

Book of Isaiah



Chapter 41

Theme: God overrules individuals; God invites Israel to trust Him; God overturns idols

**Michael Fronczak
564 Schaeffer Dr.
Coldwater, Michigan 49036**

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Chapter 41

This chapter continues the thought of chapter 40 in setting forth the greatness of God. The emphasis here is not upon God as Creator so much as upon His dealings with man. The greatness of God is revealed in both creation and human history.

There are also some things in this chapter that are rather enigmatic. It seems that there is a bare profile of prophecy in the background, but the theme is that God will protect and lead His children through the world which is fraught with pitfalls and dangers. Therefore, comfort is here for the child of God.¹

This challenge from the Lord to the nations stemmed from His special relationship with Israel. He would sovereignly protect Israel but the other nations would not enjoy that protection.²

41:1–42:17 In this prophecy the Lord puts the nations on a trial to show them that He alone is God because only He can predict the future. The trial consists of two cycles (41:1–20; 41:21–42:9), followed by a praise hymn (42:10–17). In each trial cycle, there are three elements: (1) a call of the nations to trial (41:1, 21–24); (2) a prediction of the coming of Cyrus (41:2–7, 25–29); (3) a celebration of the victories of the Servant (41:8–20; 42:1–9).³

There is an emphasis on the uniqueness of the Lord compared to other gods in this section, a theme that Isaiah introduced earlier (ch. 40 especially). The prophet particularly stressed Yahweh's ability to control history in this connection. He did this to assure Israel that God loved her and had a future for her beyond the Exile, specifically to serve Him by demonstrating to the world that He is sovereign over history. These emphases become increasingly apparent as the section unfolds. Calls to praise form bridges from one section to the next (42:10-13; cf. 44:23; 45:8).⁴

¹ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

² The Bible Knowledge Commentary:

³ The nelson Study Bible

⁴ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

¹Keep silence before me, O islands; and let the people renew *their* strength: let them come near; then let them speak: let us come near together to judgment.

God here spoke to the islands (coastal lands of Palestine, Egypt, Asia Minor, etc.) to be silent and come near to judgment, for Cyrus was coming from the east to overthrow them.⁵

The whole world of individuals is moving toward judgment.

The showdown is coming between light and darkness, between God and mammon, between faith and unbelief. God is now calling upon individuals to turn to Him and accept the salvation He has to offer. God is propitious. He is not demanding anything of you. He is simply asking you to accept the grace and salvation that He has to offer.⁶

The "king from the east" is Cyrus II of Persia, who would be king within a century and a half (he is also mentioned by name in 44:28). He conquered Babylon in 539 B.C. and was responsible for the decree releasing the exiled Jews to return to Jerusalem. God could even use a pagan ruler to protect and care for Israel, because God is in control of all world empires and politics.⁷

Keep silence: Divine calls for silence usually anticipate judgment (Zeph. 1:7). Coastlands includes Lydia in Asia Minor, which was conquered by Cyrus (51:5). Renew their strength contrasts strength that results from faith with unassisted human strength.⁸

The Lord confronted the nations and the islands (the remotest places where humans live) face to face in judgment. Of the 15 occurrences of "islands" in the Old Testament, 14 are in Isaiah. Together the islands and nations suggest all the world's peoples. In suggesting that they meet together, God was not asking that they negotiate; instead He was asking that they come together and realize the truth of His words.⁹

Keep silence before Me, O coastlands: The Hebrew word translated coastlands is also translated islands or isles in other passages, such as Isaiah 11:11 and 40:15. It is also translated with broader words like territory in passages like Isaiah 20:6. The idea is probably best expressed as "distant lands." Here, God is calling to all nations - even the "distant lands" - to keep silence before Him. Why? Because they are coming to God's courtroom: Let us come near together for judgment.

Bultema on coastlands: "a poetic name for the idolatrous distant nations." Motyer: "Isaiah uses the word [coastlands] as shorthand for the far reaches of the earth."

And let the people renew their strength! Isaiah 40:31 has just promised that those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength. But here, God advises the people - those in the distant lands, who do not know Him - to renew their strength as they come into His courtroom. If you are going to contest with God, you had better be prepared!

The problem is that while those who wait upon the LORD have the LORD's limitless strength, those from distant lands have no god of strength to help them. "The repetition of the

⁵ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible:

⁶ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

⁷ Life Application Study Bible.

⁸ The nelson Study Bible

⁹ The Bible Knowledge Commentary:

phrase 'renew their strength' (cf. 40:31) may well be ironic. Perhaps as the exiles renew their strength in the true God, so the nations are ironically exhorted to do the same - but in their man-made deities!" (Grogan)

Let them come near, then let them speak: God will allow the idol worshippers of all the world come before Him and justify their idolatry. They will have the opportunity to speak, though they must enter His courtroom in silence, out of respect of His majesty.

There are many different reasons for silence. There is the silence of shame, the silence of attention, the silence of submission. Any one of these is good reason to initially be silent in the LORD's presence.¹⁰

²Who raised up the righteous *man* from the east, called him to his foot, gave the nations before him, and made *him* rule over kings? he gave *them* as the dust to his sword, and as driven stubble to his bow.

