servant and the fact that there is more than one tells us that the individual transcends Israel

- On what Scriptural basis do you put this foundation of expecting one servant? Doesn't Scripture depict Israel as a nation that contains priests, prophets kings and regular individuals - all of whom serve God's purpose each in their own way?

My response: There are promises to David that apply to him and his descendants, not to the nation, or promises to a prophet that do not apply to the nation. That is self-evident. So, to apply Isa 59:20 to the nation would be a gross error; 59:21 shows the results of what the individual servant did in 59:20. You confuse the categories as if everything was fluid.

c - You say that the individual fulfills the destiny of the nation - can you please provide chapter and verse?

My response: The individual servant is called Israel in 49:3. Rabbinic commentaries, with which I agree, point to the servant representing the nation here. But do you differ with my statement?

d - You say that you see the opposite of blurring between the various servants - I provided a lengthy Scriptural list of literary connections that the prophet creates to blur the various servants - what is the Scriptural basis for your "seeing" the opposite of blurring?

My response: That ties in with point c, immediately above. The servant is part of the nation and is the one through whom the nation fulfills its destiny. Yes, there is blurring, and yes, there are distinctives. I don't know how I could make this clearer: the individual servant redeems; the nation is redeemed. Nowhere in these texts is the nation called the redeemer; the individual servant is. Nowhere does the nation open blind eyes (its own eyes are blind); the individual servant opens blind eyes. In short, Yisroel Blumenthal is a religious Jew and rabbi and husband and father (and on and on the list goes) but Yisroel Blumenthal is not the Messiah. If you need be to requote all the verses that emphasize these things, I'm happy to. I simply assumed that you have these verses in your head.

You wrote: In your second paragraph you make two points a - You ask how I can minimize the profound differences between the individual and the nation

- I responded to this many times by demonstrating the prophet goes out of his literary way to fuse them (individual and nation) together so you should be asking the prophet this question. To remind you - the prophet uses the literary tool of creating an explicit contrast many times in these chapters (40-52) and he uses this tool to highlight the difference between entities that are very different from each other and entities that neither he nor any other prophet ever fused together. And not once does he create an explicit contrast between the individual and the nation - yet you want to argue that this supposed contrast that the prophet never found the space to put into writing and between two entities that he fused together with so many literary devices is the most significant feature of these chapters (40-52)?

My response: We are like ships passing in the night, as I feel I have responded to your point over and over again. You point to the prophet's literary fusing of individual and nation, and I respond: Yes, the individual servant is part of the nation and helps the nation fulfill its destiny, and yes, there is a need for an individual servant-redeemer because of the failure of the nation. That is totally clear to me, and for decades, reading these same passages, what I have seen (and continue to see

with our micro reading of the text), what is clear to me is the contrast, which you continue to downplay. In short, if not for the failure of the nation, there would not have been the need for the individual servant, the one who regathers the scattered and lost sheep (= the nation).

You wrote: b - And you ask "how can this individual be any less than the Messiah"? - What do the Scriptures teach us explicitly about the Messiah that would tell us that this individual is the Messiah? And why can the prophet not be assigned a glorious role? Do you not believe that the word of God uttered by the prophet accomplishes God's purpose in this world - Jeremiah 1:10; Isaiah 55:11?

My response: Because the Messiah is the last and greatest prophet, of course he will do what other prophets have done. But only the Messiah is the redeemer; only the Messiah bears our sins and brings us forgiveness. Or, since we both agree on Isa 11 being Messianic, where did any other prophet have a calling that equaled this? Should I list every Messianic prophecy we agree on and contrast that with the role of individual prophets and/or the nation?

You wrote: c - In passing you you "remind" me that the nation is "blind and deaf" while individual is not. Please allow me to remind you - that 42:19 is either attributing the qualities of blindness and deafness to the individual or it is referring to Israel by a phrase we associate with the individual "My (God's) messenger that I send." Either way, the prophet again blurs the distinctions between the individual and the nation.

My response: I remind you again that I do not see 42:19 of applying to the individual. We've discussed this before. You say the prophet blurs the distinction. I say it's the opposite. By using similar terminology (both are messengers), he highlights the differences: one messenger opens the eyes of the blind; the other messenger is blind.

You wrote: 2 - (about the question if Israel is exclusively redeemed and the individual exclusively a redeemer) 1 paragraph and several points

a - You make the statement that in 49:4 the individual servant does not need saving - first of all, the prophet uses the word "salvation (yeshua) in relation to the individual servant's situation (verse 8) - it does not seem that the prophet is going out of his way to avoid the picture of the individual needing salvation. And second - the words the individual uses in verse 4 to explain why he moved away from seeing his mission as a failure are the very same words that Israel uses to express similar feelings - the words "mishpati" (my justice) is used by Israel in 40:27 and the word "pe'ulati" is used in the plural form in 61:8 in relation to Israel - again - the prophet is not creating a contrast - he is fusing together.

My response: You misinterpret 49:8. This is not the individual servant's salvation. Rather, he is exalted on this day of God's saving activity -- not for him; he is God's covenant with the nation, but salvation for the nation. Re: the use of mishpat, there is a clear contrast again. In 40:27, Israel is speaking in unbelief and discouragement. In 49:4, the individual puts his trust in the Lord. And

Isa 53 helps explain why the individual felt as he did in 49. His own nation rejected him; God says, "Not only will you succeed in redeeming your people, but the nations as well."

You wrote: b - You use the words "massive distinction " to describe the difference between the one saving and those being saved - In this section the

prophet describes the individual servant's experience of despair and encouragement - having his prayer answered by God (verse 8) - This section is from the few descriptions we have of the individual servant throughout this whole segment of Isaiah (40-52) yet the prophet found the need to depict the individual as someone who needs help (if not "salvation") I don't see the prophet creating this "massive distinction"

My response: You are seeing the trees and missing the forest. This individual servant does the regathering; this individual servant is a vehicle of salvation; this individual is a light to the whole world. The nation is scattered and lost and needing regathering and saving. You point to a minor parallel; I point to the larger issues. Yes, the distinction is massive.

c - You finished your paragraph with the sentence - "the contrast in roles between the individual servant and the nation or even the remnant is quite clear and definitely intended by the prophet."

As I have repeatedly pointed out there is a massive difference between a "difference" or a "distinction" on the one hand and a "contrast" on the other. The words "difference" or "distinction" do not denote "opposite" but "contrast" does. Despite the fact that there are clear differences and distinctions between the various individuals servants and the nation - the prophet goes out of his way to fuse them together and not once does he create a "contrast" between them.

My response: To me, this is still a matter of semantics. The individual servant has a distinct role on behalf of the nation and the nations. The text does not confuse that. Other there are many similarities? Of course! This is one nation with one destiny. But the key point is that the roles are different, as I pointed out repeatedly. Why do you continue to diminish that?

You wrote: 3 - (On the righteousness of the remnant) First I need to apologize for the typo - I meant 50:10 not 51:10 where the individual calls upon the nation/remnant to emulate him and put

their trust in God. I am sorry for the inconvenience it caused and I will try to be more careful in the future.

My response: I owe you far more apologies for typos than you owe me. As for 50:10, that proves my point, not yours. He is the one leading and setting the example; he is calling on his people to wake up and follow his example. Where does this speak of the righteousness of the remnant?

You wrote: Second - Do you not recognize that trust in God is a measure of righteousness? - see 2Kings 18:5; Psalm 78:7; Job 31:24-27; And third, let me point out that 65:4 has Israel saved in

merit of the remnant (compare the language with 37:35; 63:17)

My response: Of course, as someone who believes Gen 15:6 and preaches justification by faith, of course I believe that. But where does the prophet boast of the remnant's faith? It is the individual servant who is transcendent, calling the nation to believe as well. As for 65:4, are you sure that is right text?

You wrote: 4 - (on the question if a subject change is acceptable in interpretation within the larger scope of the general theme) I think it is premature to discuss what is an acceptable interpretation if we do not yet agree on the general theme.

My response: OK.

You wrote: Let me recap what I see happening here. In our debate you were trying to present a picture of how you see 40-52 leading into 53 and showing us that the subject of 53 is the individual and not the nation. You wrote - "So, by the time Isaiah 52:13 is reached, the spotlight is on a person, not a people," - In other words you understood that in order to create the literary "pointer" to tell us that 53 is all about the individual - you would want the nation to fade into the background by the time we get to 53. However, the prophet does precisely the opposite - His focus on the nation intensifies as he approaches 53 - and the individual is not mentioned even once in the last 35 verses before 53. To paraphrase your words - "So, by the time Isaiah 52:13 is reached, the spotlight is on a people, not a person." Not only that, but the very qualities that you insist the nation is lacking (in order to create your supposed contrast over and against the individual) are the qualities that the prophet does attribute to Israel - "bearers of the vessels of the Lord." Then you have the prophet addressing Israel with the very same words that he has just used to address the arm of the Lord calling on Israel to gird herself with strength. And then you have 51:16 - whichever way you slice it, the grammar gives us to understand that the nation plays a cosmic role in God's plan - the very point that you are arguing that the prophet is trying to downplay. If this is the concept that the prophet is trying to avoid - then this would be a terrible choice of words. But according to you - this is not merely a concept that the prophet is trying to avoid - he is trying to paint the very opposite picture. Note, that in all of Scripture it would be difficult to find a concentration of such a complimentary depiction of Israel. Aside from the 3 points I mentioned above the prophet uses "pursuers of justice," "seekers of the Lord," "knowers of justice," "a nation with My (God's) teaching in their heart," "enclothed with her garments of splendor" and "holy city" to describe Israel. All this in the last 35 verses before 53. So how do you come to the conclusion that by the time we come to Isaiah 53 the prominent "contrast" that we have in our mind is not the glory of God and the vindication of those who trust in Him versus the shame of the idols and the shame of those who trust in them. This contrast created by the prophet explicitly, forcefully and many times over should not be at the forefront of our mind as we approach 53. Rather we should be "overwhelmed" by the "massive difference" and "contrast" between the various servants of the One true God. A "contrast" that the prophet

found no room to put into explicit words in these 14 chapters. A distinction that the prophet goes out of his literary way to blur over many times in these chapters and he does so most heavily in the 35 verses immediately preceding 53. And this is the thought that should be foremost in our mind as we approach 53?!

My response: I appreciate your summary. Here's my response, and remember, my focus has been clear from the start: who is the servant? What focus is God putting on that word and concept in these texts? From Isa 40-48, there is only clear reference to the individual servant, which is found in 42:1-7, but his mission is international, and he will also be a covenant for his own people Israel. All the other references to the servant in these chapters are to the nation and/or the remnant. In sharp contrast, from 49-52 (through v. 12), every reference to the servant is to the individual, including two lengthy sections, 49:1-10 (at least), with his calling paralleling that of the individual servant in 42, with kings bowing down to him -- to the one despised by his own nation; he too sets captive Israel free; and 50:4-11. So, when you next see the word servant, in 52:13, with the parallel of kings taking notice, our thoughts turn immediately to the individual servant. How could they turn in any other direction? The Lord has made clear who this servant is, called righteous yet suffering innocently, just like the servant in 49:7 and 50:5-7. And from whom did the servant suffer such indignities? Should we not assume from his own people, just like the other prophets who preceded him and followed him? That too leads in perfectly to 52:13-53:12. And does not 50:11 bring a word of rebuke to the sinners in Israel?

