

# ISAIAH

## ISAIAH 50:1-3, DISCIPLINE DESERVED

The first three verses of Isaiah 50 are a continuation of the discussion which began in Isaiah 49:14 and which is answering Zion's concern that Yahweh has abandoned and forgotten them. If so, their situation is desperate and even hopeless, but God is going to assure them that He has not abandoned nor forgotten them. Not only has He not forgotten them, He intends to deliver and restore them out of the divine temporal discipline to which they have been and will be subjected. Clearly, the problem is with Israel and not with God, but He is going to be faithful to fulfill His promises to restore them. The people claimed that God had forsaken and forgotten them (Is. 49:14), but His argument is that they had left Him, and they had forgotten Him. In Isaiah 49:15, the people were referred to using the metaphor of a wife; in Isaiah 50:1 they are referred to using the metaphor of children. These are divine promises introduced by the messenger formula "Thus says the Lord" which may also be translated "This is what the Lord says" [LEB, CSB, NET Bible, ISV]. If God says it and promises it, then it must come to pass.

Isaiah 50:1 <sup>1</sup>Thus says the LORD, "Where is the certificate [סִקָּר] of divorce [כְּרִיתוּת] By which I have sent your mother away? Or to whom of My creditors did I sell you? Behold, you were sold for your iniquities [יְזוּן], And for your transgressions [פְּשָׁע] your mother was sent away.

In the first part of this verse, God asks two questions concerning His relationship with Israel. "These are rhetorical questions designed to prove just the opposite of what was intimated in the question. The problem in the relationship between God and Israel is not related to any negative thing that God has done" [ Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 40-66*, 375].

The first question concerns the issue of divorce. Israel was identified as the wife of Yahweh in Scripture. In Ezekiel's condemnation of Jerusalem, Yahweh referred to the citizens as "My children" (Ezek. 16:21) implying that Israel was His wife who bore Him those children, and Jerusalem was called an "adulterous wife" (Ezek. 16:32).

Ezekiel 16:21 <sup>21</sup>"You slaughtered My children and offered them up to idols by causing them to pass through *the fire*.

Ezekiel 16:32 <sup>32</sup>"You adulteress wife, who takes strangers instead of her husband!

Isaiah and Jeremiah also referred to Yahweh as the husband of Israel. In Isaiah, Yahweh is referred as Israel's "husband," and in Jeremiah the betrothal of Yahweh and Israel is mentioned.

Isaiah 54:5 <sup>5</sup>"For your husband is your Maker, Whose name is the LORD of hosts; And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel, Who is called the God of all the earth.

Jeremiah 2:2-3 <sup>2</sup>“... ‘Thus says the LORD, “I remember concerning you the devotion of your youth, The love of your betrothals, Your following after Me in the wilderness, Through a land not sown. <sup>3</sup>“Israel was holy to the LORD, The first of His harvest....

The book of Hosea is an extended marriage, divorce, and restoration metaphor.

“Thus God's covenantal relation with Israel is often depicted as that of a husband for his wife. By way of contrast with Israel's polytheistic neighbors, ‘The Israelites’ monotheistic stance distinguished Judaism from the polytheism of other ancient neighbors; the idea of monogamy thus undergirds figurative prostitution accusations [cf. Ezek. 16:32]. God's covenant with Israel is comparable to a monogamous marriage; he provides for her, raises her to a special place of honor and asks her to support his plan” [Richard D. Patterson, “Metaphors of Marriage as Expressions of Divine-Human Relations” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51, no. 4 (December 2008): 691, also quoting Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman III, s.v. “Prostitute, Prostitution,” *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 677].

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 did provide guidelines for divorce between a man and woman that were also applicable to Yahweh's relationship to Israel, His wife. Essentially, it involved the issuance of a certificate of divorce followed by sending the divorced wife away from the marital home. Once that happened and she married another, she could never return; reconciliation and restoration was impossible once the divorce was finalized. This was also known as a “letter of cutting off” [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 40-66*, 375].

Deuteronomy 24:1 <sup>1</sup>“When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts *it* in her hand and sends her out from his house,

This had to be a written document. Certificate, סֵפֶר, means a missive, a document, a writing, or a book. In this context, it refers to a certificate in the form of a scroll or a document attesting to the truth of certain stated facts. Furthermore, this is an official, relatively short, written document used as proof of an agreement or a transaction.

