

## The Greatest Truths of All Time

### Session 1

September 7, 2025

### The Greatest Name

**The Point:** There is only one God and only His name deserves glory.

**Session Passage:** Isaiah 42:1-12

**Isaiah the prophet.** The eighth-century BC prophet Isaiah wrote the book. His name means “Yahweh saves.” Isaiah ministered in the Southern Kingdom of Judah although he also prophesied concerning the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Isaiah’s wife is called “the prophetess” (Isa. 8:3). Isaiah had at least two sons. Their symbolic names conveyed warnings to God’s people: (1) Shear-jashub means “a remnant will return.” (2) Maher-shalal-hash-baz means “the spoil speeds, the prey hastens.” Themes that Isaiah emphasized include the Lord’s sovereignty and His holiness.

**The Setting.** Isaiah’s prophecies include the coming of the Messiah both as a righteous King (see chaps. 9; 11; 32) and as a Suffering Servant. Beginning with chapter 40, Isaiah prophesied concerning the comfort and hope the Lord would give His people (40:1-2). Chapter 42 contains the first of what biblical scholars have identified as Servant Songs or poems. These songs consist of Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; and 52:13–53:12. The poems reach their pinnacle in chapters 52–53 where the Servant suffers not for any wrong He has done but rather for the sins of others. The songs find their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus.

### Isaiah 42:1-4

**Connection to the Point.** God has empowered His chosen Servant to bring His justice to the earth.

**My servant/my chosen** (v. 1). The term servant designates the Messiah in key passages in the latter part of the book of Isaiah (see “The Setting”). These Servant Songs are fulfilled in Jesus. Many Bible scholars identify Isaiah 61:1-3 as a fifth Servant Song although the term servant does not appear in the passage. In any case these verses describe the role of the Messiah. Jesus read this passage as His text for His initial sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:16-21). After reading these words from the scroll of Isaiah, Jesus announced their fulfillment in Him. The word translated chosen often has theological overtones and primarily expresses a choosing that has ultimate and eternal significance. It is used of God’s choice of Israel and can also be rendered “elected.”

God brings glory to His name through His chosen Servant. As His crucifixion approached, Jesus prayed for Himself, for His disciples, and for all believers (John 17:1-26). In John 17:1-5 Jesus prayed that God would glorify Him so that He might glorify God. Jesus did indeed glorify God by completing the work that God had given Him to do. Involved in that work is the provision of eternal life.

**Bring justice to the nations** (v. 1). The Servant’s mission involved *bringing justice* not only to Israel or Judah but also to the *nations*. The Hebrew word translated *nations* can also be rendered “*Gentiles*.” In the Old Testament the term increasingly comes to designate non-believing peoples who were not in covenant relationship with the Lord. The Hebrew word rendered *justice* can convey a broad range of meanings. It refers to all functions of governing, not only judicial processes but also executive and legislative roles. True *justice* is primarily an attribute of God. It finds its source in God Himself. God has

empowered His *chosen* Servant to bring His *justice* to the earth. True *justice* is found in Scripture. Jesus the Servant brought *justice* to first-century society by demonstrating compassion to all classes of people among the Jews, Gentiles, and Samaritans. Those who were victims of injustice received benefits, while their exploiters experienced punishment (Isa. 61:8). Perfect justice will prevail only when Christ returns and establishes His kingdom at the end of this age (see Matt. 6:10).

**A bruised reed/smoldering wick** (v. 3). These terms suggest items that appear weak and useless. The common reed grew in shallow water or wet salty sand. The plumed flower that formed its head may have constituted the staff handed to Jesus as a form of mockery (Matt. 27:29). Lamp wicks were typically made of twisted flax. Lights symbolically depicted life in abundance in biblical times in contrast to death and darkness. A *smoldering wick* refers to one burning with smoke but without flame. Both *reed* and *wick* images suggest that although the Servant possessed royal power, He would not use it in a damaging way. The expressions depict the gentle nature of the Servant's ministry.

**Coasts and islands will wait for his instruction** (v. 4). The same Hebrew term designates both *coasts* and *islands*. The phrase refers to distant nations and thus functions as a way of referring to all nations. The entire world will one day heed the Lord's *instruction*. The Hebrew term rendered *instruction* is often written in English as Torah. The word basically means "teaching" or "law." Motivated by His love, the Lord revealed to human beings basic insight into how to have a relationship with Him and with one another. In the Scriptures, the term encompasses both the moral law and the ceremonial law. The word's meaning later expanded to include the first five books of the Old Testament, an inspired record that includes history, regulations, and exhortations.