The call to listen to the servant and to obey God finds natural continuity in 51, where the righteous remnant (the redeemed, not the redeemer) is called on to follow and believe, with the second half of the chapter focusing on God's encouragement for His people and city under severe judgment. Then 52 calls on the slumbering city/nation to awake, recounting her former woes and speaking of her imminent redemption, and then yes, at last, the final glorious focus on the servant redeemer, despised and rejected by his own nation, yet he who suffered for the sins of his people, bringing them healing, the one who, in keeping with 42 and 49, will bring God's salvation to the ends of the earth. Anyone reading these texts without preconceptions -- in my opinion -- would see the success of the servant's role on behalf of his beleaguered people. And, if you simply ask the question I was asking, "Who is the servant?", the answer is clear: from 49 on, the focus is on an individual, not the nation. The former redeems; the latter is redeemed.

Two last points. First, again, I do not agree with your reading of Isa 51:16, for reasons we have discussed. Second, you close passionately with, "A distinction that the prophet goes out of his literary way to blur over many times in these chapters and he does so most heavily in the 35 verses immediately preceding 53. And this is the thought that should be foremost in our mind as we approach 53?" The answer is simple: the attention span of the reader is not so short as to forget the clear and definite and undeniable contrasts between the nation and the individual! The one who opens the eyes of the blind is not the same as the blind; the redeemer is not the same as the redeemed; the one who is beaten for his righteous voice is not the same as the ones who beat him. So, I repeat: who is the servant? The focus is on a person, not a people.

*Y - Regarding our discussion triggered off by your questions. A stylistic point before I begin - I realize that you favor putting your words in between mine. I find it difficult to write (and to read) that way – so please tolerate my way of writing which will refer to and perhaps quote your words, but I will post my words separately.*

*You wrote that you believe that you have already contrasted the calling of the individual and the group. I am well aware of this. I am also well aware that any distinction can be turned into a contrast. However, I have already pointed out to you that the prophet, who uses the literary tool of creating contrast very often throughout these 14 chapters, never once uses his pen to create the contrast that you see as so foundational and thematic to this text. Can you perhaps explain why the prophet failed to put this “foundational contrast” into explicit words?*

*You had stated that the fact that there is more than one servant where only one (Israel) is expected tells us that the individual transcends Israel. I responded by asking you on what Scriptural basis do you lay this foundation of expecting one servant? You responded by telling me what you believe to be the correct interpretation of 59:20, 21 and by accusing me of “confusing the categories.” – How is this a response to my question? What is the chapter and verse that supports your statement that “we expect one servant”?*

*You said that the individual fulfills the destiny of the nation. I asked for chapter and verse. You responded with 49:3. My question to you then is, does this verse tell you that the nation does not fulfill its own destiny?*

*You had stated that you see the “opposite of blurring.” I challenged this statement of yours by pointing out that I had provided a lengthy list of the literary devices that the prophet uses to fuse the individual and the nation together. You respond by acknowledging – “Yes, there is blurring, and yes, there are distinctives.”*

*So if you accept that the prophet spends quite a bit of his literary energy creating blurring, how then can you say that you see “the opposite of blurring”? To remind you. I acknowledge that there are distinctions between the roles of the various servants. I just don’t see how you can say that the prophet is highlighting those distinctions.*

*You had asked how I can minimize the profound differences between the individual and the nation. I responded by telling you that you should ask the prophet this question – it is he that minimizes the differences by blurring them together so many times. You responded by saying (and I paraphrase) that the blurring represents the idea that the individual is part of the nation and then you go on to say that the individual is only here because of the failure of the nation.*

*You realize that this is your own theory, the prophet breathes not a word about this. The prophet does not tell us why he fuses the nation and the individual together so many times. And he certainly doesn’t tell us that the individual only steps in upon the failure of the nation.*

*Now, I recognize full well that had the nation not failed/sinned we would not need redemption. But you are saying more than that. You are insisting that the nation in its exiled state does not contribute to the redemption process and that this is the reason that a redeemer is needed. This theory of yours has no support in the text. In fact the text makes it clear that Israel's hope to God is an important component of the revelation of God's glory. God desires to reveal that those who hope to Him are not shamed (49:23) and those who hope to God contribute to that revelation through their hope. This is something that the nation does in an active way.*

*But either way, as it relates to my original point. By fusing the nation and the individual together as often as he does, the prophet is minimizing the distinctions between them. The fact that the prophet does not limit his fusing them together as it relates to their origin (such as describing them both as being "chosen" and "formed from the womb") but he uses them also as it relates to their role (both are called "servant," both give their bodies for suffering and both have God holding their hand) and also as it relates to the future glorification (that God will glorify Himself with both of them, that rulers will bow to both of them and that the enemies of both will be consumed by the moth). This tells us that the individual does not step in to take up the role of the nation while the nation is relegated to the background. The fusion/blurring created by the prophet goes far beyond telling us that the dry fact that the individual is "part of the nation."*

*I had described what I see as a second individual servant (aside from the judge of nations mentioned in 42) and I put forth that this is the prophet. You asked – how can this individual be less than the Messiah? I responded by asking – what clear Messianic text assigns this role to the Messiah? What I meant by "this role" was – "declaring God's word primarily to Israel but eventually to effect the nations - 42:5-9; 49:1-9; 50:4-9; - by doing so (declaring God's word) he stands as a covenant to the nation and a light to the Gentiles - he opens the eyes of the blind and sets the captives free." I asked further – "And why can the prophet not be assigned a glorious role? Do you not believe that the word of God uttered by the prophet accomplishes God's purpose in this world - Jeremiah 1:10; Isaiah 55:11?"*

*You responded with a few points. You said that the Messiah will be the greatest prophet – can you please give us chapter and verse? You wrote that "only the Messiah bears our sins and brings us forgiveness" – chapter and verse please?*

*Then you point to chapter 11 as if I was diminishing the glorious role of the Messiah. I understand that the Messiah is a very glorious figure in God's plan for mankind – but this does not mean that God does not assign glorious roles to anyone else. Isaiah 11 describes a glorious king and judge of nations. This is parallel to 42:1-4. However, I do not see the task of declaring God's word assigned to the Messiah. Do you have a chapter and verse in an explicit Messianic prophecy that describes the Messiah as one who brings God's word to the world?*

*You argued that one of the distinctions between the nation and the individual is that the nation is blind while the individual opens the eyes of the blind. I responded by pointing to 42:19 which*

*either attributes the qualities of blindness and deafness to the individual or it is attributing to the nation the role of being sent by God as a messenger. Whichever way you choose, this verse further fuses the nation and individual together.*

*You responded with the argument that the prophet is describing the nation as a messenger sent by God in order to highlight the distinction between the individual and the nation. One is a blind messenger while the other is a messenger that opens the eyes of the blind.*

*In response I would point out that your interpretation is not obvious in the text. There are Christian commentators who read the text as applying to the individual and not to the nation. This being the case, I ask you, if the prophet is trying to create this distinction, why would he put it in such ambiguous terms? Again, there are many contrasts created by the prophet throughout these 14 chapters that are not open to question. Why would this one, which is so important according to you, be presented in a way that is less than crystal clear?*

*Furthermore, the main distinction that you are trying to create is that Israel is inactive as opposed to the active individual. If you attribute this verse to Israel (which I understand you do), then the prophet is clearly assigning an active role to Israel (“My messenger that I send”). This verse does not harmonize with the portrait that you would have the prophet paint.*

*You had argued that one of the distinctions (which you incorrectly call “contrasts”) between the individual and the nation is that the nation needs saving while the individual does not. I pointed out that the prophet associates the word “salvation” with the help that the individual needs from God (49:8).*

*You responded with the argument that the “day of salvation” in 49:8 refers to the general salvation of the nation and not to that of the individual.*

*I do not necessarily disagree with your interpretation here. My point was that according to your understanding this was an association that the prophet should have been looking to avoid. If the most important contrast that the prophet is trying to create is the idea that the individual is divorced from the salvation that the nation needs, why does he link the two (the help needed by the individual and the salvation needed by the nation)? This does not harmonize with the contrast that you would have us see here.*

*I had pointed out that the prophet further fuses the two (nation and individual) together by using the same words (“mishpati” - my justice and “pe’ulati” – my work) to describe a parallel experience (of having God taking up their cause). You responded by pointing to what you see as distinctions between the respective experiences of the individual and the nation.*

*I may or may not agree with the distinctions that you argue for. But by using the same words, the prophet is bringing them together, not setting them apart. Not only does the prophet not contrast them explicitly by placing them side by side in clear juxtaposition, (as he has done so many times*

*for other entities in these chapters), and not only does he not use contrasting words, he uses the very same words to describe a parallel experience. This is not “creating contrast.”*

*In this setting you quoted Isaiah 53 as if it is talking about the individual. In other words, you are quoting your own conclusion in order to “prove” your point. This is circular reasoning.*

*I had pointed out that a significant feature of the prophet’s depiction of the individual servant is the experience of despair and encouragement, needing God’s help and having his prayer answered. And my question is, if the contrast that the prophet is trying to create is that the nation needs salvation while the individual does not – why then this emphasis on the individual’s need for God’s help? Again, this does not harmonize with the portrait that you have us see in the prophet’s words.*

*You responded by pointing to other distinctions that you see between the individual and the nation (the one saves while the other needs saving). How does this answer my question? Again, I acknowledge that there are distinctions between the nation and the individual. The question here is – is the prophet highlighting those distinctions or is he minimizing them? By pointing to the individual’s need for God’s help using the same words (“mishpati” and “pe’ulati”) he had used to describe the nation’s need for the same, the prophet is clearly minimizing the distinctions and not highlighting them.*

*You had written - “the contrast in roles between the individual servant and the nation or even the remnant is quite clear and definitely intended by the prophet.” I responded by pointing out that there is a distinction between a “contrast” on the one hand and a “difference” or “distinction” on the other hand.*

*You responded with the argument that this is a matter of semantics. You remind me that the role of the individual and the nation are distinct and different and you ask why I minimize that truth?*

*My response to you is that this is definitely not a matter of semantics. Again, I agree that the individual and the nation play different and distinct roles in God’s plan. My argument is that the prophet does not at any point in these 14 chapters use these distinctions to create a literary contrast between the two. In fact he uses many literary tools to fuse the two together. There is no way you can say that “the contrast in roles was definitely intended by the prophet.”*