Cyrus predicted. Note that Cyrus came from a region northeast. Thus, sometimes he is spoken of as coming from the east (v. 2) and sometimes from the north (v.25).¹¹

[righteous man from the east] Used of Cyrus, righteous refers to doing right in carrying out God's will in punishing Israel's enemies and allowing them to return to their own land. Cyrus, who came from the East, is named in Isa. 44:28 -- Isa. 45:6 and referred to in Isa. 41:2,25; 45:1; 46:11; 2Chr. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-8; 3:7; 4:3,5; 5:13-17; 6:3,14; Dan. 1:21; 6:28; 10:1.¹²

"Righteous man from the east" is a strong expression. There are those who feel that this is a veiled suggestion of Cyrus. Cyrus will be mentioned by name shortly, but this is not the place. I believe that the word actually refers to a quality -- righteousness -- rather than to a person. It could be a reference to the rule of righteousness which Christ will establish at His return to earth. We find this thought developed in this section.¹³

2-4 God now told the nations that because He controls history, they in the final analysis really have no control over their future. For example, He stirred up a leader from the east (cf. v. 25 about God stirring up one from the north). This one from the east who would serve God's purpose was called in righteousness. This did not mean that warrior was righteous, but that he would carry out God's righteous plan on the earth. He would fulfill God's will even if he was unaware of it. God would hand nations over to him and subdue kings before him, that is, the conqueror could not be stopped in his conquests (turning enemies to dust and chaff). Who was this conqueror? Because he would follow a path his feet had not traveled before, he could not be an Assyrian king (Assyria had invaded the west on several occasions). Since Isaiah was writing in advance for people who would be enslaved in Babylon, he must have been referring to that great Persian ruler Cyrus, whom he mentioned by name in 44:28 and 45:1. The

¹⁰ https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Isa/Isa-41.cfm

¹¹ Chuck Missler, Notes on Isaiah, khouse.org

¹² Dake's Annotated Reference Bible:

¹³ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

Lord had planned this and would carry it out (41:4). In emphatic terms the Lord affirmed that He is the One who brings events to pass.¹⁴

One from the east refers to Cyrus, king of Persia (559–530 b.c.; see 46:11). Since God had made a covenant between Himself and Abraham (v. 8), He delivered the exiles in righteousness, a synonym for salvation in Isaiah (45:8; 46:13; 51:6; 56:1). God, who has authority over the nations, gave the nations to Cyrus as a ransom for Israel (43:3).¹⁵

The righteous man from the east: This refers to Cyrus who is also called righteous in 45:13. As in all other places in Isaiah, important people and events are introduced obscurely at first and then more details are subsequently added with additional mentions of the same person and events. It is this continuity of description of the two messiahs, the fall of Babylon, the return of the remnant, and the setting up of the messianic Zion which unifies this section and gives it continuity. The section at first appears but is not fragmentary. Cyrus, called the LORD's anointed in 45:1, is introduced here for the first time. He and his exploits will be mentioned again and again. The fall of Babylon to Cyrus is the great event which is here placed in contrast in this section to the setting up of Zion under the Messiah and which is behind all of the pleadings to prove God by history and forsake idolatry. Who else could tell the future things, about the fall of Babylon to Cyrus, his release of the captives of Israel as well as the Nazarene Savior who later will call the gentiles into a reestablished Zion, except the one true God.. The introduction of the future fall of Babylon is in 43:14-21. The next obscure mention of Cyrus is in 41:25. The next and stunning mention of Cyrus is in 44:26 - 45:4,5; 45:13, 14; 46:11; 48:14,15; Seeing all these references together may help.¹⁶

Calling him in righteousness. Like the servant of the Lord in 42:6, Cyrus was chosen to carry out God's righteous purposes.

Subdues kings. One of these kings was Croesus, king of Lydia in Asia Minor.

2-4 Who raised up the one from the east? God questions the idolaters from the distant lands, and asks them who authored this important event in human history - who raised up the one from the east?

Commentators warmly debate the identity of this one from the east. Most believe him to be either Abraham, the patriarch of the Jewish people and the father of the faithful, or Cyrus, the king who joined the Medes and the Persians into a fighting force which conquered Babylon - which, prophetically, is the broad time context Isaiah speaks to.

Wolf speaks for those who believe Cyrus is spoken of: "Born east of Babylon in what is now Iran, Cyrus would move through country after country, conquering every king in his path. Shortly after 550 B.C., Cyrus was able to unify the Medes and the Persians and to defeat the powerful kingdom of Lydia in Asia Minor. Then he turned south to conquer Babylon (539 B.C.)." Bultema adds regarding Cyrus: "Both secular and sacred documents present him as righteous and good, and he can be called righteous or, as the text actually has it, justice,

¹⁴ The Bible Knowledge Commentary:

¹⁵ The nelson Study Bible

¹⁶ <http://www.moellerhaus.com/40-45.htm>

especially since he carried out the righteous acts of vengeance on Babylon and that of the deliverance of Israel."

Clarke speaks for those who believe Abraham is the one from the east: "Some explain it of Abraham, others of Cyrus. I rather think that the former is meant; because of the character of the righteous man, or righteousness, agrees better with Abraham than with Cyrus."

Who is it? It's a tough call, and either answer can be correct according to the context. On balance, it is best to see the one from the east as Abraham, because of the word of the LORD later in the chapter, in Isaiah 41:22: Let them bring forth and show us what will happen; let them show the former things, what they were. God appeals to idols and their worshippers, and asks them to tell both the future and the past. Since Cyrus is mentioned in Isaiah 41:25 (I have raised up one from the north ... from the rising of the sun), he is the figure that shows God's knowledge of the future. Abraham is the figure that shows God's knowledge of the past. Past and future - with the present sandwiched in-between - all belong to the LORD our God.

