

Isaiah Lesson 41

Isaiah Chapter 41

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Introduction: We studied chapter 40 last week. We found the prophecy of the ministry of John the Baptist being foretold. Then the prophet moves on to a magnificent comparison, contrasting the greatness of God and the weakness of man. The chapter concluded with a promise to Israel.

This chapter is a direct summons by Jehovah to the nations of the earth to know that He is God. He confronts their idolatry. He also comforts Israel in confirming that He is their God and that He will overthrow their enemies. The idols of the nations will come to nothing.

I. Fear Not, for I Am with You

Isa 41:1 Keep 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 speaks directly through the prophet to the nations of the earth, summoning them to judgment. The word translated as islands (ya 'iy) also refers to regions and by extension to the nations of the earth. These nations are ordered to be silent and appear before Almighty God.

Isa 41:2 Who 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.

Isa 41:3 He pursued them, and passed safely; even by the way that he had not gone with his feet.

Isa 41:4 Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he.

Isa 41:5 The isles saw it, and feared; the ends of the earth were afraid, drew near, and came.

The righteous man from the east mentioned was Abraham and note is made how that God gave Him the land now called Israel. It was God who called Abraham.

It was God who enabled Abraham to prevail against the nations. It was Jehovah God who accomplished this. Notice how God describes Himself as “the LORD, the first, and with the last.” Here, as well as in Isaiah 44:6, Jehovah defines Himself as the first and last. Notice how Jesus Christ describes Himself in Revelation 1:11,17; 2:2:8, 19; 22:13.

Rev 1:11 Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

Rev 22:13 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

Implied is not only the Deity of Christ but also that Jehovah of the Old Testament is one and the same with Jesus of the New Testament. There is an exclusiveness to being the first and the last. Only one can hold claim to this distinction. The conclusion is that Jesus Christ is Jehovah God. God describes the reaction of the world upon being confronted with this truth. Though some nations through the ages have feared God, most have not.

The ultimate fulfillment of this is prophetic, no doubt pointing to when Jesus Christ returns in power and glory in the Millennium. In that day all nations will come before Him in fear.

Isa 41:6 They helped every one his neighbour; and every one said to his brother, Be of good courage.

Isa 41:7 So 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.

The nations all around the world have degraded themselves with the abomination of idolatry. Idolatry has infested virtually every native and indigenous people throughout the ages. The so-called ‘Christian influence’ of the Roman Catholic Church has been a spreader of idolatry with its endless statues of the ‘saints.’ Craftsmen around the world throughout the ages have fashioned their innumerable idols often with such expensive materials as gold and silver.

Isa 41:8 But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend.

Isa 41:9 Thou 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 had a message of encouragement for Israel. “But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend.” The unique relationship between God and Israel is defined. Israel was the servant of God. That is a privilege unique to no other nation.

Israel was chosen by God to Himself. I don't wish to ruffle up anybody's pin feathers here but here it goes. The doctrine of election is in full view here. It is noteworthy in this instance that election is more corporate than personal. God chose a people in Jacob. Jews to this day are party to that covenant by birth.

The church is party to a new covenant (i.e., the New Testament) with God by a spiritual birth. Israel (and by extension the church) is descended from Abraham, the friend of God. The greater thought here is one of encouragement to Israel. Though the pagan nations faced judgment by God, Israel remained God's chosen people. This is one of three places in the Bible where Abraham is called the friend of God. See also II Chronicles 20:7 and James 2:23.

Jas 2:23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.

God reminds Israel of the covenant He made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

- (1) God chose a people in Jacob.
- (2) He called Abraham from the Ur of the Chaldees.
- (3) He called Israel out of Egypt.

Joseph certainly had been one of the chief men of Egypt. Israel has been given the distinction and privilege of being His people and His servant. God chose them and He once again reiterated His promise that He would not cast them away. Paul reminds us that God has never cast away His people, though they have turned their backs on Him. See Romans 11:1.

Rom 11:1 I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

There undoubtedly is also a foreview of the church here as God speaks of calling His people from the ends of the earth. Though the church is not Israel and vice versa, nevertheless, the church and Israel are parallel in that they both are the people of God. The security of the believer and the assurance of salvation is in view here.