*You had asked me; where in these chapters does the prophet present the remnant as righteous? I responded by pointing to the hope to God attributed by the prophet to the remnant. I added a detail with the point that this is the very righteousness that the individual servant calls upon the remnant to produce as we see in 50:10. You responded by pointing out that 50:10 does not speak of the righteousness of the remnant. I never said it did. I just pointed out that this verse shows us what the individual calls upon the remnant to do. It is 40:21 and 49:23 which tell us that the remnant had actually put their hope in God. I was not pointing to 50:10 to establish that detail of my point.*

*You ask where does the prophet boast of the remnant's faith. I never said that he "boasts" of it. I did say that he speaks of it as a given fact in 40:21 and 49:23.*

*Just lines after I apologized for a careless typo – I made the same mistake again. I meant 65:8, not 65:4. In this verse the remnant's righteousness is used as a cause for God not to destroy all of the nation. The prophet is clearly attributing righteousness to the remnant.*

*Regarding your response to my recap.*

*You ask "who is the servant?" If I would ask you "who is the Lord's servant?" right after I spoke of "the bearers of the vessels of the Lord" – wouldn't you assume that this function (bearing the vessels) is that of the Lord's servant? Wouldn't the one who has the Lord's word placed in his mouth be the Lord's servant? Remember, this was the interpretation of 51:16 that you favored from the 1970's until April of 2018. "Pursuers of justice," "seekers of the Lord," "My (the Lord's) people," "My (the Lord's) nation," "knowers of righteousness," "a nation with My (the Lord's) teaching in their heart" and "holy city." Wouldn't those be qualities that would be associated with a servant of the Lord? How about an entity that is described (51:22) as having God as their Master? Is that not a description of a servant of the Lord?*

*If you ask "who is God's servant in 52:13?" - you will see that the preceding verses have made the answer very clear.*

*If the concept of kings reacting to the glory of the servant (52:15) is an indicator to consider, why should we ignore 49:23?*

*And in your closing sentences, are you describing the remnant as one who beat the servant of God?*

*Then you introduce the "short attention span" argument. Can you please explain why you believe that the reader's attention span can sail right over the 35 verses from 51:1 through 52:12 but this same reader is completely distracted by the 37 verses from 49:1 through 50:11? And mind you, while the 35 verses immediately preceding 53 do not mention the individual even once, the 37 verses from 49:1 through 50:11 still speaks of the nation, telling us that kings will bow down to them and that their hope to God plays an important role in the process of bringing God's truth to the world (49:22,23). So again, why are you so confident that the reader remembers chapters 49 and 50 after he has read 51 and 52, but at the same time you are just as confident that the reader has forgotten chapters 40 through 48 by the time he has read 49 and 50?*

*Let me present this from another angle. Isaiah 53 is about a contrast. You have the suffering servant of the Lord who is exalted and vindicated and you have those who are confused and shamed by the same exaltation of the servant. The prophet does not explicitly identify these two entities who stand opposite of each other.*

*Now we have two proposed interpretations that would identify these two entities. The one interpretation (mine) puts all of God's servants on the one side, and places their opponents on the other side. (To remind you, my interpretation does not exclude the individual servants. All of God's servants are exalted at the time of the redemption, precisely because they are His servants.) And the other interpretation (yours) pits two of God's servants against each other. According to this interpretation, the entity that is exalted is one particular servant of God while the entity that is confused and shamed is a group who has been repeatedly and explicitly identified by the prophet as servants of God.*

*Those proposing these different interpretations agree that the 14 chapters leading up to Isaiah 53 will help us determine which of these two interpretations is correct.*

*Now we have discovered that in these chapters, the prophet had created the explicit literary contrast between Israel and her opponents many times over. The prophet attributed shame and confusion to Israel's opponents again and again. The prophet had attributed glory, vindication and exaltation to Israel a number of times throughout these 14 chapters, and often in direct juxtaposition to each other. Furthermore, in these chapter we find that the prophet has used many literary devices to fuse all of God's servants together. And throughout these 14 chapters, never once, and I repeat, not even one time does the prophet create an explicit literary contrast between any of God's servants. Not once does he attribute shame and confusion to any of God's servants.*

*So which contrast are the 14 chapters (40-52) pointing to? Is it a contrast between two servants of the One true God? Or are these chapters pointing to a contrast between all of God's servants on the one hand and the opponents of God and His servants on the other?*

*What is the theme, the thread, that links all of these 14 chapters together? What is the song and the spirit of Isaiah 40 through 52? Is it a contrast between two entities who are explicitly identified as servants of God? Or is it perhaps a contrast between the The victory of the One true God that He shares with all of those whom He has raised to be His servants on the one hand over and against the futility of the idols together with the shame of those who serve them and trust in them on the other?*

*Isaiah was quite a good writer. His words leave us with no question.*

M - I'm reminded of one of our early email exchanges, where you observed that arguments that seem so impressive to the one making them seem utterly unimpressive to the other person (and vice versa). I guess, at this stage, we're both shaking our heads a little, wondering how the other one is not seeing the strength of our arguments. Since you prefer to engage in a bit more free flowing interaction, I'll do the same here while still trying cover all your points, just reverting to my method of direct quotation and rebuttal towards the end.

You keep pointing to the literary genius of Isaiah and the contrasts he paints, feeling he does no such thing with the individual vs. corporate servant. I feel it's the opposite, that the distinctions

between individual and corporate servant are so stark they need no literary flourish to underscore them. Really, now, how could the distinction be deeper? At the risk of repeating myself, let's try this once more, comparing and contrasting the individual servant with the corporate servant.

To the individual servant: "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness." (Isaiah 42:6–7)

To the national servant: "Hear, you deaf; look, you blind, and see! Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like the messenger I send? Who is blind like the one in covenant with me, blind like the servant of the LORD? You have seen many things, but you pay no attention; your ears are open, but you do not listen." (Isaiah 42:18–20)

The individual opens the eyes of the blind. The nation is blind, blind, blind. What more could Isaiah say? How else could he have distinguished the one who opens the blinded eyes of the nation from the nation with blind, blind, blind eyes? Notice also how the nation is described in 43:8: "Lead out those who have eyes but are blind, who have ears but are deaf." (Isaiah 43:8) See also 56:10: "Israel's watchmen are blind, they all lack knowledge; they are all mute dogs, they cannot bark; they lie around and dream, they love to sleep." And also the national confession in 59:10: "Like the blind we grope along the wall, feeling our way like people without eyes. At midday we stumble as if it were twilight; among the strong, we are like the dead."

Note also that the nation is imprisoned in dungeons, as in 51:14: "The cowering prisoners will soon be set free; they will not die in their dungeon, nor will they lack bread." Yet the individual releases them from the dungeon in 42:7.

If these differences are not stark, dramatic, and indisputable, then Isaiah did not know how to write and God did not know how to inspire.

Or consider the simple truths of 49:5-6: "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 my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."

So, while the servant is identified with his people in v. 3, he is sent on a mission to Jacob-Israel. HE regathers THEM. THE INDIVIDUAL restores THE NATION. This is underscored in 49:9, where it is through the individual that the Lord says to the nation in exile "get out!", the same word spoken to the exiles in 48:20 and 52:11. (And notice that, just as the individual servant brings this word to the prisoners [asurim] in 49:9, it is the prophet, and individual servant of God, who proclaims liberty to the prisoners [asurim] in 61:1.) I ask again, how could Isaiah

make the distinction clearer? To quote you: “Isaiah was quite a good writer. His words leave us with no question.”

And contrary to your arguments, which allege that Isaiah leaves us no question as to who he was speaking of beginning in 52:13, somehow the Targum wasn't sharp enough to figure this out, rendering with, “Behold My servant the Messiah.” And somehow, the midrash was reminded of the Messiah in 52:13, along with, according to Alsheikh, all the rabbis of his generation (even if he spoke only of 52:13). Of course, I do not accept the authority of these writers. I simply point out that they failed to see what you claim to see so clearly.

As much as you downplay it, there is a massive difference between the redeemer and the redeemed, from the who languishes in prison and the one who sets the prisoner free. And, as both 42:6 and 49:8 state, the individual is in covenant relationship with the nation. The two are clearly and definitely distinguished. And while the nation is often rebuked by the Lord and indicted for sin throughout these chapters, the individual is never rebuked, never accused, never censored. So, to the extent Isaiah connects the servant with his people, it is not with the purpose of blurring – to use your word – but with the purpose of uniting them while sharpening the differences: one from among us will redeem; one of our own, whom we rejected and mistreated, will set us free.

This is in keeping with the role of the prophet (who, in my view, clearly anticipates the Messiah in many ways), who in Isaiah 61, states that the Spirit is on him with the purpose of setting captives free, but here in a primarily eschatological context. This is the role of the individual servant. He is not bound or imprisoned; rather, he is sent by God to bring freedom to the prisoner.

Then there is the issue of the nation rejecting the servant, even violently, which is the perfect setup for 52:13-53:12. In fact, when we read the description of the servant in 52:13-15, it is only natural to ask, “Who is this disfigured and beaten servant?” And when we continue into 53 we can ask more precisely, “Who is this disfigured servant, beaten and rejected by his own people?” The answer jumps off the pages to us as we think back to the only references to the servant in the previous chapters: it is the individual servant!

So, in 49:4, the individual servant says that he has labored in vain. I agree with the rabbinic commentaries that understand he was saying, “I brought Your word to My people, but they rejected it and they rejected me” (paraphrased). Yet God assures him that his mission to Israel will ultimately be successful, ultimately being a light to the nations as well, just as in 42:4, 6. This servant is also called a despised one, possibly even abhorred by the nation (49:7; there is some debate about the translation), yet kings will bow down to him. (Ibn Ezra applies the whole verse to the prophet, as you know, and I mention this, as always, to point out that respected Jewish scholars have also read this verse with reference to the individual servant, for Ibn Ezra, of course, meaning the prophet himself.)

Note also some key words that are used, connecting the servant in 49 with the servant in 52:13ff.: “kings” in 49:7 and 52:15; “saw” in both of these verses; and then b-z-h, despised in 49:7 and 53:3 (twice; in fact, the root is not found anywhere between these verses). Are you really suggesting that this is not describing the same, suffering individual, the one to whom kings will one day bow down but right now is beaten and despised by his own people?

Then we continue into chapter 50, where the individual servant is once again suffering at the hands of his people Israel. Yet, despite the violent opposition, he is obedient and will not turn back, struck on his face and his beard ripped out (see 50:5-7). And look at the parallel language here as well: the servant is smitten by his people (n-k-h), just as in 53:4, where our people think he is being smitten (n-k-h) by God (and again, as with b-z-h in 49:7 and 53:3, the next time n-k-h occurs in Isaiah after 50:6 is in 53:4). And in 50:6, he doesn't hide his face from shame and spittle, while in 53:3, he is one from whom people hide their face (here too, the root s-t-r, with panim, is not found in between these chapters, which is quite striking in light of the other parallels).