Who ... Who ... Who: As God invites those in distant lands to come and reason with Him, He shows them His greatness over all creation, and over all history. They must ask themselves, "Who is in control of the course of human events?" Who has performed and done it, calling the generations from the beginning?

This is always a relevant question. Is there a point, a direction to human history? Is it just a random, meaningless combination of undirected events? Is it a cycle, fated to repeat itself endlessly? Or, is there a God in heaven who directs human events, always moving to a final resolution and fulfillment? Our answer to this question influences almost everything in our lives.

³He pursued them, *and* passed safely; *even* by the way *that* he had not gone with his feet.

⁴Who hath wrought and done *it*, calling the generations from the beginning? I the LORD, the first, and with the last; I *am* he.

"first and the last" - Rev 1:8, 17; 22:13.

[the first, and with the last] Jehovah is the 'Aleph-Tau and the Alpha-Omega of the Bible -- the first and the last; from eternity to eternity, the Self-existent One, and the Eternal (Isa. 44:6; 48:12; Rev. 1:11,17; 2:8; 22:13).

[he] The church is called a man (Eph. 2:15; 4:13) and referred to by the pronoun he (2Th. 2:7, notes). The pronouns him (Dt. 32:10; Jer. 31:10; Mic. 3:8), his (Ps. 25:22), her and she are all used of Israel as a nation or a unit of people (Rev. 12:1-5,14). If singular pronouns are thus used of the church and Israel, each of which comprises multitudes, the same can also be true of the Trinity.¹⁷

Each generation gets caught up in its own problems, but God's plan embraces all generations. When your great-grandparents lived, God worked personally in the lives of his people. When your great-grandchildren live, God will still work personally in the lives of his people. He is the only one who sees 100 years from now as clearly as 100 years ago. When you are concerned

¹⁷ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible:

about the future, talk with God, who knows the generations of the future as well as he knows the generations of the past.¹⁸

I, the LORD, am the first; and with the last I am He: Here, the LORD God of Israel declares that He has performed and done it, calling the generations from the beginning. He lifts up and puts down kings and nations. He is the first and He is the last; He is the "bookend" both before and after the saga of human history, starting the story, ending the story, and keeping the whole story together.

If God is both the first and the last, then He also has authority over everything in-between. This means that there absolutely is a plan of God for human history, and He directs the path of human events toward His designed fulfillment. Our lives are not given over to blind fate, to random meaninglessness, or to endless cycles with no resolution. Instead, the LORD God who is the first and the last directs all of human history and even our individual lives.

Jesus takes the same title of the First and the Last in Revelation 1:17 and 22:13. If the LORD is the first and the last according to Isaiah 41:4, and if Jesus is the First and the Last according to Revelation 1:17 and 22:13, since there cannot be two firsts or two lasts, Jesus must be the LORD God!¹⁹

The Lord has always been the one who has called forth such conquerors to carry out His will in the world. The military history of the world is simply the outworking of God's sovereign plan. As A. T. Pierson used to say, "History is His story." God is the ultimate strategist who controls history. It has always been so, and it will always be so, because no other god preceded Yahweh, neither will any other succeed Him. He has no genealogy (cf. John 8:58; 18:5; Rev. 1:8, 17; 22:13).²⁰

⁵The isles saw *it*, and feared; the ends of the earth were afraid, drew near, and came.

[The isles saw it, and feared] Verses 5-7 picture the isles (maritime countries) and the far off parts of Egypt, Palestine and Asia Minor fearing Cyrus and uniting against him. They encouraged each other not to be afraid of Cyrus' invasion (Isa. 41:6), and they made new images for the temples to obtain the favor of their gods whom they trusted to deliver them from Cyrus (Isa. 41:7). Sinners often become religious to avert judgment, but trust in idols is futile.²¹

"The ends of the earth" is an expression used 28 times (Isa. 41:5,9; 26:15; 40:28; 43:6; 45:22; 52:10; Dt. 33:17; 1Sam. 2:10; Job 28:24; 37:3; 38:13; Ps. 48:10; 59:13; 65:5; 67:7; 72:8; 98:3; 135:7; Prov. 17:24; 30:4; Jer. 10:13; 16:19; 25:31; 51:16; Mic. 5:4; Zech. 9:10; Acts 13:47).

"The ends of the world" is used in Ps. 22:27; Rom. 10:18; 1Cor. 10:11. Used 8 times, "the end of the world" refers to mean the inhabited earth (Isa. 62:11; Ps. 19:4), the end of the age (Mt. 13:39-40,49; 24:3; 28:20), and the end of the ages or junction of the ages (Heb. 9:26). The term "end of the earth" in the sense of the literal earth coming to an end is not found in Scripture, for the earth is eternal (Ps. 104:5; Eccl. 1:4). As used here in Isa. 41:5 it simply means the countries

¹⁸ Life Application Study Bible.

¹⁹ https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Isa/Isa-41.cfm

²⁰ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

²¹ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible:

threatened by Cyrus and not literally all parts of the earth, for many lands in those days never heard of Cyrus, just as many today have never heard of Jesus Christ. The same expression in Isa. 41:9 refers simply to Chaldea.²²

The pronoun it refers to the conquests of Cyrus (vv. 2, 3).

