

After reading in chapter 41 that God will deliver Israel because Israel is God's Servant, and then reading the description in chapter 42 of the work that God's Servant must do, an Israelite might easily be filled with skepticism and wonder. How could Israel, in bondage, in weakness, and in suffering, bring justice to the Gentiles? How could Israel, with its little strength, go forward with such tremendous power that it would not need to raise its voice or to break the bruised reeds?

Feeling its utter inability to perform the work assigned to the Servant of the LORD, Israel might well think that the figures of the bruised reed and the dimly burning wick meant Israel itself. Israel, which should be a strong force to accomplish the work for which God called it into the world, is broken by oppression and exile and is suffering the result of its sin. Israel, which should be a bright light to show forth the truth of God's Word, is merely a smoking wick. God promises that the Servant will not cast aside or throw away this instrument.

An unthinking Israelite who reads the passage might consider that in some way this description of the Servant pictures what Israel will actually succeed in doing. But a more discerning Israelite might conclude that the Servant described in chapter 42 is a wonderful figure sent by God to do God's work and would therefore give thanks that the Servant will deal gently with Israel instead of casting it utterly aside for its failure and sin.

If the revelation about the Servant of the LORD stopped here, so that nothing was known about him beyond the fact that the term is applied to Israel in chapter 41 and that his work and character are thus described in chapter 42, reconciliation of the two would be a very difficult problem. Fortunately the subject is greatly developed by the prophet in later chapters.