We can now ask, in light of such a dramatic setup, with such clear links, with such detailed descriptions, as the prophet depicts Israel coming up out of exile, to whom does he call the nation to look? The answer is obvious and clear: he calls the nation, the people being redeemed, to look at the individual servant, their redeemer, beaten and rejected by them, yet vindicated by God, to the amazement of kings and nations. It is through his suffering they become righteous, by his wounds they are healed, and through his exaltation, they will be exalted.

To me, without the prophet saying in caps, I'M SPEAKING ABOUT THE INDIVIDUAL SERVANT HERE, he has made himself extremely clear, both explicitly and through literary parallels. It is as clear as the contrast between the redeemer, the Messiah, and the redeemed, the people of Israel, at the end of Isaiah 59: “The redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins,” declares the LORD.” Isaiah needs no literary contrasts here, no special flourish of his pen. The two entities, although part of the same people Israel, are distinct. That's why the whole community of Israel prays for the coming of the Messiah to this day. He is one of us, but he is distinct. Again, I don't know how Isaiah could have been clearer without writing prophecy as if it was a newspaper article documenting the score of a sports event. For prophetic literature, he was stunningly clear.

We should also look at the use of brit in 42:6 and 49:8, where the individual servant is called a brit 'am, a covenant of the people. In 42:6, this is coupled with being a light to the nations; in 49:8, it is coupled with restoring the land of Israel. Does this connect with the brit 'olam of 55:3, which is described as “the sure mercies of David” and, in 55:5, is connected to Gentile nations turning to Israel? If so, this would underscore the role of the individual Messiah, the new David who will lead this generation out of bondage, just as Moses did of old. (And note that Ibn Ezra understands these verses in chapter 55 to be speaking of the Messiah.)

Then there is the parallel between 48:20-22, where God calls Israel to depart from Babylon, followed by the focus on the individual servant, who will deliver them, beginning in 49:1, and the same call to depart from Babylon in 52:11-12, followed by the focus on the individual servant, who suffers on their behalf, beginning 52:13. And note the common vocabulary (referenced, in part, above), with tse'u, "get out" in 48:20 and 52:11 (see also the root y-ts' occurring again in 48:20 and in 52:12), and the root h-l-k occurring in 48:21 and then twice in 52:12.

Let me also add this important perspective. For almost 50 years now, year in and year out, I have heard from rabbis, counter-missionaries, and a wide range of Jews with whom I interacted, "The servant is Israel. Just look at what Isaiah says." They will then quote passages like this: "But you, Israel, My servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham My friend" (Isaiah 41:8); or this: "You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me." (Isaiah 43:10) "You see," I have been told countless scores of times, "Israel is the servant! Just look at Isaiah's own words. The servant is called Israel; the servant is called Jacob; the servant refers to people, not a person."

So, to respond to that argument, I studied carefully the usage of "servant" in Isaiah 41-53 (it does not occur in chapter 40), demonstrating clearly that in a number of key passages, the servant is clearly an individual, distinct from the nation (as acknowledged by many traditional commentators). I also point out that, beginning in chapter 49, the servant is never referred to in the plural, as the usage clearly focuses on a person in extended passages in chapters 49-50, making likely, if not certain, that the servant in 52:13-53:12, described in such individualistic terms, is that same person, rather than the nation as a whole. In keeping with this, I have pointed out that from a consistent biblical approach, going through the Tanakh, it is impossible that 52:13-53:12 can refer either to the nation as a whole or to the righteous remnant.

I have seen nothing in your arguments to rebut any of these servant-focused arguments, other than to claim that: 1) Isaiah constantly blurs the corporate servant and the individual servant, a point that I refuted above, demonstrating the clear differences between them; and 2) Isaiah focuses more and more on the nation, in particular the righteous remnant in chapters 51-52, not to mention the larger thematic purpose of chapters 40-52, thus pointing to a corporate servant in 52:13-53:12. The problem, however, with your argument, is that: 1) it fails to recognize Isaiah's intentional and clear use of "servant" in chapters 49-50, tying back also to 42, then beginning in 52:13; 2) it fails to factor in that, repeatedly in these chapters, Isaiah shifts his focus and his subject, thus forcing us back to look at his use of "servant" when we ask, "Who is the servant?"; and 3) when we continue into 52:13-53:12, we see that it cannot refer to the nation or even the righteous remnant. So, even if you would argue, "The closer we come to this section, the more the focus is on the nation, in its righteousness, then on an individual," I would say, "Well, let's see how your argument works as we keep reading," at which point it breaks down entirely.

Now, I'm quite aware that our question is on the setup to 52:13-53:12, but it is only fair to raise the question, in anticipation of what is coming, "Does the alleged theme carry over well? Or is there is a shift in focus?" Obviously, you differ with me here too, claiming that the passage fits the righteous remnant/Israel perfectly well, whereas it does not refer to Yeshua. I understand that. I simply make my point that, any reader of the text will not just say, "To whom is 40-52 pointing?" but also, "Of whom does 53 speak?"

Having laid out my arguments afresh, and in a bit more detail, let me respond to your most salient points.

You continue to draw attention to 52:11, as if it somehow it contradicts any of the arguments I have raised, but it does not. As the exiles are leaving Babylon carrying the articles from the Temple, rather than extolling their righteousness, God calls on them not to pollute themselves. That's it. Interestingly, the rabbinic commentators do not seem to put much stress on this, some feeling it refers to the exiles bringing back the Temple articles, some to Israel being the nation with the Torah, and some to Israel's "vessels" being God's gracious protection rather than sword or spear, so not even seeing a reference to the Temple vessels. And despite your protestations that this presents a different picture of Israel than I'm painting, it does no such thing. It does not make Israel an agent of redemption. It does not present Israel in the active role of liberating captives or the like. It simply calls of them not to be polluted. I repeat: you make way more of this than Isaiah does.

Regarding the question of Isaiah contrasting the individual servant with the corporate servant, I addressed that in detail, above.

Regarding 49:3, it certainly does not teach that the nation fulfills its own destiny, as the verses that follow make totally clear. Rather, it teaches that it is only through the individual servant, who is part of the nation and represents the nation, that the nation can fulfill its destiny.

You take considerable time to argue that, "By fusing the nation and the individual together as often as he does, the prophet is minimizing the distinctions between them." I believe I refuted that clearly in my opening arguments here, in detail. You miss the forest of the obvious, fundamental, absolutely explicit differences between the individual and the nation, for the trees of other literary contrasts.

As for your question about a text that speaks of the Messiah being the greatest of the prophets, I would point to: 1) Isaiah 11 and his extraordinary enduement of the Spirit; this is part of the very essence of being prophetic; 2) the Messianic understanding of Deuteronomy 18:15-19 when compared with Deuteronomy 34:10-12 (cf. Ralbag there, who also cites Isaiah 11); the prophet like Moses had never arisen in Israel even though such a prophet was promised. I understand that prophet to be the Messiah. Interestingly, the Midrash to Isaiah 52:13 speaks of the Messiah being greater than Abraham, Moses, and the ministering angels, and since: 1) I also understand 52:13 to refer to the Messiah, and 2) I believe he will be a miracle-working prophet like Moses, then

3) I too believe he will be greater than Moses, who, otherwise, would have been the greatest of the prophets.

As for the Messiah bearing our sins and iniquities, obviously I believe that Isaiah 53 states this explicitly, with other passages pointing to his suffering and death. I'm quite aware that we are disputing the meaning of this very passage, but that does not mean that I eliminate it from my theology when articulating my beliefs to you.

You feel that, although the Messiah plays a glorious role, so also do God's prophets, and you ask me, "Do you have a chapter and verse in an explicit Messianic prophecy that describes the Messiah as one who brings God's word to the world?"

Of course, this is a circular argument, since we can debate what is and is not an explicit Messianic prophecy. But since we agree that Isaiah 42:1-4 is Messianic, you have your answer there. Not only does the Messiah bring forth justice to the nations, but they also wait for his teaching (torah). Is not that God's word going to the world through the Messiah?

You continue to argue that the prophet is intentionally fusing the individual servant and the national servant, believing that the distinctions I am making are minor and hardly intended by the prophet. Again, I believe I addressed that sufficiently in the opening sections of my reply, detailing just how stark and dramatic those contrasts are.

It's as if two baseball players wore identical uniforms, highlighting the fact that one was 6' 3" and the other 5' 2", or one was black with blond hair and the other white with red hair. Putting them in the same uniforms reminds us they are part of one team – yes, the Messiah is one of us and part of us – while at the same time highlights the distinctives.

I pointed this out clearly in Isaiah 42 (with the emphasis on blindness and deafness) and again in 49, with the individual having a mission to the nation. The specifics are unambiguous and transparent.

To give another analogy, if a the bride and groom wore identically colored outfits at their wedding, signifying their unity, would anyone forget that one was a man and the other a woman? You put the emphasis on the same colored clothing, saying, "You see, the prophet was blurring the distinctives." I put the emphasis on the obvious: one is a man and the other is a woman.

You wonder how 42:19 could refer to the nation, since it is God's messenger, sent on a mission. But the prophet tells you exactly who he is speaking of in 42:22, "But this is a people plundered and looted . . ." Yes, Israel was sent on a mission as God's messenger, and yes, Israel fell short, needing the Messiah's redemption in order to fulfill her national calling. There is nothing complicated here at all.

You claim that, according to me, the prophet would not have wanted to associate the individual servant with the need for salvation, as in 49:8. But you say that you don't disagree that this verse

could speak of national salvation rather than the salvation of the servant, so what, then, is the problem? Plus, Isaiah elsewhere tells us the servant will be rejected by his people in 49 and that he is beaten by his people in 50, and you know how I understand 52:13-53:12. The prophet is being consistent. That he didn't say things the way you feel he needed to, I cannot help.

Again, you point to other areas where you see the prophet fusing the individual with the nation, but I do not object to that at all. They are one. The same people. The same larger mission. The same family. The same God. Yet, to repeat yet again, one is the redeemer, the other the redeemed; one sets the captives free and opens the eyes of the blind, the other is captive and blind. I still cannot fathom why you look for the wordplay, for the supposed "contrast" while ignoring the stark, explicit, and obvious. I mean no insult, but it feels as if you do not want to see what is there in plain sight since it doesn't fit your larger theology.

As for the individual servant suffering discouragement, this is in harmony with passages such as Psalm 22, which, as you know, I understand as Messianic, and with the servant being beaten in Isaiah 50, fitting in perfectly with 53 (what was the servant feeling as his own people rejected him?). Yet he is the redeemer, the deliverer, the one vindicated by God, ultimately for the salvation of his people. I find utterly baffling your comment that, "There is no way you can say that 'the contrast in roles was definitely intended by the prophet.'"

You still have provided no explicit statement in these chapters that the prophet called the remnant "righteous," arguing instead in a roundabout way to make your point. That is disappointing, since you constantly point to the prophet being such a careful wordsmith. Surely, with so many negative descriptions of the nation in these chapters (really, from the beginning of Isaiah to the end), the description of the servant in 53 as righteous and making many others righteous stands out. Of course it is the Messiah, the individual, the redeemer, not the sinful people in exile needing redemption and forgiveness.