5-7. Mockingly Isaiah noted that alliances between the nations would not help them withstand the advance of Cyrus and the Persians as they carried out God's will. In fear the nations everywhere would be driven to help and encourage each... other (v. 6). (On islands see comments on v. 1; and on the ends of the earth see comments on 5:26.) Rather than turn to the true God, these idolatrous people would get more and more involved in idol-worship (41:7). The idols, which Isaiah had already mocked (see comments on 40:19-20), would not help them offset Cyrus' conquests.²³

⁶They helped every one his neighbour; and every one said to his brother, Be of good courage.

Since God is coming to right the wrongs and relieve injustices, individuals who are right with God can be of good courage. There is hope for the little man who trusts God. He doesn't have to worry about the future.²⁴

⁷So the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith, and he that smootheth with the hammer him that smote the anvil, saying, It is ready for the soldering; and he fastened it with nails, that it should not be moved.

In an emergency some folk hammered themselves out a god, that is, a temporary idol.

So the craftsman encouraged the goldsmith: What did they do with the fear they felt after their encounter with God? They let the fear drive them away from the true God. Instead of surrendering to this God of glory and majesty and power, they turned from God, and made for themselves gods, idols of gold!

Isaiah pours on the irony. It took a lot of work to make a good god. It took skilled workers (the craftsman ... the goldsmith ... he who smooths with the hammer ... him who strikes the anvil). It took organization and teamwork ("It is ready for the soldering"). If you don't do it right, your god might not be able to stand up! (That it might not totter.)²⁵

"The purpose of all this detail is not clear, but the prophet may want to heighten the ironic effect by showing what a complex and arduous task idol making is. Thus he is implicitly asking his hearers if simply trusting the sovereign Lord is not a great deal easier. Another purpose may be

²² Dake's Annotated Reference Bible:

²³ The Bible Knowledge Commentary:

²⁴ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

²⁵ https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Isa/Isa-41.cfm

to point out how dependent the gods are. They cannot be created by just one person; it takes a whole host of people to keep them going."²⁶

⁸But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend.

Abraham - one of his titles is 'friend of God' (Gen 18, part of friendship was a disclosure of the future, also Gen 22) Cf. 2 Chr 20:7; Isa 2:23.

One prophet called "beloved": Daniel. (New Testament: John called "beloved"; Cf. Jn 15). Both wrote apocalyptic books.²⁷

[But thou, Israel ...] After addressing the Gentiles' futility of trusting in idols to defend them from Cyrus (Isa. 41:5-7), God addressed Israel, calling attention to their background, their call of God, His choice of them to be His servant, and His many promises of blessing to them (Isa. 41:8-20).

[art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend] Sevenfold call to Israel:

1. You are My servant (Isa. 41:8-9).
2. I have chosen Jacob (Isa. 41:8).
3. You are the seed of Abraham, My friend.
4. I have taken you from the ends of the earth (Isa. 41:9; note a, above).
5. I have called you from the chief men of the earth.
6. I have declared you to be My servant, My chosen people.
7. I have not cast you away.

[friend] Hebrew: 'ahab (HSN-<H157>), to have affection for. Translated "friend" (Isa. 41:8; Prov. 18:24; 27:6; Zech. 13:6); "love" (Lev. 19:18,34); "lover" (1Ki. 5:1; Ps. 88:18); and several other ways. Abraham was known as the friend or lover of God (Isa. 41:8; 2Chr. 20:7; Jas. 2:23). What greater honor could be given any man? The descendants of God's friends were often blessed as well. Israel is blessed for Abraham's sake (Isa. 41:8; Gen. 26:24), and David's sake (Isa. 37:35; 1Ki. 11:12-13,32-34; 15:4; 2Ki. 8:19; 19:34; 20:6). God has blessed others for the sake of His other friends (Gen. 39:5; Ex. 18:8; 2Sam. 5:12; Mt. 24:22; 2Cor. 4:5,11; 12:10; Eph. 4:32).²⁸

God now turns to Israel to comfort them in their distress. God says, "Instead of hammering out an idol, why not turn to Me?" After all, He knows they are sinners. He still calls them Jacob, and Jacob was the crooked one. It is God who made him Israel, a prince with God. And God wants to do that for the sons of Jacob.

Abraham is called the "friend" of God, and God wants to bring these people into a right relationship with Himself.²⁹

²⁶ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

²⁷ Chuck Missler, Notes on Isaiah, khouse.org

²⁸ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible:

²⁹ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

Servant refers to one highly honored by the Lord. There is no higher position to which a person can aspire. The term was bestowed on the person chosen to administer and advance God's kingdom (Ex. 14:31; 2 Sam. 3:18). In chs. 40–55, the title of servant is bestowed implicitly on Cyrus (45:1–4) and explicitly on God's prophets (44:26), the nation of Israel (44:21; 45:4) and particularly on the Lord Jesus Christ (42:1–4; 52:13). Abraham: The Lord calls him friend (see Gen. 18:17, 18; 2 Chr. 20:7; James 2:23).³⁰

8-10. God sovereignly chose Israel (also called Jacob and Abraham's descendants) to be His servants (cf. 43:10) and to do His will. Unfortunately she often failed to be a faithful servant so God had to punish her. Taking the nation from the ends of the earth (see comments on 5:26) probably refers to God's regathering Israel after the Babylonian Captivity, rather than His leading Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees. Israel's being chosen by God is a frequent theme in the second major division of the Book of Isaiah (41:8-9; 42:1; 43:10, 20; 44:1-2; 45:4; 49:7; 65:9, 15, 22). Even though Israel was exiled because of sin and unbelief, she still was not rejected by God. Since the covenant the Lord made with Abraham was unconditional (Gen. 15), his descendants need not fear. The Lord remains their God (cf. Isa. 43:3) so He will continue to be with them (cf. 43:5) and strengthen (cf. 40:31), help (cf. 41:13-14), and uphold them.³¹

8-10 God chose Israel through Abraham because he wanted to, not because the people deserved it (Deuteronomy 7:6-8; 9:4-6). Although God chose the Israelites to represent him to the world, they failed to do this; so God punished them and sent them into captivity. Now all believers are God's chosen people, and all share the responsibility of representing him to the world. One day God will bring all his faithful people together. We need not fear because (1) God is with us ("I am with you"), (2) God has established a relationship with us ("I am your God"), and (3) God gives us assurance of his strength, help, and victory over sin and death. Are you aware of all the ways God has helped you?³²

⁹Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the chief men thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away.