Divorce, כְּרִיתוֹת, refers to the legal dissolution of a marriage. When these two words are used together, סֵפֶר כְּרִיתוֹת, they refer to a written certificate of divorce that serves as a deed giving notice by a husband to his wife of impending divorce thus releasing the woman to marry someone else.

What is important in terms of Isaiah 50:1, is that no certificate of divorce was ever served on Judah by Yahweh. That means the marriage contract between Yahweh and Judah is continually in force and has never been legally dissolved. Judah was never sent away by Yahweh so that she could never return. That cannot be said about Israel, the Northern Kingdom, because that nation never returned to God (Jer. 3:7) and was therefore never restored to the land, but Judah, and presumably Benjamin and Simeon, did return after the Babylonian captivity. The Northern Kingdom, as an independent nation, ceased to exist. The people themselves still exist, of course, and many of them fled to Judah to escape the idolatry there, but the nation never came back into existence as the Northern Kingdom. When the people from those tribes do return, it will be to the newly

reconstituted nation we know as Israel. Only in the Messianic Kingdom will Israel and Judah be fully reunited (Jer. 3:18; Ezek. 37:15-23). The point I am making here is that the Northern Kingdom, Israel, was served a certificate of divorce by Yahweh, but the people of the Northern Kingdom may still participate in the Messianic Kingdom based on belief.

Jeremiah 3:8 <sup>8</sup>“And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear; but she went and was a harlot also.

Marriage, when used as a figure of speech in the Bible, is a picture of spiritual faithfulness and unfaithfulness, which is often referred to as adultery as it was here in Jeremiah 3:8. Judah was also an unfaithful harlot, but no certificate of divorce was ever served on the Southern Kingdom. In verse 1, God is asking Judah, “Where is the certificate of divorce by which I have sent your mother away?” “One simple way to prove that God has not rejected the people of Judah is to point to the lack of a divorce document. Since no one could produce such document, one must conclude that God’s relationship with his people has not ended from God’s point of view” [*The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 40-66*, 375].

The point being, there was no certificate of divorce ever issued to Judah. God’s desire was always to have Israel as a nation set apart for His use as a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6). Some theologians believe the marriage between Israel and Yahweh took place at Mount Sinai and that is consistent with the connection between betrothal and following Him in the wilderness spoken of in Jeremiah 2:2, but the nation violated the marriage stipulations. “Israel was ‘married’ to Jehovah when they accepted the covenant at Sinai (Ex. 19-20), but they violated that covenant by ‘playing the harlot’ and worshiping idols. But God did not forsake His people even though they had been unfaithful to Him” [Warren Wiersbe, “Isaiah” *The Bible Exposition Commentary: Old Testament: The Prophets*, 55]. Their divine appointment never changed; it was postponed due to unfaithfulness and the subsequently imposed divine temporal discipline their rebellion called for, but the assignment remains in force, and Israel will faithfully fulfill that assignment one day. That is an eschatological event that has yet to occur.

The second question involves slavery. In this context, it has to do with the sale of one’s family into servitude for the payment of debt. This is something that is very repulsive to us, but it was a common practice in that time and place. It was certainly repulsive to them as well, but they had few options. The powerless certainly could not fight the practice.

The Law of Moses contained provisions for the care, management, and provision of slaves (Ex. 21:1-11, 20-21, 25-26, 32).

The widow who cared for Elisha faced the prospect of her sons being forced into slavery by her creditor. After the Lord’s miraculous provision of oil, she was able to get out of debt and keep her sons from being sold into slavery (2 Kings 4:1-7).

2 Kings 4:1, 7 <sup>1</sup>Now a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha, “Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the LORD; and the creditor has come to take my two children to be his slaves.” ... <sup>7</sup>Then she

came and told the man of God. And he said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debt, and you and your sons can live on the rest."

As a result of abusive lending practices arising out of a famine, the people who returned to Israel from Babylon were faced with abusive lending practices concerning mortgages on their farmland that forced them to sell their children into slavery (Neh. 5:1-5).