You point to 65:8, but even there, the term "righteous" is not found. Once again, a swing and a miss. In fact, reading these surrounding chapters is quite devastating (just 59 is enough). Our people needed (and need) a righteous redeemer.

Regarding your response to my response to your recap, yes, Israel is called the servant of the Lord often in 41 to 48, but never thereafter, and yes, in other ways, Israel is called to do things that God's servants should do. Who would argue with that? But Isaiah is very precise and strategic, as I have emphasized, focusing on the individual servant in two extended passages in 49 and 50, with specific language connecting 42, 49, and 50 to 52:13-53:12, as I demonstrated in my response. (Re: your frequent reference to 51:16 and my views on it until April 2018, may I ask you how many times I actually wrote about 51:16 before our exchange in 2018? Please don't give the false impression that I had studied the passage in depth and held a certain view, only to question it later. To the contrary, I had not studied the passage carefully until our exchange – I apologize for that, but it's the truth – and upon further study, raised some questions.)

You ask, “If the concept of kings reacting to the glory of the servant (52:15) is an indicator to consider, why should we ignore 49:23?”

I don’t ignore it. I simply don’t separate it from 49:7. Kings will bow down to the Messiah, and when he liberates captive Israel and redeems them, they too will be exalted and then served by the nations. You, however, ignore 49:7 and fail to see the divine sequence of things.

You ask, “why are you so confident that the reader remembers chapters 49 and 50 after he has read 51 and 52, but at the same time you are just as confident that the reader has forgotten chapters 40 through 48 by the time he has read 49 and 50?”

Actually, if I gave the impression that the reader “forgot” 40-48, I apologize. That was not my intent. Rather, I see the cumulative direction of the prophecies to be clear, with the chapters building on one another, with constant shifts in subject and subject matter, culminating in the time when our people come out of exile, led by the one who suffered on their behalf. And, as stated above, Isaiah clearly tied in 53 with the preceding Messianic prophecies, using specific vocabulary to drill the point home, also with identical language in the end of 48 and the end of 52 (“get out” of Babylon), immediately before pointing to the individual servant in the verses that follow.

You close by writing, “Now we have two proposed interpretations that would identify these two entities. The one interpretation (mine) puts all of God’s servants on the one side, and places their opponents on the other side.” And you ask (after further elaboration), “So which contrast are the 14 chapters (40-52) pointing to? Is it a contrast between two servants of the One true God? Or are these chapters pointing to a contrast between all of God’s servants on the one hand and the opponents of God and His servants on the other?”

You continue, “What is the theme, the thread, that links all of these 14 chapters together? What is the song and the spirit of Isaiah 40 through 52? Is it a contrast between two entities who are explicitly identified as servants of God? Or is it perhaps a contrast between the victory of the One true God that He shares with all of those whom He has raised to be His servants on the one hand over and against the futility of the idols together with the shame of those who serve them and trust in them on the other?”

You answer your questions with this: “Isaiah was quite a good writer. His words leave us with no question.”

I agree totally with your answer. Isaiah’s words leave us no doubt. He is speaking of the individual servant in 52:13-53:12.

Let’s remember that, in these chapters, Isaiah painstakingly points to an individual servant who, although part of his nation, stands out dramatically from the nation. (It would be redundant to

repeat all the ways he does this.) His mission is critical for the liberation of the nation; he comes to set them free!

But why is he himself not in bondage? How can he, who is one with his people, not be blind and in prison? It is because he is the Messiah! Shockingly, though, his people reject him. They even beat him violently. His face is struck, his beard pulled out, connecting him to the servant in 52:14, with a visage so disfigured he can hardly be recognized.

So, we have someone who is rejected by his people, yet to whom kings will bow down (in 49), one disfigured, yet obedient, one who suffers, yet not for his sins, but rather for the sins of his people. One who, unlike his sinning people, is righteous and makes many others righteous.

Of whom does the prophet speak in 52:13-53:12? Isaiah leaves us no doubt. He speaks of the individual servant, the Messiah, through whom Israel's wounds will be healed, and through whom the nations will believe.

Millions of readers, including countless hundreds of thousands of our Jewish people, have understood Isaiah's words, without the help of a commentary or a very protracted interchange between two serious students of the Word like you and me.

Let the text speak for itself. The readers will get it right.

Having said this, I'm not sure if we have reached the conclusion to our interaction, but on my end, without getting into 52:13-53:12 itself, I am happy to leave our discussion here and allow you to edit things in one lengthy document which we can then post on our sites.

Otherwise, I fear that, as my schedule picks up even more, it will be very difficult to continue with exchanges of this length. But since you initiated the interaction, I want you to feel we have reached an endpoint as well.

*Y - Thank you for your latest response. I appreciate the time and effort that you have invested in this conversation. I feel that we owe this to the audience that took the time to watch our debate and read the subsequent articles (and I keep on getting feedback from that exchange). I believe that as long as words can add clarity to the subject we should be sharing them with each other and with the public.*

*Let me summarize this segment of our conversation. We have been studying chapters 40 through 52 of Isaiah for almost a year and a half. At this point in time we are both trying to show how our conclusions of that study support our respective positions on the suffering servant of 53. In my most recent set of e-mails I pointed out how in these 14 chapters, the prophet used the literary tool of creating an explicit contrast between one entity and another.*

*In the course of our study I wrote: "Here is a partial list of contrasts "over and against" that the prophet presents in these chapters. 40:8 - flesh vs. the word of God; 40:30,31 - those who*

*possess human vigor vs. those who hope to God; 41:16 - Israel's victory vs. the defeat of her opponents; 44:25,26 - the sorcerers vs. the prophets of God; 45:16,17 - the shame of the idolaters vs. the absence of shame in Israel; 45:20,21, The dead idols vs. the true God; 46:1-4 - the nations carrying their idols vs. Israel being carried by God; 49:24,25 - the strength of the human warrior vs. the power of God; 51:6 - the transient nature of the heaven and earth vs. the eternity of God's salvation."*

*I further pointed out that the prophet does not create this type of explicit contrast between the individual servant and the nation. I then asked: "So which contrast are the 14 chapters (40-52) pointing to? Is it a contrast between two servants of the One true God? Or are these chapters pointing to a contrast between all of God's servants on the one hand and the opponents of God and His servants on the other?"*

*You did not directly answer this question of mine in your recent e-mail. Instead you wrote: "You keep pointing to the literary genius of Isaiah and the contrasts he paints, feeling he does no such thing with the individual vs. corporate servant. I feel it's the opposite, that the distinctions between individual and corporate servant are so stark they need no literary flourish to underscore them. Really, now, how could the distinction be deeper?"*

*So are you saying that the contrast between the corporate and individual servants is a stronger contrast than the contrast that exists between God and the idols? The one contrast is so obvious that there is no need for the prophet's "literary flourish to underscore" it while the other is so weak that the prophet had to be charitable and provide a "literary flourish" so that we should notice the contrast. Is this what you are saying? Please clarify.*

*In the course of our study of chapters 40-52 we noticed that the prophet uses the very same words and phrases to describe the individual servant and the nation/remnant. I wrote: "Both are called "My servant" (41:8; 42:1), both are called "Israel" (49:3), both are chosen (41:9; 42:1), both are "called by God" (41:9; 42:6), both are "formed by God from the womb" (44:2; 49:5), God will "glorify Himself" with both of them (44:23; 49:3), both give their bodies over to suffering (51:23; 50:6), both have God holding their hand (41:12; 42:6), both have rulers bowing to them (49:7, 23) and both have their enemies consumed by the moth (51:8; 50:9)" (- edited for argument's sake).*

*You put forth the argument that the prophet points to all of these similarities between the nation/remnant and the individual servant only in order to highlight the distinction between them.*

*How does this argument fit with your previous claim that "the distinctions are so stark that they need no literary flourish to underscore them"? Does the prophet use "literary flourish" to underscore the distinctions or does he not? Can you please explain your thought process?*

*Another related question: Do you not think that the amount of literary energy that Isaiah used to describe the similarities between the nation/remnant and individual is a bit overdone if his entire intention was merely to provide background for the contrast?*

*You asked: “how could Isaiah make the distinction clearer?” (You mean here the distinction between the individual and the nation/remnant). I have provided the answer to this question in my previous communications but it seems that my answer did not satisfy you. To remind you, if the lead up to Isaiah 53 is this contrast between the blind nation/remnant and the righteous individual then why does Isaiah describe the nation/remnant as: “pursuers of justice seekers of God,” “knowers of justice, a nation with My (God’s) teaching in their hearts,” “I (God) have set My word in your mouth and in the shade of My hand did I shelter you,” “holy city,” “bearers of the vessels of the Lord”? Why does he crowd all these expressions in the 2 chapters immediately preceding 53 where the contrast needs to be the sharpest? Do you not see how these descriptions mitigate the image of a blind nation versus a righteous individual? To answer your question directly: Isaiah could have made this distinction clearer by avoiding this cluster of descriptions which cast the nation/remnant in a positive light. Why does this answer not satisfy you?*

*Furthermore, I pointed out that the prophet spends much literary energy creating explicit contrasts between God and idols, God’s prophets and necromancers, God’s servants and idol-worshippers by placing them in clear juxtaposition to one another. If the distinction between the individual and the nation/remnant was so important to convey to his audience, he could have done the same for this distinction.*

*You asked why the Targum and the Alshich did not see what I see and associated the servant of 53 with the Messiah. You seem to be missing a big piece of my argument. I have written many times (starting back in Contra Brown) that my picture of the exaltation of the nation/remnant does not exclude the individual servants. When God comes to redeem His people to the eyes of all the nations, a major part of the glory of His people includes that a glorious king from amongst His people will be greatly exalted, a king that confirms their message and their faith. When the Targum and the Alshich see the glory of the Messiah in this passage they saw the glory of the nation/remnant as well. They did not see this as the glory of the Messiah to the exclusion of the nation/remnant.*

*You point to various literary parallels between the individual servant and the servant of Isaiah 53. Yet when I pointed to a literary parallel; the arm of the Lord being suddenly revealed (52:10 and 53:1), you reject my argument of using one text to illuminate the other. These two phrases and concepts are close together, they appear nowhere else in all of Isaiah (the arm of the Lord being revealed – and if you count 30:30, the concept is the same there as well – God’s arm saving Israel to the sight of the nations), yet you ignore this obvious literary parallel. Are we to use literary parallels to help us understand the text or are we not to use them? What is your method?*