God has NOT cast off Israel (Rom 8, 9, 10).

¹⁰Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

God's righteousness, not ours.

³⁰ The Nelson Study Bible

³¹ The Bible Knowledge Commentary:

³² Life Application Study Bible.

Eight Promises and Commands to Israel³³

1. Fear not, for I am with you (Isa. 41:18,13,14).
2. Be not dismayed, for I am your God.
3. I will strengthen you.
4. I will help you.
5. I will uphold you with the right hand of My righteousness.
6. I will hold your right hand (Isa. 41:13).
7. I will hear them -- the poor and needy (Isa. 41:17).
8. I will not forsake them.

This verse has been a real pillar of strength and a source of comfort to God's children of every age.

As he moves on, he says that if they oppose God it will be the very height of folly because they are moving toward the day when all these adjustments will have to be made.³⁴

The Lord's command to the Israelites to fear not contrasts with the fright of pagans in vv. 5, 6. God had bared His right hand at the first Exodus in order to destroy the power of Pharaoh (Ex. 15:6): the phrase indicates His sovereignty and strength over all who oppose Him (40:10).³⁵

Fear not, for I am with you: This is both a command and a promise. Israel is commanded to fear not. Fear, worry, and anxiety are often sin. When the God who rules over the nations as described in Isaiah 41:2-4, the God who chose us and loves us as described in Isaiah 41:8-9, when that God tell us fear not, we must take it seriously! But there is also a promise. We fear not, because the LORD has told us, I am with you. What more do we need? If God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31)

How much more prone to fear and discouragement we are when we are alone. But we are never alone, because God has declared, fear not, for I am with you.³⁶

¹¹Behold, all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish.

Gen 12:3. Unconditional covenant with Abraham.

11-16. In contrast with God's choosing and helping Israel, He will not protect nations who oppose her. They will perish (vv. 11-12). With the Lord's help Israel will defeat the nations as if she were threshing and winnowing grain (vv. 15-16). This, however, will not be by her own power because she is a worm and is little (v. 14). Israel should not be afraid (cf. v. 10; 43:5; 44:2, 8; 54:4). God is her Redeemer, a title Isaiah used of God 13 times (41:14; 43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 59:20; 60:16; 63:16), 5 of them with the title the Holy One of Israel

³³ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible:

³⁴ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

³⁵ The Nelson Study Bible

³⁶ https://www.blueletterbible.org/commentaries/guzik_david/

(41:14; 43:14; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5). This help from God will cause Israel to rejoice in Him (41:16).³⁷

¹²Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, *even* them that contended with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought.

¹³For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee.

Here is God's gracious overture to trust Him -- what comfort! God wants to take us into His confidence. He wants to enable us to walk with Him, have fellowship with Him, and know Him. My, what mankind is missing today! Some people can even get so involved in church work that they miss all this.³⁸

¹⁴Fear not, thou worm Jacob, *and* ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the LORD, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.

“The Lord and thy redeemer” sounds like more than one.

“Redeemer”: goel—kinsman redeemer (see Ruth, Rev 5). Two roles: levirate marriage and restores land, other role is the goel, the avenger of blood! First coming, redemption. Second coming, avenger of blood.³⁹

Eight things God is to men:⁴⁰

1. Their God (Isa. 41:10,13)
2. Strength (Isa. 41:10)
3. Helper (Isa. 41:10,13-14)
4. Upholder (Isa. 41:10)
5. Redeemer (Isa. 41:14)
6. The Holy One and Power (Isa. 41:14-16)
7. Supplier of needs (Isa. 41:17)
8. Gardener (Isa. 41:19)

You may think you are something, but you are a "worm" -- a nobody. It is only God who can make any of us important. Only God can make man a somebody. Little man frets and struts across the stage of life, as Shakespeare put it. He huffs and puffs like the old wolf around the little pigs' houses. Where is man going, and exactly what is he getting out of what he is doing? Some people see the futility of it all and take their own lives. Where else can they turn? The only place man can turn is to God. Oh, what man is missing! God's fellowship, His salvation, His goodness, His grace -- all of these are yours if you but turn to Him.