Nehemiah 5:5 <sup>5</sup>"Now our flesh is like the flesh of our brothers, our children like their children. Yet behold, we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters are forced into bondage *already*, and we are helpless because our fields and vineyards belong to others."

God had no creditors to whom He owed anything that He should sell His people into slavery to those He owed; God is not in debt to anyone or anything. He already owns everything. God said "...for the world is Mine, and all it contains" (Ps. 50:12). God asks them to prove the identity of the entity to whom He owed anything that would cause Him to sell them into slavery.

We need to understand that God did allow the Israelites to be subjugated to others at various times, but that was not because He owed a debt to those Gentile people and nations. Instead, it was due to the fact that He was using those nations to impose His divine temporal discipline on Israel. Those nations were really doing God's bidding, although they did not know that.

1 Samuel 12:9 <sup>9</sup>"But they forgot the LORD their God, so He sold them into the hand of Sisera, captain of the army of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines and into the hand of the king of Moab, and they fought against them.

Judges 10:7 <sup>7</sup>The anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the sons of Ammon.

God challenged the assertion that He sold them into slavery because He had forgotten them and rejected them. "Behold" is a word that says "pay attention" to what follows, and what follows is the reasoning behind God's actions concerning Israel and her people. The problems they experienced then and now were and are due to their iniquities and their transgressions. God has promised to never leave them (Jer. 31:35-37), and He never has left them. Part of never leaving them is shepherding, guiding, providentially ensuring the nation's survival, and even imposing divine temporal discipline on them according to the promises He made to them through Moses so many centuries before. The end result that is revealed here is that the Israelites have left Him, and He is trying to get them to come back! He is revealing to them the reasons why these things happen to them, although they should have known, because the Scriptures revealed it to them (Lv. 26; Dt. 28).

Jeremiah 31:35-37 <sup>35</sup>Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for light by day And the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; The LORD of hosts is His name: <sup>36</sup>"If this fixed order departs From before Me," declares the LORD, "Then the offspring of Israel also will cease From being a nation before Me

forever." <sup>37</sup>Thus says the LORD, "If the heavens above can be measured And the foundations of the earth searched out below, Then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel For all that they have done," declares the LORD.

Iniquity, *עֲוֹן*, means iniquity, wickedness, misdeed, sin. It relates to perversity or depravity hence depraved actions, crimes, and sins, i.e., wrongdoing with a focus of liability or guilt for this wrong incurred. It has the sense of an act or feeling that transgresses something forbidden or ignores something required by God's law or character whether in thought, feeling, speech, or action. It indicates "sin that is particularly evil, since it strongly conveys the idea of twisting or perverting deliberately ... [it] means sin or transgression in a conscious sense" [Baker and Carpenter, s.v. "עֲוֹן," *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament*, 814]. This word is a very accurate description of Israel's rebellious relationship with God. They knew what they were supposed to do to maintain a righteous and harmonious fellowship relationship with Him, but they refused to meet the requirements they said they would meet all the way back at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:8). This word emphasizes the deliberate rebellious mindset the people developed that led them to revolt against God. That's why the nation experienced many of the problems they experienced then and continue to experience to this day—and they are still confused to this day about why these things keep happening to them!

Transgression, *פְּשָׁע*, means transgression, crime, sin, or rebellion and revolt. In terms of rebellion or revolt, it refers to rising up in clear defiance of authority. In terms of transgression, it refers to what is contrary to a standard, human or divine, with a focus on the rebellious nature of the sin. "... this word primarily expresses a rebellion against God and His laws. Since it is possible for humanity to recognize this transgression, God's first step in dealing with it is to reveal it and call His people to accountability. He then punishes the guilty in the hope of restoring the relationship and forgiving the transgressors who repent" [Baker and Carpenter, s.v. "פְּשָׁע," *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament*, 927]. In this context, the emphasis on rebellion is probably the focus more than it is on sin since it appears alongside iniquity making sin and rebellion foundational elements impacting the nation's fellowship, or, more accurately, lack thereof, with God.

"Both of the words used are strong ones: 'your iniquities' and 'your rebellions.' Israel's actions were not merely mistakes or failures, but willful rejection of God's ways" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 318, n. 13]. God is not the guilty party in this situation as much as the Israelites might want to think that is the problem; the Israelites are the problem.