*And once we are on the subject of literary parallels, did you notice those parallels that connect the nation/remnant with the suffering servant? For example, the word “lukach – was taken” is used in 52:5 in relation to the nation/remnant and again in 53:8 in reference to the suffering servant. This word or any word with the same root is not used in between these two verses. The word “lamo – unto them” is used in 48:21 in relation to the nation remnant and the next time this word is used is in 53:8 in reference to the suffering servant. The metaphor of the remnant bearing the weight of her oppressors is put forth in 51:23 and the metaphor of the suffering servant carrying the sins of his oppressors is presented throughout 53. The suffering of the servant in 53, which includes death, is reflected in the suffering of the remnant which is consistently described with terms associated with death (e.g. 51:19), while the suffering of the individual servant is never associated with death. Then you have Psalm 44, a Psalm of the righteous remnant, which reflects so much of the terminology of 53 and of the suffering of the remnant described in the previous chapters. Are these literary parallels less significant than the ones you pointed to?*

*You present your arguments on Isaiah 53 as if the text says that the servant was rejected by his own people. But this is part of our debate. My interpretation of the text says nothing of the sort. You are using your own conclusion to “prove” your point.*

*And I asked a question in my previous communication which you did not answer. I asked if you believe that the righteous remnant rejected and persecuted the servant. The righteous remnant is the audience of the prophet in 51 and 52. Are they called to behold the one that they beat and rejected? Is this your understanding of the righteous remnant?*

*And then you use the words of 48:20 to illuminate the passage under discussion (53). Yet when I pointed to this very same text in our debate you wrote: “Even more oddly, Rabbi Blumenthal writes, “And when the prophet asks; ‘who has believed our report?’ [in 53:1] he is echoing the report described in 48:20 where Jacob is described as God’s servant.” Again, there is no parallel between 48:20 and 53:1. The former focuses on Israel being redeemed; the latter focuses on how the servant brings us redemption. (The language is hardly parallel either.)”*

*So I ask; is 48:20 to be associated with chapter 53? Or is it not? What is your thought process?*

*In your response to my question about 52:11 you argue that this passage says nothing that has a bearing on the understanding of chapter 53 (I paraphrase, and please correct me if I misunderstood). So do you think that the association with the sons of Kehat in Numbers 4:15-20 is entirely coincidental?*

*You rebuke me for not having provided an explicit statement in these chapters that the prophet called the remnant “righteous.” I find it interesting that you challenge me this way. Did you not notice that the prophet does not use the word “righteous” as a title for the individual servant either? In fact, in the entire book of Isaiah, the word “tzaddik - righteous” as a title of an identified entity is used only for God (45:21) and for Israel (26:2; 60:21). All the other usages of*

*this word speak of the general righteous or rightness without identifying anyone in particular (3:10; 5:24; 24:16; 26:7; 29:21; 41:15; 49:24; 57:1). Should this shed light on the “righteous” of 53:11?*

*You point to the millions of readers who associate Isaiah 53 with Jesus as if they should decide the meaning of this passage. The idea of taking one passage out of its broader context and pasting it on billboards or putting it in the newspaper is not very honest. To put this in a Christian context, if someone were to plaster John 8:44 all over the streets of Berlin in 1940 and ask people, what does this passage say? Would you consider this a valid means of discovering the correct meaning of a given passage? Do you think that our study of the context is so pointless that you favor the interpretation of people who have no clue of what the previous chapters are talking about?*

*For a while now you have been accusing me of missing the forest for the trees. I have not responded to the accusation for the simple reason that this accusation is entirely subjective. Who decides what is the forest and what is the trees? But I think that now after our study of these 14 chapters I may ask you; what is the forest of these 14 chapters? In other words what is the theme of these 14 chapters? Isn't the “forest” of these chapters the idea that God will be glorified to the eyes of the nation through His salvation of Israel? Doesn't the title that you chose for these 14 chapters reflect this truth? If we have a question of the interpretation of a given passage shouldn't we choose one that flows with the theme over one that runs counter to the theme?*

M - I'm attaching this in a separate document to be sure that the contrast in fonts is clear. I have put all your comments in italics, followed by my responses. It is much easier for me to do so in this way. And whether our interaction helps anyone else in the days ahead, it has certainly enriched me thus far, for which I am grateful.

*You wrote: Let me summarize this segment of our conversation. We have been studying chapters 40 through 52 of Isaiah for almost a year and a half. At this point in time we are both trying to show how our conclusions of that study support our respective positions on the suffering servant of 53. In my most recent set of e-mails I pointed out how in these 14 chapters, the prophet used the literary tool of creating an explicit contrast between one entity and another.*

*In the course of our study I wrote: “Here is a partial list of contrasts "over and against" that the prophet presents in these chapters. 40:8 - flesh vs. the word of God; 40:30,31 - those who possess human vigor vs. those who hope to God; 41:16 - Israel's victory vs. the defeat of her opponents; 44:25,26 - the sorcerers vs. the prophets of God; 45:16,17 - the shame of the idolaters vs. the absence of shame in Israel; 45:20,21, The dead idols vs. the true God; 46:1-4 - the nations carrying their idols vs. Israel being carried by God; 49:24,25 - the strength of the human warrior vs. the power of God; 51:6 - the transient nature of the heaven and earth vs. the eternity of God's salvation.”*

*I further pointed out that the prophet does not create this type of explicit contrast between the individual servant and the nation. I then asked: "So which contrast are the 14 chapters (40-52) pointing to? Is it a contrast between two servants of the One true God? Or are these chapters pointing to a contrast between all of God's servants on the one hand and the opponents of God and His servants on the other?"*

As I made it clear in my last email and repeatedly before that, I accept these contrasts as part of the prophet's message. I also see very clear contrasts between Israel, the sinning servant, and the Messiah, the righteous servant. One is blind, the other opens the eyes of the blind; one is deaf, the other has an open ear; one is imprisoned, the other sets the prisoners free; one is marked by sin, the other is marked by righteousness; one is suffering rightly for his sin, the other suffers undeservedly at the hands of his own people; one needs to be redeemed, the other is the redeemer.

You consistently downplay the significance of these contrasts, despite me listing them with chapter and verse reference and with emphasis. What more can I say? I can only present the evidence. I can't force anyone to embrace it. And as we continue reading into chapter 53, it becomes quite clear which servant is being described: the Messiah, the righteous servant, the one who suffers violence at the hands of his own people (as in ch. 50), dying for our sins and yet vindicated by God.

Moreover, what we find in chs. 40-52 is consistent with the rest of the prophet's message from beginning to end: Israel, a sinning nation, will go into exile, but God will bring His people to repentance and restore them, and, as it is written, "the redeemer will come to Zion" (Isa 59:20).

*You wrote: You did not directly answer this question of mine in your recent e-mail. Instead you wrote: "You keep pointing to the literary genius of Isaiah and the contrasts he paints, feeling he does no such thing with the individual vs. corporate servant. I feel it's the opposite, that the distinctions between individual and corporate servant are so stark they need no literary flourish to underscore them. Really, now, how could the distinction be deeper?"*

*So are you saying that the contrast between the corporate and individual servants is a stronger contrast than the contrast that exists between God and the idols? The one contrast is so obvious that there is no need for the prophet's "literary flourish to underscore" it while the other is so weak that the prophet had to be charitable and provide a "literary flourish" so that we should notice the contrast. Is this what you are saying? Please clarify.*

I'm happy to clarify: 1) we both emphatically agree that the greatest contrast is between God and the idols; not a word I have written downplays that at all; 2) we also agree that God will be glorified as the true God through His redemption of Israel; 3) what I'm saying is you point to the difference in the colors in the outfits of the bride and groom (just to give an example), she wearing white and he wearing black; I point to the fact that the bride is female and the groom is male. So yes, I believe the contrasts I point out, as intentionally given by the prophet, are at least

as evident as those you present. But either way, even if I accepted every last contrast you presented, none of them would minimize the contrasts I point out, especially when our ultimate question is: what is the identity of the servant of Isa 53? To this moment, I do not feel you have adequately addressed the contrasts I pointed out, choosing instead to downplay or deny them.

You wrote: *In the course of our study of chapters 40-52 we noticed that the prophet uses the very same words and phrases to describe the individual servant and the nation/remnant. I wrote: "Both are called "My servant" (41:8; 42:1), both are called "Israel" (49:3), both are chosen (41:9; 42:1), both are "called by God" (41:9; 42:6), both are "formed by God from the womb" (44:2; 49:5), God will "glorify Himself" with both of them (44:23; 49:3), both give their bodies over to suffering (51:23; 50:6), both have God holding their hand (41:12; 42:6), both have rulers bowing to them (49:7, 23) and both have their enemies consumed by the moth (51:8; 50:9)" (- edited for argument's sake).*

*You put forth the argument that the prophet points to all of these similarities between the nation/remnant and the individual servant only in order to highlight the distinction between them.*

*How does this argument fit with your previous claim that "the distinctions are so stark that they need no literary flourish to underscore them"? Does the prophet use "literary flourish" to underscore the distinctions or does he not? Can you please explain your thought process?*

My intention was never to argue that "the prophet points to all of these similarities between the nation/remnant and the individual servant only in order to highlight the distinction between them" (my emphasis). If I'm correct in remembering the context of this discussion (since I cannot find an exact quote to this effect in our emails; I may have missed it), my point was this: the similarities highlight the contrasts. Allow me to explain further.

The similarities are there because they are real. The Messiah is one with his people. They are fellow-Israelites with similar purposes and destinies, both to the ultimate glory of God. Both suffer yet will be exalted. Yet one is guilty of sin and the other is not. One is in bondage and the other is not. One of them is redeemed and the other is the redeemer. And, when there is a "we-him" or "he-them" contrast in these passages, it is the contrast between the Messiah and his people. Accordingly, in a passage like 49:1-10, the individual servant, called "Israel," is sent on a mission to the tribes of Israel/Jacob, only to be rejected by his people for a time. The contrast between the two is unmistakable, not by a literary device but by the simple stating of the facts. You point to the similarities between the description of the servant and the description of the nation. I point to the undeniable contrast between the two, which is certainly part of the prophet's literary flourish.

Accordingly, if my intent was to point to the difference between the male leader of a pride of female adult lions and their cubs, I would use many similar words in describing them. This, then, would serve to underscore the distinctions when I made them.

You wrote: *Another related question: Do you not think that the amount of literary energy that Isaiah used to describe the similarities between the nation/remnant and individual is a bit overdone if his entire intention was merely to provide background for the contrast?*

Again, if I said that “his entire intention was merely to provide background for the contrast,” yes that would be overdone. Either I expressed myself poorly or you misread my intent. I hope I have clarified that here, especially is the lack of clarity was on my part.

You asked: *“how could Isaiah make the distinction clearer?” (You mean here the distinction between the individual and the nation/remnant). I have provided the answer to this question in my previous communications but it seems that my answer did not satisfy you. To remind you, if the lead up to Isaiah 53 is this contrast between the blind nation/remnant and the righteous individual then why does Isaiah describe the nation/remnant as: “pursuers of justice seekers of God,” “knowers of justice, a nation with My (God’s) teaching in their hearts,” “I (God) have set My word in your mouth and in the shade of My hand did I shelter you,” “holy city,” “bearers of the vessels of the Lord”? Why does he crowd all these expressions in the 2 chapters immediately preceding 53 where the contrast needs to be the sharpest? Do you not see how these descriptions mitigate the image of a blind nation versus a righteous individual? To answer your question directly: Isaiah could have made this distinction clearer by avoiding this cluster of descriptions which cast the nation/remnant in a positive light. Why does this answer not satisfy you?*

The answer does not satisfy me for a number of reasons. First, it fails to explain why this individual servant is needed, why he is the redeemer and the rest of the nation (including the righteous remnant) is the redeemed (among the many other contrasts). Why must he be sent to the nation? Why is their rejection of him so consequential? Why cannot the people liberate themselves and simply march out of Babylon? With your reading of the text, the individual servant could virtually disappear and the righteous remnant would get the job done on its own.