### **Isaiah 42:5-8**

**Connection to the Point.** God is the sovereign Creator who alone deserves glory. He has purposed to work through His Servant to bring us into a covenant relationship.

**Who created the heavens** (v. 5). The descriptive words in verse 5 emphasize the power and sovereignty behind God's words recorded in verse 6. The expression *who created the heavens* calls to mind the first words of Scripture (Gen. 1:1). God displayed His power at creation by simply speaking the universe and its contents into being. The Hebrew word translated *created* (*bara'*) is the same verb that appears in Genesis 1:1, 21, and 27. The basic form of the word is limited to divine activity. Only God is identified as the subject who creates. Because the verb never occurs with the mention of any material used in creating and because the main emphasis falls on the newness of what has been created, the clear implication is that of creation out of nothing.

**Called you for a righteous purpose** (v. 6). This phrase describes the role God called His Servant to fulfill. The Hebrew phrase more literally means "called you in righteousness." The term rendered *righteousness* basically designates "conformity to a moral or ethical standard." In the Old Testament that standard is God's nature and will. A righteous individual is one who attempts to preserve the well-being of the community by fulfilling God's commands in relating to others. The righteous person is one who serves

God (Mal. 3:18). Ultimately this Servant Song was fulfilled in Jesus. His righteous purpose was to bring salvation to all by restoring a right relationship between God and sinful humanity.

**I will appoint you** (v. 6). God appointed His Servant for a specific purpose. The Hebrew verb conveys three broad areas of meaning: (1) to give, (2) to put, set, appoint, and (3) to make, constitute. The same verb occurs in Isaiah 42:1 where the Lord stated that He had “put” His Spirit on the Servant. The Lord’s putting His Spirit on the Servant enabled the Servant to perform His divinely appointed task. In verse 1 the task is described as bringing justice to the nations. In verse 6 the responsibility is identified as being “a covenant for the people and a light to the nations.”

**A covenant for the people and a light to the nations** (v. 6). A *covenant* is a treaty, agreement, or contract between nations or individuals. The parties may be equal in power or one party may be superior. The action of making a covenant in the Old Testament sometimes employs the idiom “to cut a covenant.” The statement “the Lord made a covenant with Abram” (Gen. 15:18) more literally reads “the Lord cut a covenant with Abram.” The events in Genesis 15:7-21 provide background for the expression “to cut a covenant.” In the covenant-making process the Lord required Abram to bring certain animals, cut them in half, and place the halves opposite one another. The parties making the covenant then walked between the pieces, thereby likely signifying what would happen to them if they failed to uphold their part of the agreement. A smoking fire pot and a flaming torch representing the Lord passed between the divided animals in Genesis 15, thus signifying that the Lord’s covenant with Abram was an unconditional covenant that He would fulfill.

The Lord’s covenant with Abram or Abraham included not only the promise to make his descendants a great nation (Israel) but also the pledge to bless all peoples through the patriarch (Gen. 12:1-3). The Lord’s promise to make the Servant “*a covenant for the people and a light to the nations*” informs us that the Servant cannot be simply identified with Israel because the Servant has a mission to Israel. The expression *a covenant for the people* suggests an orderly relationship between the Lord and people already possessing His revelation (the Israelites or Jews). The phrase *a light to the nations* implies the widening of the scope of revelation to include all nations or Gentiles. Thus this passage apparently depicts the Servant’s role in establishing a new covenant, a promise fulfilled in Christ (Jer. 31:31-34; Matt. 26:27-28).

**To open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon** (v. 7). These words call to mind Jesus’s reading from the scroll of Isaiah in the Nazareth synagogue at the beginning of His ministry (Luke 4:16-21). Although He read Isaiah 61:1-2 from the Septuagint, a major Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, the passage included the Servant’s role of opening blind eyes and setting prisoners free. While Jesus did heal people of physical blindness, His primary mission was spiritual. Freeing prisoners suggests conquest of captors and thus kingship. Opening blind eyes involves spiritual enlightenment. Thus the Servant’s mission included giving both liberty and light.

**I am the LORD. That is my name** (v. 8). The title *Lord*, typically printed in both large and small capital letters, distinguishes the Hebrew word often written in English as *Yahweh* from another Hebrew word that means “Lord.” God revealed the significance of this title to Moses at the burning bush when He

responded to Moses's request to know God's name with the expression, "I AM WHO I AM" (Ex. 3:14). The designation is derived from the Hebrew verb "to be" and denotes God as the self-existent, covenant God who acts independently of outside influences.