"Evidence will show, either by its presence or its lack, that it is not the fault of God that they are in captivity. Thus the issue is not whether God is at fault for their situation; it is how can the iniquities and rebellions that they have committed be atoned for so that they can return to him? [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 318].

Remember, at this point in time, the Northern Kingdom has already been conquered by Assyria, but Judah's destruction was still well over 100 years in the future. The people of Judah were not in captivity at this time. It is not out of line to suggest that the Babylonian invasion and subsequent captivity is the problem that is staring them right in the face, but

this set of circumstances is applicable to the nation's fellowship with God over a wider range of time and situations than just the Babylonian captivity.

Those who restrict this to the Babylonian captivity are not correctly interpreting the text; in fact, they are interpreting it to mean the opposite of what it is revealing to us. If that interpretation stands, then the Israelites' complaint that God had forsaken and forgotten them would have merit because it would have been God who divorced them and who sold them into captivity based on His actions and attitudes. But that is not what happened. The Israelites were being subjected to divine temporal discipline based on their sin and rebellion, which is something they were long ago promised if they failed to live up to the Mosaic Covenant's stipulations. This text is actually revealing good news to them. God had not forsaken and forgotten them. God had not divorced them or sold them into slavery.

"The real problem in the relationship between God and his people is found in God's answer in 1b. 'See, behold', it was always because of their deliberate rebellious choices and their iniquity that the people were sent away to endure times of trials. Israel's past tribulations were God's just discipline of his children; they were not intended to destroy the relationship he had with his people. God wanted to humble them and bring them back to himself" [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 40-66*, 376].

It is important to understand the difference between relationship and fellowship. God began a permanent relationship with Abraham and his descendants when the Abrahamic Covenant was established and ratified. He began a relationship with the nation in Egypt where the nation was created by means of His divine intervention in the affairs of Egypt and the Hebrew slaves. Both of those relationships are permanent, and neither one can ever be broken. Fellowship is another matter altogether. While the relationship remains forever intact, fellowship may be broken and require restoration; therefore, the issue here is one of fellowship between Israel and Yahweh, not relationship. The marriage relationship cannot be broken; it was established through an unconditional covenant.

God had been with Israel the whole time, but their predicaments were the result of their refusal to heed His commands and to remain in fellowship with Him by means of obedience to the covenant stipulations. He asks four rhetorical questions in this verse. These questions are designed to reveal Israel's guilt in the activities that have disrupted the fellowship between God and His nation.

Isaiah 50:2-3 <sup>2</sup>"Why was there no man when I came? When I called, why was there none to answer? Is My hand [יָד] so short [קָצֵר] that it cannot ransom [פְּדוּת]? Or have I no power to deliver [נַצֵּל]? Behold, I dry up the sea with My rebuke, I make the rivers a wilderness; Their fish stink for lack of water And die of thirst. <sup>3</sup>"I clothe the heavens with blackness And make sackcloth their covering."

"Verse 2 consists of four rhetorical questions followed by a set of assertions that continue into v. 3. The rhetorical questions highlight Israel's culpability in the exile. God came, but no one welcomed Him. He called for the nation to repent and to trust Him for

deliverance, but no one responded. God did not lack the capacity to rescue Israel. Instead, Israel refused to obey and trust in the Lord whose power has no equal" [Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer, "Isaiah" in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, 1083].

The first two questions relate to the fact that no one believed Him when He sent the prophets to guide and instruct them. This includes the fact that the book of Isaiah contains the revelation of the Messiah Servant who became manifest in their midst several hundred years later. Their unbelief has led to their rebellion which has then led to the divine temporal discipline they experience at various times in various ways. God addressed this issue with Isaiah at the time the prophet received his commission.

Isaiah 6:10 <sup>10</sup>"Render the hearts of this people insensitive, Their ears dull, And their eyes dim, Otherwise they might see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, Understand with their hearts, And return and be healed."

Jeremiah 7:25–26 <sup>25</sup>"Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have sent you all My servants the prophets, daily rising early and sending *them*. <sup>26</sup>"Yet they did not listen to Me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck; they did more evil than their fathers.

This was still true hundreds of years into the future when the Messiah Servant appeared in Israel to offer them their King and His Kingdom.