Second, in these chapters, in particular beginning with chapter 49, there is a back and forth flow, resulting in the following rhythm: 49:1-10, focusing on the work of the individual servant, then 49:11-26, focusing on the redeemed nation, likely as the fruit of the individual servant’s work. This is followed by 50:1-3, focusing on the sinning nation, in contrast with 50:4-11, focusing on the individual servant, suffering because of his people’s sins. Then, ch. 51 focuses on the righteous remnant and the release of the captives, ending with a word that addresses the sinning nation as a whole, now being delivered from judgment (I’m not debating here the interpretation of 51:16, which we have discussed in depth previously).

So, we have gone from the individual servant to the nation as a whole (the recipient of mercy after suffering for sin), then back to the individual servant suffering for the sins of his people, then to the righteous remnant, then the nation as a whole again. Chapter 52:1-6 brings a call to the nation as a whole to rise up into her spiritual destiny, having suffered in exile, with 52:7-12 continuing that call as the nation returns to Jerusalem, with the great focus being on the mercy

and greatness and activity of God, with the exhortation for the people to walk rightly. The time for salvation has come! Then, 52:13-53:12 focuses on the redeemer, the one whose sufferings have brought redemption to the nation. This is the glorious culmination and the key to the people's freedom, leading to the celebratory words of chapter 54, just as 49:1-10 led to the glorious words that followed.

Also, in all candor, having read these texts for decades, as you have, I always saw the emphasis of 52:7-12 to be on divine activity, not the righteousness of the nation. The message is, "Your God reigns!" rather than, "You are the righteous remnant!" To illustrate this, note the words in bold:

"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'

Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes.

Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem.

The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

Depart, depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing! Come out from it and be pure, you who carry the articles of the LORD'S house.

But you will not leave in haste or go in flight; for the LORD will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard."

The emphasis is unmistakably on the saving, redeeming work of the Lord, who is about to lay bare His holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and it's very hard for me to see how anyone can come to a different conclusion as to the main point of the prophet. Of course this now points to the redeemer and the savior. Of course this leads powerfully to the focus on the Messiah, the very saving arm of the Lord. What a wonderful way to lead up to this point! And on a certain level, this parallels 59:1-21, which starts with an indictment on the sinning nation, then the repentant prayer of the nation, then the announcement of the coming of the redeemer Messiah.

Third, you claimed that, "*Isaiah could have made this distinction clearer by avoiding this cluster of descriptions which cast the nation/remnant in a positive light.*" To the contrary, the fact that even this righteous remnant is the subject of redemption, of salvation, of divine intervention ultimately highlights that point. These people, too, need redeeming. And again, as I noted immediately above, the prophet's emphasis is hardly on the righteousness of the people here. It is on the saving activity of their God. I trust you can see clearly why your answer did not satisfy me in the least. In fact, to be candid, having taken a break from our discussion for some time and

then reengaging, I was struck by how central God's activity was in this chapter in comparison to the emphasis on Israel's righteousness, despite the fact that you place so much emphasis on the latter.

*You wrote: Furthermore, I pointed out that the prophet spends much literary energy creating explicit contrasts between God and idols, God's prophets and necromancers, God's servants and idol-worshippers by placing them in clear juxtaposition to one another. If the distinction between the individual and the nation/remnant was so important to convey to his audience, he could have done the same for this distinction.*

Again, I don't know how I can address this any more clearly. The prophet certainly does spend much literary energy contrasting the people as a whole from the individual servant, as I have stated over and over again. Is no energy being exerted when painting a picture of a blind people cowering in bondage with a liberator who opens their blind eyes? Is no energy being exerted when painting a picture of one being sent to the people as a whole and the people as a whole rejecting him? What would you call that? When the prophet, in detail, describes the servant's brutal suffering at the hands of his very own people, how is that not an exertion of literary energy to contrast the obedient servant from the disobedient nation? Once we understand that chapter 53 speaks of that contrast with absolute clarity, it fits into place perfectly.

We recognize the inherent similarity between the individual and the corporate servant, as they are both called God's servant. No one denies that. But as we keep reading into ch. 53, even with a wider canonical view, we notice how different the individual is from the nation. Thus, Israel, the nation is guilty of mirmah in Jeremiah, 5:27; 9:5, 9:7, with the last verse saying: mirmah dibber be-piv. Yet in Isa 53:9 we have: we-lo' mirmah be-piv. These are the kind of contrasts I have pointed out within Isa 41-52: the servant is one with his people, but he is also very different than his people, and the more we dig into ch. 53, the clearer it becomes. I'm still not clear why that answer doesn't satisfy you.

*You asked why the Targum and the Alshich did not see what I see and associated the servant of 53 with the Messiah. You seem to be missing a big piece of my argument. I have written many times (starting back in Contra Brown) that my picture of the exaltation of the nation/remnant does not exclude the individual servants. When God comes to redeem His people to the eyes of all the nations, a major part of the glory of His people includes that a glorious king from amongst His people will be greatly exalted, a king that confirms their message and their faith.*

*When the Targum and the Alshich see the glory of the Messiah in this passage they saw the glory of the nation/remnant as well. They did not see this as the glory of the Messiah to the exclusion of the nation/remnant.*

First, who said anything about seeing the Messiah's glory being to the exclusion of the nation/remnant? This is even a fundamental NT truth, taught in verses like this: "The Ruach Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. And if children, also heirs—

heirs of God and joint-heirs with Messiah—if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him” (Rom 8:16-17). Or this: “Loved ones, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal taking place among you to test you—as though something strange were happening to you. Instead, rejoice insofar as you share in the sufferings of Messiah, so that at the revelation of His glory you may also rejoice and be glad. If you are insulted for the name of Messiah, you are fortunate, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.” (1 Pet 4:13-15) Or this: “When Messiah, who is your life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him, in glory!” (Col 3:4)

I could easily multiply such references, which, of course, do not speak specifically of God and Israel. But I cite them to say that I embrace and affirm the idea that Messiah’s glorious exaltation will mean glorious exaltation for his people. His victory is our victory. The redeemer leads the repentant and redeemed in the sight of the watching world. This will surely happen when he returns.

Second, while you speak of Alsheikh and Targum as also seeing the glory of the nation in 52:13-15, they do not explicitly say that. Nor did Midrash Tanchuma, cited in Yalkut Shimoni. I don’t doubt they saw the Messiah’s glory and the people’s glory as intimately connected, and again, I have no issue with that concept. I embrace it. But with things allegedly being so clear from your viewpoint in terms of the identity of the servant, it’s striking that they came to different conclusions, with Alsheikh stating this was the normative, unanimous view in his day. Special attention is given to the Messianic king, as in the opening verses of ch. 11. He stands out uniquely, to the good of his people.

*You point to various literary parallels between the individual servant and the servant of Isaiah 53. Yet when I pointed to a literary parallel; the arm of the Lord being suddenly revealed (52:10 and 53:1), you reject my argument of using one text to illuminate the other. These two phrases and concepts are close together, they appear nowhere else in all of Isaiah (the arm of the Lord being revealed – and if you count 30:30, the concept is the same there as well – God’s arm saving Israel to the sight of the nations), yet you ignore this obvious literary parallel. Are we to use literary parallels to help us understand the text or are we not to use them? What is your method?*

Actually, the references to “the arm of the Lord” being revealed do not lessen my position at all. In fact, I could argue they enhance it. In 52:10, the declaration is made that the nations will see God’s holy arm bared, which then leads us to vv. 13-15, where those nations come to recognize Israel’s Messiah. Then, in 53:1, the question is asked who, among God’s own people, has that arm been revealed? This would be similar to 2:1-4, where Isaiah speaks of the day when the nations will come to walk in the ways of Israel’s God, moving the prophet to speak to his own people in v. 5 and say, “You come too! In the future, the nations will come to worship your God in Jerusalem. Surely you can do it now.”

So, again, I ignore nothing you present. I just read it differently and see nothing in the least bit compelling in what you point out.

*And once we are on the subject of literary parallels, did you notice those parallels that connect the nation/remnant with the suffering servant? For example, the word “lukach – was taken” is used in 52:5 in relation to the nation/remnant and again in 53:8 in reference to the suffering servant. This word or any word with the same root is not used in between these two verses. The word “lamo – unto them” is used in 48:21 in relation to the nation remnant and the next time this word is used is in 53:8 in reference to the suffering servant. The metaphor of the remnant bearing the weight of her oppressors is put forth in 51:23 and the metaphor of the suffering servant carrying the sins of his oppressors is presented throughout 53. The suffering of the servant in 53, which includes death, is reflected in the suffering of the remnant which is consistently described with terms associated with death (e.g. 51:19), while the suffering of the individual servant is never associated with death. Then you have Psalm 44, a Psalm of the righteous remnant, which reflects so much of the terminology of 53 and of the suffering of the remnant described in the previous chapters. Are these literary parallels less significant than the ones you pointed to?*

These are excellent questions, and once again, my answer is the same: the more you present your parallels, when we dig deeper, we find that they only highlight the contrasts. Let's review these one at a time. As for being “taken” (lukach), 52:5 is speaking of the nation as a whole, as I'm sure you would agree. Yet over and again in these chapters, the message is the same: you were taken into captivity because of your sins! Ch. 53 tells the exact opposite story. As for lamo in 48:21 and 53:8, while that is quite minor (just a preposition and indirect object), it's best to read them distinctly, as the NJPSV to 53:8: the servant receives a stroke for them, meaning, for the people, as I explained many years ago in vol. 3. (There's also the evidence from the DSS pointing to a possible passive reading of nwg', hence, nuga', smitten for them.)

The comparison between 51:23 and 53:12 breaks down completely. The former simply speaks of Israel being crushed under her enemies; the latter speaks of the servant redemptively carrying the sins of others. And surely God promises to punish Israel's oppressors for their harsh treatment of His servant Israel. In contrast, the sufferings of the individual servant bring healing to those who smote him. And where is there any reference in 51:23 to Israel interceding for those trampling on her? There is not the slightest of hint of it. Do you not honestly see how forced these parallels are?

As for your claim that the suffering of the individual servant is never associated with death, he is the subject of violent treatment in ch. 50, which parallels 52:14. This would fit well with 53, which simply describes his sufferings in greater detail, to the point of death. Surely, there is nothing in any of the other chapters that precludes the idea of his death.