³⁷ The Bible Knowledge Commentary:

³⁸ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

³⁹ Chuck Missler, Notes on Isaiah, khouse.org

⁴⁰ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible:

Then He talks to them about the material blessings of the Millennium -- they will be there. And God would like to talk to you and me about the spiritual blessings which are available to us now and those we will have in eternity.⁴¹

Exiled Israel seemed as feeble and despicable as a worm (Job 25:6; Ps. 22:6). Redeemer refers to the family protector of distressed relatives, who would avenge murders (Num. 35:19) and redeem indentured slaves (Lev. 25:47–49). A redeemer could also purchase land for a relative or marry a widow whose first husband was childless (see the role of Boaz in the Book of Ruth). When the Lord is called the Redeemer the title highlights His zeal to defend, protect, and purchase back His people (49:26).⁴²

The Lord employed a second picture to comfort the Israelites. He would enable what was essentially weak to become strong (cf. 2 Cor. 12:10). Israel was like a worm in that she was insignificant, despised, weak, and vulnerable. However, she had a next of kin (Heb. *go'el*, redeemer)—the Holy One of Israel—who would take on her care and provide all that she, His family, needed—and more. This is the third time in this passage that Yahweh explicitly said He would help His people (cf. vv. 10, 13).⁴³

¹⁵Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat *them* small, and shalt make the hills as chaff.

The Lord would transform the helpless worm, a tiny thresher of the soil, into a powerful threshing sledge—by giving her His power. Threshing sledges were heavy wooden platforms fitted with sharp stones and pieces of metal underneath. Farmers dragged them over straw to cut it up in preparation for winnowing. The sledge that Yahweh would make of Israel, however, would be so good that it could chop down mountains and hills, not just straw. The modern equivalent would be giant earth-moving equipment.⁴⁴

¹⁶Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in the LORD, *and* shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel.

¹⁷When the poor and needy seek water, and *there is none, and* their tongue faileth for thirst, I the LORD will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them.

17-20. In God's care for Israel He will see that extremely thirsty persons will encounter rivers... springs, and pools of water in the desert (vv. 17-18; cf. 35:1-2, 6-7; 43:19-20; 44:3-4). In many places in the Middle East water is scarce, so this figure is most apt. God will also cause trees (seven kinds are mentioned) to grow in the desert whereas normally most of those trees grow only in fertile areas. In the Millennium the climate of the land of Israel will be changed so that

⁴¹ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

⁴² The Nelson Study Bible

⁴³ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

⁴⁴ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

the land will be well-watered and fertile. People will know that God, the Holy One of Israel (cf. 41:14, 16), has done this.⁴⁵

18I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.

19I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together:

Cedar, acacia, myrtle, oil - all indigenous to Judea. Other trees show up after Babylonian captivity. Thus, the use of these trees helps demonstrate the timing of the book being prior to the Babylonian captivity.⁴⁶

20That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the LORD hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it.

This verse gives the reasons for the promises, commands, and predictions of Isa. 41:10-19: that they might:

1. See God's eternal love for them.
2. Know that it is God who provides, protects, and supplies the riches of life here and hereafter.
3. Consider their ways and be grateful for the providence of God.
4. Understand as a whole that God has planned and created all things for the highest good of all (cp. Rev. 4:11).⁴⁷

21Produce your cause, saith the LORD; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob.

God challenges evil spirits! (vv. 21-24). Prophets of God are right 100 % of the time. God describes things to come to prove that He is God.⁴⁸

This is a challenge to idolatry. Now who is an idolater? Have you ever considered the possibility that you may be? Anything you put between your soul and God is your idol -- regardless of what it is. It is anything to which you are giving your time and your energy; it could actually be your religion. Anything that you allow to take the place of a personal relationship with God is your idol.

⁴⁵ The Bible Knowledge Commentary

⁴⁶ Chuck Missler, Notes on Isaiah, khouse.org

⁴⁷ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible:

⁴⁸ Chuck Missler, Notes on Isaiah, khouse.org

What can idols do? Can they explain the origin of the universe? Are you satisfied today with the explanations that evolution has given? Of course there have been several explanations, but God says, "Bring them all out."⁴⁹

Sevenfold Challenge of God

1. Produce your cause -- set forth your case so that men may know you are gods and capable of helping them (Isa. 41:21).
2. Bring forth your strong reasons -- prove that you are divine and living, and not lifeless material.
3. Let them bring forth their proofs -- predict one thing that is yet to come (Isa. 41:22).
4. Let them show even former things that they have predicted which came to pass, so that men may know they are capable of predicting the future things to the end.
5. Show the things that are yet to come, that we may know that you are gods (Isa. 41:23).
6. Do good or evil -- perform any kind of act that we may all be dismayed together.
7. If your work is nothing then you are nothing (Isa. 41:24).

This entire passage seems to express the idea that God bases His claim to Divinity upon the fact of His power to foretell, plan, and bring about His plan from the beginning to the end. At this time He gave an example of His power to foretell by stating that He would raise up Cyrus, a man He named over 200 years before He fulfilled the prophecy. Israel had not even been taken to Babylon yet when God predicted Cyrus would free them from captivity and command the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple (Isa. 41:25; Isa. 44:28 -- Isa. 45:4; Ezra 1).⁵⁰

(Isa 41:21) God calls idols and their worshippers to trial.

"Present your case," says the LORD. "Bring forth your strong reasons," says the King of Jacob.

- a. Present your case: God is fair. He will not condemn idols, the false gods of the nations, and those who worship them, without a fair trial. So He invites these idols and their worshippers to come and present your case. "Let's hear your side of the story." Bring forth your strong reasons. "Let's hear your best arguments."
- b. Says the King of Jacob: This is the only place in the Bible where God uses this title. King of Jacob is used only here, but the title king of Israel is used 138 times in the Bible, mostly of men, but of the Lord GOD in Isaiah 44:6 and Zephaniah 3:15, and of Jesus in John 1:49 and 12:13.⁵¹

21-24 Israel was surrounded by many nations whose gods supposedly had special powers, such as helping crops grow and providing victory in war. These gods, however, failed to deliver. A god with limited or no power at all is not really a god. When we are tempted to put our trust in something other than the living God—money, career, family, or even military power—we should stop and ask some serious questions. Will it come through? Will it unfailingly provide what I am looking for? God delivers. When he makes a promise, he keeps it. He is completely trustworthy.⁵²

⁴⁹ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

⁵⁰ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible:

⁵¹ https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Isa/Isa-41.cfm

⁵² Life Application Study Bible.