Isaiah 53:1 <sup>1</sup>Who has believed our message? ...

The issue was not that God did not reveal Himself to them, did not inform them, and did not interact with them on a very personal basis, because He did all those things. The issue was that they did not listen to Him and obey Him. They not only failed to respond to Him in faith and obedience, they did not believe Him in the first place. Despite all of God's interaction with them by means of signs, miracles, and wonders and the prophets through whom He spoke to them, there was no one who was willing to answer God's call to restore the nation's relationship with God. They should have been responding to Him rather than blaming Him for whatever problems they faced. Their problems were the result of their rebellion; they were not the result of any indifference regarding them, or even abandonment of them, on God's part.

God always stood ready to intervene on Israel's behalf if they would only turn to Him for deliverance. He certainly had the power to do that. The next two rhetorical questions deal with that issue. "Hand" and "arm" are idioms for power and the ability to exercise it. In this case, the reference to a "short" hand is reference to a hand lacking in sufficient power, i.e., a weak hand. Of course, the expected answer is that God is not lacking in any power to save the nation, because He does not have a short hand.

"The hand, in general, was the symbol of *power and strength*, especially the *right hand*" [Merrill F. Unger, s.v. "Hand" *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, 522].

“The ‘hand of God’ or ‘in Thy hand’ is an idiom referring to the supreme and almighty power and authority of God.... The hand of God can be upon someone in either a good or bad sense. In a good sense, it meant to bring aid, while the negative connotation meant to hinder or distress” [Chad Brand, gen. ed., s.v. “Hand” *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, rev. ed., 701].

Hand, יָד, means hand or strength. Literally, it applies to the hand of a human being, i.e., the terminal part of the arm used to perform functions of a man's will. Metaphorically it refers to strength or power. In terms of semantics, there is not a sharp distinction between hand, wrist, and forearm leading to the fact that some translations use “arm” in this verse (TANAKH, ISV). Both “arm” and “hand” are used interchangeably in the Scriptures as metaphors referring to God's strength and power to act. The concept of the hand is used in a number of ways in the Scriptures as a reference to the exercise of strength, might, and power. Conversely, the concept of weakness is also represented, as it is in this verse, through the concept of a “short” hand, or in the dropping of one's hands.

Short, קָצָר, means to be short referring to being in a state of not having sufficient or normal length, but here it is used as a metaphor referring to a lack of ability to do a task. The Septuagint used ἰσχύω to translate this Hebrew word meaning to be strong, i.e., to have strength, ability, and power, both physical and moral. In this verse, the word is negated resulting in the sense of this question being “Am I so weak that I cannot ransom you?” Being a rhetorical question, the expected answer is, “Of course, you are strong enough to ransom!”

The Messiah Servant has been the subject of this part of the book, and that is not going to change in the upcoming chapters. Subsequent revelation reveals that the power to save is certainly applicable to the appearance of the Servant. We will see in Isaiah 53 that the Servant came to not only ransom the nation from physical captivity, but to ransom Israel from spiritual captivity as well. Not only did the Servant not physically appear in Babylon, but the spiritual aspect of the Servant's work was not part of the nation's release from Babylon through King Cyrus.

God is powerful and He is capable of redeeming and delivering Israel; no one else can do that, and the nation is certainly incapable of doing it for themselves. That makes their rejection of Him all the more shocking.

Ransom, פְּדוּת, means redemption or ransom referring to the payment of an amount or a price for the release of someone or something from captivity. It has the sense of acting to deliver from trouble such as slavery or exile. This particular word is used only four times in the Old Testament. Isaiah 53 will reveal the specifics of the cost of this redemption.

Deliver, נָצַל, means saved, delivered, to be spared referring to being safe from danger and therefore attain to a more favorable circumstance. It has the sense of rescuing someone from harm or evil and, in some cases, imprisonment which is accomplished by an entity that has the ability to overcome the power of another entity.

As a nation, God has protected and defended the nation numerous times, but He has paid a ransom for the nation only once. Once was sufficient to pay the ransom in full.