### **Isaiah 42:9-12**

**Connection to the Point.** Because of what God has done, we are to give Him glory and praise.

**Past events . . . new events** (v. 9). The expression *past events* could refer to previous prophecies in Isaiah that had already been fulfilled. It might also designate all the Old Testament prophecies that had already come to pass, including the exodus from Egypt (Gen. 48:21; 50:24). The *new events* the Lord announced probably encompass the deliverance from exile as well as the predicted ministry of the Servant.

**New song** (v. 10). The *new song* is a song of praise occasioned by the Servant's work. The reference to a new song implies the existence of an old one. Verse 13 suggests that the old or previous song may have been the one the Israelites sang when the Lord delivered them from Egyptian bondage (Ex. 15:1-18 and compare 15:3 with Isa. 42:13). Thus the Servant's work of which Isaiah prophesied may include a new exodus and a great victory over God's enemies. It will include deliverance from the bondage of sin.

**Praise** (vv. 8,10,12). The new song expresses praise to the Lord. The term rendered *praise* derives from a Hebrew verb with which we are familiar although we may not realize it. It comes from a verb written in English as *halal*. That verb forms the basis of the expression *Hallelujah*, meaning "praise Yahweh" or "praise the Lord." The Hebrew word conveys sincere and deep gratitude in extolling the superior qualities and great acts of God. Isaiah 42:10 refers to the messianic age in which God's people would sing a new song (Rev. 5:9-10). Because of what God has done for us in Christ, we sing a new song of praise and glory to Him.

**The end of the earth** (v. 10). Because of the new events that God was bringing about through His Servant, the prophet called people to praise Him from *the ends of the earth*. This expression denotes the extremity. Sometimes it is a poetic reference to distant places. The phrase also is a significant recurring theological theme in the Old Testament. It appears in Deuteronomy 28:49 to identify the source of Israel's judgment when the people forsake the Lord. In Psalm 61:2 David voiced the expression in describing the extent of his suffering. In Psalm 65:5 he declared God as "the hope of all the ends of the earth." And in Isaiah 49:6 the Lord used the expression in announcing that His Servant would provide salvation for both Jews and Gentiles.

**Kedar . . . Sela** (v. 11). The designation *Kedar* means "mighty," "black," or "swarthy." The man named Kedar is first mentioned in Genesis 25:13. He was a son of Ishmael and grandson of Abraham. Apparently a tribe developed from this individual. The Kedarites inhabited the area south of biblical Palestine and east of Egypt. These nomadic peoples raised sheep, goats, and camels, which they sold to Tyre (Ezek. 27:21). The Kedarites also were well-known for their warriors, especially their archers (Isa. 21:17).

The place name *Sela* means “rock” (KJV). The term *rock* is also translated as “Sela” (CSB, NIV). It was a major fortified city located in Edom. Amaziah, king of Judah in the eighth-century BC, captured Sela and renamed it Joktheel (2 Kings 14:7). Sela has traditionally been identified with Petra, Edom’s capital, or with the nearby umm-Bayyara in the Wadi Musa. More recently scholars have placed it at es-Sela, five miles southwest of Tafileh and two and one-half miles northwest of Bozrah. The two sites of Kedar and Sela together represent isolated desert and mountainous areas.

**Glory** (vv. 8,12). The term translated *glory* comes from a Hebrew verb meaning “to be heavy.” It designates the weighty importance and the shining majesty that accompany the Lord’s presence. The term also can refer to the very reality of His presence. Verse 8 reveals that the Lord will share His glory with no one else. There is none with the reputation for greatness that God alone deserves not only because He is Creator and King but also because He is Savior and Deliverer. Nowhere is the reality and splendor of His presence and character seen more than in the person of His Son (Isa. 4:2; John 1:14).

**The greatest name.** In the ancient world a *name* expressed essence, character, and nature. Knowing someone’s name implied a relationship between the two individuals. For God to reveal His name indicates His desire to enter into personal relationship with human beings, whom He created in His image. God’s name deserves glory because of the relationship He offers. By believing in the name or nature and power of Jesus as the Son of God, we experience salvation. There is no other name or person to whom we can turn for salvation (Acts 4:12). Thus God has given Jesus a name above every name. And one day every tongue will confess that Jesus’s name is the greatest name (Phil. 2:9-11).