21-24. With the information the nations have received in verses 1-20, they are now challenged to use their idols to recall past events and predict the future. By doing something the nations might then cause others to fear. But their inability to tell the future shows that their gods are ineffective and worthless. Someone who would choose such a nation would be detestable.⁵³

21-23 On one hand, this passage suggests an infallible criterion by which man can test the claims of religious impostors. On the other hand, it calls attention to an unanswerable argument for the truthfulness of God's Word. Furthermore, this demonstrates the fact that God alone knows the future, declaring both the beginning and end of His creation, confirming that Scripture is His inspired revelation to mankind.⁵⁴

²²Let them bring *them* forth, and show us what shall happen: let them show the former things, what they *be*, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare us things for to come.

Man doesn't know his beginning or the origin of the universe. He simply doesn't know -- I don't care what theory he is following. I predict that the evolutionist will be embarrassed in the next fifty years or so because evolution will be just one of the many theories which will be left along the highway of time with the other wreckage. There have been many explanations of the origin of the universe which were called scientific at one time but are exploded today. Evolution will be exploded in time. Then man will turn to another theory. Man doesn't know his origin, and he doesn't know the future. Man is a very ignorant creature. Have you ever stopped to think how little you know?

There are many Ph.D.'s who don't know very much either. I heard of a man working on his Ph.D. who was studying the eye of the mosquito. Now there is an unusual subject! One day as he was doing his research, it suddenly occurred to him that he did not want to spend the rest of his life looking a mosquito in the eye. And I can understand that -- I wouldn't mind taking one or two looks, but after that I think it would become monotonous! This man came to the conclusion that he should do something else. He found the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior, was granted his degree, and he decided to dedicate his life to something worthwhile. Today he is a minister of the gospel.

It is quite interesting that man can be very well-educated, even have his doctor's degree, and still know very little. He knows nothing about his origin or where he is going, and no idol can give him that information. So it is well to turn to the One who does have the answers. This doesn't mean He will give you all the answers, but it is nice to know Him who knows the answers. I have never learned much about science, but I did learn a motto that was posted in the science building of the college I attended, which read: "Next to knowing is knowing where to find out." Now there are many things I don't know, but I know the One who knows everything. If there is something I need to know, God will tell me.⁵⁵

⁵³ The Bible Knowledge Commentary:

⁵⁴ The Believers Study Bible

⁵⁵ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

The former things probably refers to prophecies of judgment by earlier prophets, and some prophecies spoken by Isaiah in chs. 1–35 (see also 42:9, 21–25; 43:9, 10; 46:8, 9; 48:3). Latter end of them may also be translated “their glorious future.” The phrase things to come may refer to the mighty acts God would do through Cyrus. Ultimately, things to come refers to the gathering of God’s people and the establishment of Christ’s kingdom on earth. The point is that idols cannot tell the past or the future, but the Lord God can.⁵⁶

God invited idols to present your case in Isaiah 41:21. But none is presented; the next words are God's questioning of the idols. Why don't the idols present their case and defend themselves? Because they are dumb statues that can't speak! So the questioning moves on, and God examines the defendants.

Let them bring forth and show us what will happen: If these idols really are gods, then they certainly know the future and the past. Then let them speak up. Show us what will happen. Then, let them show the former things, what they were. Gods know these things, don't they? Do it that we may know that you are gods.

Yes, do good or do evil: It is as if God stands in a courtroom, questioning a thousands idols of different sizes and designs, and finally cries out, "Do something! Do good or do evil! Can't you do anything?"

But they can not do anything. So, the accusation is made based upon the evidence: Indeed you are nothing, and your work is nothing; he who chooses you is an abomination.

Today, idolatry is still an abomination. Though few bow down to statues, many still fashion a god of their own opinion, and decide that is the god they will respect. Even many churchgoers do this today. "The spiritual conflict experienced today is exactly of the same nature and of the same character as you find depicted here. The issue is still unsettled in the minds of men, though it is settled eternally in the mind of God. The world is still making every effort to put the best possible show upon its worship of the creature rather than the Creator. Its worship is more the patronizing of the shell of religion than bowing in submission before an empty cross, and occupied throne, and the King of kings in glory." (Redpath)⁵⁷

²³Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye *are* gods: yea, do good, or do evil, that we may be dismayed, and behold *it* together.

²⁴Behold, ye *are* of nothing, and your work of nought: an abomination is *he* that chooseth you.

Man cannot explain his past, and he does not know his future apart from God. That makes all of man's effort apart from God a very vain thing, an empty thing. During my first pastorate a man came to me and said, "If you can't give me a good reason for living, I am going to solve all of my problems by taking my life." What do you do with a man like that? He had an old, rusty .45; it was a big old gun. I said to him, "Now look, if you can show me you can solve your problems by taking your life, I will get you a better gun than the one you have so you can do it right. Candidly, if you are not going to turn to Christ -- if you are not going to bring Him into your life

⁵⁶ The Nelson Study Bible

⁵⁷ https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-lsa/lisa-41.cfm

-- you might as well use your gun. I see no reason why you shouldn't." Well, he was really taken aback. He expected me to give him arguments on reasons for living. That fellow put down his gun and left. Although he didn't turn to Christ at that time, he did later on. And he found that Christ had the answer to his problems.⁵⁸

²⁵I have raised up *one* from the north, and he shall come: from the rising of the sun shall he call upon my name: and he shall come upon princes as *upon* mortar, and as the potter treadeth clay.