There is an aspect of time in these verses. God's active participation in the life of the nation is not restricted to the physical appearance of the Servant, but that is a major consideration in these verses. "When I came" is a marker of time. When did the Servant come? Not until the First Advent. These verses are relevant throughout Israel's rebellious history and not just to the Babylonian situation, but they are particularly relevant in terms of the Servant's future interaction with the nation. "[I]t is one person who speaks; and who is that, but the servant of Jehovah, who is introduced in these prophecies with dramatic directness, as speaking in his own name? Jehovah has come to His people in His servant. We know who was the servant of Jehovah in historical fulfillment" [C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Isaiah*, vol. 7, 7:481].

There is another interesting aspect concerning the power of the Messiah Servant to physically ransom Israel. He did not exercise that power at His First Advent, because He was rejected, but He will exercise it at His Second Advent. When He came the first time, He came as the suffering Servant; when He comes the second time, He will come as the conquering King.

Luke 4:17–19 <sup>17</sup>And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, <sup>18</sup>"THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, <sup>19</sup>TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD." [quoting Isaiah 61:1-2a]

The Lord did not completely quote this Scripture from Isaiah. This quote represents His First Advent, and the remainder of Isaiah, that He did not quote, will not be fulfilled until the Second Advent. He left out the second part of Isaiah 61:2 which reads:

Isaiah 61:2b <sup>2</sup>... And the day of vengeance of our God ...

"But what will his 'arm' look like? Its appearance (just as in ch. 9) will be surprising (52:14-53:3). Instead of power to smash the enemy, it will be the power to absorb the worst that the enemy can do yet give back love" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 319]. Of course, that will change at the Second Advent when He slays His enemies with "the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse" (Rev. 19:21) and who will return as the "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev. 19:16).

One other thing to remember in all of this, is the fact of the believing remnant. They are always a small group, but they are also always present. It is not as though there are no believers, but they may be understood to be a very small group within the larger, unbelieving Israelite community. They are most likely without power in terms of Israelite politics, but they are present. "Isaiah's own message from start to finish has been an appeal for the people to take hold of God's outstretched arms, but over and over only a small remnant responded. Nor was this Isaiah's experience alone; it was that of all the prophets. Thus this verse is talking of the revealing, beckoning character of God as that character has been revealed since the beginning of time, and will be until the end of time. Jesus

Christ as the Servant is the apex of that activity, but he is not the sum total of it" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 319]. In other words, the Servant's interaction with Israel has been going on from the call of Abraham. His physical appearances may be the premier events of His ministry, but He has always been extremely active in His interactions with the nation.

God uses the example of His power to control nature's manifestations to mankind to highlight His ability to save Israel from whatever self-imposed calamity befalls them. Creation and the Exodus are the two events He showcases to show that He is the master over the creation.

Miracles are things that occur outside the boundaries of the natural realm that is governed by certain physical principles such as gravity, inertia, etc. Miracles also serve a purpose and that purpose is to authenticate the God's message and God's messenger bringing the message. That is exactly what is happening here. Using the examples of the miraculous events of the Exodus that transcend the physical boundaries God set within His creation, God is authenticating His identity as the Creator God who operates outside the bounds of His creation. As such, He can do any and all things. He is authenticating Himself as the only One who can act on Israel's behalf as Israel's Redeemer. The God who can do these things is the God who can save all Israel. The point being that rejecting Him, the Creator God of not only all that exists but of Israel in particular, is inexcusable.

The Exodus is not specifically mentioned, but the references to these miracles seems unlikely to be referring to such occurrences in general, although that is possible. Events such as drying up the Red Sea are such important milestones in the history of the nation that it seems unlikely to be a reference to God's power to accomplish that feat at will which is certainly within His power to do. The same thought is applicable to making the fish stink for lack of water when He makes the rivers into a desert or a wasteland. The reference to blackening the heavens seems to be a reference to another plague visited upon Egypt that was supernaturally caused to occur.

"Since the source of these statements is unclear, one is only able to conclude that God is powerful enough to act in almost apocalyptic ways to demonstrate his power over everything in this world. No direct application to the prophet's audience is formulated, but it is very apparent that if God has this kind of power he is able to rescue his people from any situation, defeat any of their oppressors, and have compassion on his people. Does this sound like a God who has forsaken his people or one who is unable to rescue them?" [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 40-66*, 376-377].