As for Ps 44, aside from the “sheep” reference, there is no parallel language of significance and not the slightest hint that the suffering of the righteous remnant will bring healing to the nations. Quite the opposite! Rather, the remnant awaits the day when in the Lord’s name, they can gore their foes and trample their enemies (44:6). Talk about a blatant, total contrast to Isa 53, where, according to you, the kings of the nations confess how their mistreatment of Israel brought them healing, not destruction, not goring.

It really feels to me as if you are trying so hard to make your argument that you have completely lost sight of the tremendous difference between the vicarious and redemptive suffering of the servant because of and for the sake of others, vs. the deserved suffering of the nation, under which the righteous remnant also suffers. In fact, with all our years of discussion and this very lengthy interchange here the last couple of years, you have yet to provide me with a syllable demonstrating the vicarious and redemptive aspects of Israel’s suffering on behalf of the nations.

You present your arguments on Isaiah 53 as if the text says that the servant was rejected by his own people. But this is part of our debate. My interpretation of the text says nothing of the sort. You are using your own conclusion to “prove” your point.

Fair enough. I would simply argue that, understanding my argument based on the other texts in Isaiah, that argument is now reinforced in ch. 53.

*And I asked a question in my previous communication which you did not answer. I asked if you believe that the righteous remnant rejected and persecuted the servant. The righteous remnant is the audience of the prophet in 51 and 52. Are they called to behold the one that they beat and rejected? Is this your understanding of the righteous remnant?*

Sorry for missing that. First, the righteous remnant is hardly the exclusive audience of the prophet in 51 and 52. Surely, at points, the audience includes the nation as a whole. Do you deny this? (For example, does 51:17ff. only address the righteous remnant? And does not ch. 52 also call the people as a whole to step into their high calling?) So, the nation as a whole is called to look on the whom they rejected.

Second, even if the righteous remnant is largely addressed in chs. 51-52 (in other words, even if I accepted your argument), we have seen that there is a constant flow from the nation to the individual, or from the nation to the righteous remnant. Why must that flow stop here? It could just as well as be argued that we go from the sinful nation, to the righteous remnant, to the Messiah, a very logical and beautiful progression. So, there is nothing substantial to your argument.

*And then you use the words of 48:20 to illuminate the passage under discussion (53). Yet when I pointed to this very same text in our debate you wrote: “Even more oddly, Rabbi Blumenthal writes, “And when the prophet asks; ‘who has believed our report?’ [in 53:1] he is echoing the report described in 48:20 where Jacob is described as God’s servant.” Again, there is no*

*parallel between 48:20 and 53:1. The former focuses on Israel being redeemed; the latter focuses on how the servant brings us redemption. (The language is hardly parallel either.)”*

*So I ask; is 48:20 to be associated with chapter 53? Or is it not? What is your thought process?*

Let’s go back to what I wrote about this previously. I’ll quote it verbatim here, beginning with a discussion of ch. 49. I wrote: So, while the servant is identified with his people in v. 3, he is sent on a mission to Jacob-Israel. HE regathers THEM. THE INDIVIDUAL restores THE NATION. This is underscored in 49:9, where it is through the individual that the Lord says to the nation in exile "get out!", the same word spoken to the exiles in 48:20 and 52:11. (And notice that, just as the individual servant brings this word to the prisoners [asurim] in 49:9, it is the prophet, and individual servant of God, who proclaims liberty to the prisoners [asurim] in 61:1.)

I also spoke of the parallel between 48:20-22, where God calls Israel to depart from Babylon, followed by the focus on the individual servant, who will deliver them, beginning in 49:1, and the same call to depart from Babylon in 52:11-12, followed by the focus on the individual servant, who suffers on their behalf, beginning 52:13. And note the common vocabulary (referenced, in part, above), with tse’u, “get out” in 48:20 and 52:11 (see also the root y-ts-’ occurring again in 48:20 and in 52:12), and the root h-l-k occurring in 48:21 and then twice in 52:12.

To answer your question, then: 1) 53:1 does not parallel 48:20, nor is there any evidence that the report of 53:1 relates to 48:20 (with only the root sh-m-’ in common between them, plus yhwh, out of a total of 25 words); 2) the report of 53:1 has to do with the exaltation of the servant referred to in 52:13; this is not simply a reference to Israel coming out of captivity; 3) 48:20 plainly states Jacob is being redeemed; chapter 53 points to the work of the redeemer. So, we agree that 48:20 is relevant, but in totally opposite ways.

In your response to my question about 52:11 you argue that this passage says nothing that has a bearing on the understanding of chapter 53 (I paraphrase, and please correct me if I misunderstood). So do you think that the association with the sons of Kehat in Numbers 4:15-20 is entirely coincidental?

I hardly see “an association” with the sons of Kehat in 52:11. In fact, neither the phrase nos’ey keyley nor keyley yhwh occur in Numbers, while nos’ey keyley is normally used for an armorbearer, as in 1-2 Samuel. Not only so, but the passage in Numbers 4 is primarily an exhortation not to encroach on the sanctuary and die. This, again, is in stark contrast with the context of 52, as Israel is called out of Babylon on its way back home. And yes, to repeat, I see no connection between 52:11 and chapter 52. If I am somehow missing the point you are trying to make re: Numbers 4, please do elaborate.

*You rebuke me for not having provided an explicit statement in these chapters that the prophet called the remnant “righteous.” I find it interesting that you challenge me this way. Did you not*

*notice that the prophet does not use the word “righteous” as a title for the individual servant either? In fact, in the entire book of Isaiah, the word “tzaddik - righteous” as a title of an identified entity is used only for God (45:21) and for Israel (26:2; 60:21). All the other usages of this word speak of the general righteous or rightness without identifying anyone in particular (3:10; 5:24; 24:16; 26:7; 29:21; 41:15; 49:24; 57:1). Should this shed light on the “righteous” of 53:11?*

Did I rebuke you? If so, I truly apologize. I respect you far too much to “rebuke” you for having a different position on a verse than I do. As to your question: 1) the servant’s righteousness is exemplified in other ways in the chapter, with 53:6 making things abundantly clear: all of us sinned, but he didn’t; we went astray, but God visited our punishment on him; he intercedes for the transgressors in 53:12; he himself is not a transgressor; 2) 53:9 emphasizes the wrongness of his punishment, since his conduct was exemplary; 3) in 53:11 he is called (by God!) “My righteous servant,” which is quite titular, in my view; in fact, the subject and adjective are reversed from the normal order, hence “righteous one, My servant”; 4) it is this one, the righteous one, who makes the many righteous. Thus, the fair conclusion is the opposite of what you’re arguing. You wrote (and asked), “All the other usages of this word speak of the general righteous or rightness without identifying anyone in particular (3:10; 5:24; 24:16; 26:7; 29:21; 41:15; 49:24; 57:1). Should this shed light on the ‘righteous’ of 53:11?” There’s your answer. The many others are the righteous in the nation; the one is the individual servant who makes them righteous. Your argument proves my point.

*You point to the millions of readers who associate Isaiah 53 with Jesus as if they should decide the meaning of this passage. The idea of taking one passage out of its broader context and pasting it on billboards or putting it in the newspaper is not very honest. To put this in a Christian context, if someone were to plaster John 8:44 all over the streets of Berlin in 1940 and ask people, what does this passage say? Would you consider this a valid means of discovering the correct meaning of a given passage? Do you think that our study of the context is so pointless that you favor the interpretation of people who have no clue of what the previous chapters are talking about?*

Actually, this passage in many ways stands out on its own, which is why countless Jews over the years reading through the Scriptures have also been struck by the passage. It is a transcendent portion of the Word, inspired by the wisdom of God, coming to full light through Yeshua. That being said, there is quite a difference between quoting a passage of 15 verses and one single verse (John 8:44), as I’m sure you would agree. Moreover, I’m convinced that the more you dig into the surrounding context, as we have done these many months, the more its message speaks clearly. So, I encourage studying chapters 40-53; I encourage studying all of Isaiah and reading chapter 53 in that context; I encourage studying all of the Tanakh and reading it in that context. Then, being totally satisfied that my reading of the passage is accurate, I am happy to post it in full, on its own, for others to read.

*You wrote: For a while now you have been accusing me of missing the forest for the trees. I have not responded to the accusation for the simple reason that this accusation is entirely subjective. Who decides what is the forest and what is the trees? But I think that now after our study of these 14 chapters I may ask you; what is the forest of these 14 chapters? In other words what is the theme of these 14 chapters? Isn't the "forest" of these chapters the idea that God will be glorified to the eyes of the nation through His salvation of Israel? Doesn't the title that you chose for these 14 chapters reflect this truth? If we have a question of the interpretation of a given passage shouldn't we choose one that flows with the theme over one that runs counter to the theme?*

Yes, yes, yes. We should look at the great themes in these chapters, one of which is that God will be glorified through His individual servant, the Messiah, through whom Israel will fulfill its destiny, to the glory of God among the nations. Without the Messiah, Israel will fail and God will not receive the glory due to Him. Put another way, without the Messiah, there is no Messianic era, and without the Messianic era, Isa 2:1-4 or chapter 11 will never be fulfilled. Without the redeemer, redemption will never come to our people, and if we are not redeemed, God will not be exalted in the eyes of a once-hostile world.

As I said earlier, there is a deep connection between the Messiah and his people, who will share in his glory when he is revealed. Thus, in 42 and 49, the Messiah is given as both a covenant for the people (Israel) and a light for the nations. The two go hand in hand. It is the Messiah who brings justice to the nations (42:1, 3b, 4), and it is to his teaching the isles will look (42:4). He will open the blind eyes and set our captives free, and this will bring glory to God (42:7-8). Does this not jump off the page to you?

That's why in 49:3, the individual servant, called Israel, is the one through whom God is glorified (with the root p-'-r). This parallels 44:23, where God says He will be glorified (same root) through Israel. Yet chapter 49 shows us how this will take place: the Messiah will liberate his people, bringing glory to God through them. This is what leads to the beautiful description in ch. 60 – which follows 59:20, where the redeemer Messiah comes to Zion – using the same root four times (vv. 7, 9, 13, 21), and culminating with all Israel being righteous. The one made the many righteous, as in 53:11. He succeeded in his mission.

I, therefore, choose a glorious theme that runs through these chapters: God's individual servant within Israel will redeem and liberate his people, bringing great, universal glory to God. Therefore God will highly exalt him, and with him, his people. It all makes perfect sense.

**M - 52:13-15 The Lord's servant will be exalted in the sight of the nations after terrible suffering**

**M - 53:1-12 The Lord's servant suffers vicariously for his people, who think he is suffering for his own sins**

**M - 54:1-17 A call to redeemed Jerusalem to rejoice and expand; she will be destroyed no more**

**55:1-5 A call to the hungry and thirsty in Israel, based on God's covenantal promises to David, with the promise that the nations will come running to Israel.**

**55:6-12 A call to repentance with the promise that the Lord will keep His word and that the exiles will return.**