Note that Cyrus came from a region northeast. Thus, sometimes he is spoken of as coming from the east (v. 2) and sometimes from the north (v.25).
"My name" - Ezra 1:3. "He is (the) God."⁵⁹

Three predictions -- fulfilled:

1. I will raise up one who will come from the north.
2. From the rising of the sun shall he call upon My name.
3. He will come upon princes as upon mortar and as a potter treads the clay.

[raised up one] Cyrus was the one God raised up to fulfill His Word concerning the punishment of Babylon and the freeing of Israel (Isa. 41:1-3,25; Isa. 44:28 -- Isa. 45:4,13; Ezra 1; Jer. 25; Dan. 1:21; 6:28).

[from the north] "From the north" seems to contradict "from the east" (Isa. 41:2), but there is no discrepancy. Cyrus was from the east of Palestine where Isaiah made the prediction. This verse says he will come upon the princes from the north; he did this in conquering Babylon. He first conquered all of Asia Minor and then moved south against Babylon. He was born in Persia, east of Palestine, but his conquest of Babylon was from the north.

[call upon my name] This no doubt means that Cyrus would acknowledge Jehovah as the true God and the source of his success (Ezra 1:2).⁶⁰

25-29. In contrast with idols (vv. 21-24), which are man-made and unable to help people, God can and does tell the future. God predicted that a strong leader would come from the north and from the east (the rising sun) who would easily destroy many nations. This was Cyrus (see comments on v. 2). He was from the east (Persia was east of Israel) and also from the north as his conquests extended to the north of Israel. Only God could predict such a thing; no one else could even hint at it. Only He could tell Zion and Jerusalem that a messenger would give them good news about the Jews being released by Cyrus (cf. 40:1-5, 9-11). This proves that the Lord is the true God and all idols are false gods amounting to nothing. Those who believe in such idols have an empty faith; those images offer no more help than the wind and they confuse people's minds.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

⁵⁹ Chuck Missler, Notes on Isaiah, khouse.org

⁶⁰ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible:

⁶¹ The Bible Knowledge Commentary:

from the north ... From the rising of the sun: The conquest of Media by Cyrus (550 b.c.) made him master of the territories north of Babylon. Cyrus, who did not personally know God (45:4), nevertheless called on God's name when he released the exiles (2 Chr. 36:23; Ezra 1:1-4).⁶²

²⁶Who hath declared from the beginning, that we may know? and beforetime, that we may say, *He is righteous? yea, there is none that showeth, yea, there is none that declareth, yea, there is none that heareth your words.*

[declared from the beginning] God's plans span from eternity to eternity; His predictions were made "from the beginning," long before they came to pass. This is what He challenged idols to do to prove their divinity (Isa. 41:21-24). Only a supernatural Being could do such things, as over 6,000 verses of prophecy confirm.

c [that we may know] Seven Purposes of Prediction

1. That the end might be known from the beginning (Isa. 41:26; Acts 15:18; Eph. 1:10; 2:7; 3:10-11).
2. That these things might be known beforehand (Isa. 41:26; 42:8-9).
3. That men might know God is righteous (Isa. 41:26).
4. That Jehovah might be recognized as the only true and living God -- the only one capable of making the future known.
5. That such predictions might be known as coming from God, and not idols or their prophets (Isa. 41:27).
6. That man might see how absolutely powerless he is to reveal the future (Isa. 41:28).
7. That idols may be proved less capable of foretelling the future than man (Isa. 41:29).⁶³

²⁷The first shall say to Zion, Behold, behold them: and I will give to Jerusalem one that bringeth good tidings.

This translation is unclear as to who "the first" refers to. The Septuagint reads, "I will first give notice to Zion"; Moffatt, "'Twas I who first sent word of it to Zion"; Berkeley, "I first said to Zion"; Rotherham, "He who is First can say to Zion"; Fenton, "I first gave to Zion good news." The idea is that God was the first to declare these things to Zion and Jerusalem; revelation did not come from idols. True prophecy came first and only through Jehovah.

[behold them] The time for the fulfillment of certain predictions is here.

[one that bringeth good tidings] The bearer of the good tidings from God, referring primarily to Isaiah himself, and secondarily to other prophets who brought such tidings (Acts 3:21; Heb. 1:1-2).⁶⁴

⁶² The Nelson Study Bible

⁶³ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible:

⁶⁴ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible:

²⁸For I beheld, and *there was* no man; even among them, and *there was* no counsellor, that, when I asked of them, could answer a word.

[For I beheld, and there was no man] God is the only one who can foretell future events. No man or idol can make such things known.⁶⁵

²⁹Behold, they *are* all vanity; their works *are* nothing: their molten images *are* wind and confusion.

Four facts about idols:

1. They are all vanity.
2. Their works are nothing.
3. They are wind.
4. They are confusion.⁶⁶

"Confusion" is the end result of idolatry or any philosophy which is anti-God or atheistic. It does not have the answers to the problems of life. These man-made systems cannot satisfy the human heart. The answer is found in the One who brings good tidings of great joy.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible:

⁶⁶ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible:

⁶⁷ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.