Isa 41:10 Fear 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.

One of the great promises of the Bible is at hand as a result of God's covenant promise to His people. It pertains not only to Israel but to the church as well.

"Fear 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."

On at least seven different occasions throughout the Bible, God has promised His people in varying form to "fear thou not; for I am with thee." See Genesis 26:24, Deuteronomy 31:6, 8; I Chronicles 28:20; Isaiah 43:5; and Jeremiah 46:28.

The encouraging truth remains to this day to be not dismayed. The reason? He is our God! He has promised (1) to strengthen us; (2) to help us; (3) and to uphold us with His right hand. Notice also how His right hand—the hand most frequently used—is characterized by righteousness. It defines the character and integrity of God! Because He is our God and is righteous and because He has promised to keep us; we need not be afraid or dismayed.

Isa 41:11 Behold, 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.

Isa 41:12 Thou 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.

Isa 41:13 For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee.

God assures Israel of ultimate victory. Because He was their strength and help, no enemy would prevail against them. The prophecy here clearly is eschatological. The northern kingdom had already been deported. Assyria had just recently threatened Judah. Babylon would conquer a century later, beginning a succession of gentile domination that would last to the past century.

The ultimate fulfillment of this promise clearly will not take place until the Millennium. Though there may have been limited fulfillment of this with the destruction of the Assyrian army, the greater fulfillment of this promise will be after the Tribulation. On that day, all nations will come against Jerusalem to seek to destroy it. Yet, with the return of Jesus Christ, those armies will be destroyed and Israel will be exalted.

As Israel was obedient to their God in ages past, God did indeed help them. Moreover, He has done so through the centuries. However, the definitive fulfillment of this promise will be during the Tribulation when God intervenes to

protect and deliver Israel. Notwithstanding the direct application of this promise to Israel, it remains true in a broader sense for the church to this day. God has promised to help, strengthen, and encourage His people as they are obedient to Him.

II. Israel Was Not to Fear

Isa 41:14 Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the LORD, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.

Isa 41:15 Behold, 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.

Isa 41:16 Thou 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.

Once again, God encourages Israel to fear not. God intended to humble Israel lest they exalt themselves above measure. Compared to His infinite power, Israel was like unto a worm. Nevertheless, God encouraged them to fear not. He again promised to help them. Moreover, God refers to Himself as their Redeemer and again as the Holy One of Israel. Indeed, our Redeemer is holy! Implicit in redemption are mercy, grace, and love. Yet, at the same time, God reminded us that He is holy. The two great defining attributes of God's character are in view—holiness and love. Though Israel has been as a worm of the nations over the centuries, obscure, persecuted, and trodden down; the day is coming when they will be the capital nation of the world.

Whereas in times past, the gentile nations had thrashed them; in the Day of the Lord, Israel will be the superpower ruling over the nations. From the day of Isaiah to the present, there never has been a time when Israel has overwhelmed other nations militarily or otherwise.

Though they certainly have won battles and wars against their neighbors over the centuries, the greater fulfillment of this prophecy is yet future. When Christ returns, God may also allow Israel to subjugate those nations which have harbored such hatred and bitterness toward them. That very well may be the Islamic nations of the present world. There is a portion of the Government of the United States that is doing everything they can to lead this nation away from Israel.

Isa 41:17 When 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.

Isa 41:18 I 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.

Isa 41:19 I 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:

Isa 41:20 That 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.

Through the centuries, God has always provided for His people, especially those who are obedient and dedicated to Him. The ultimate fulfillment of this again however likely is in the Millennium. Nevertheless, the promise remains true as a principle to this day for the people of God. He will not forsake His people. Some have thought that the cultivation of the land by the modern State of Israel has been a fulfillment of this prophecy.

Indeed, the Jews have caused portions of the land to flourish. However, the final fulfillment again will be millennial. Israel at this hour and through the preceding millennia, has been a semi-arid land, requiring effort to be fruitful. However, the day is coming when water will abound in the land. That has yet to be fulfilled.

In times past, as well as in this time, the southern regions of Israel were considered wilderness. Portions of the Judean wilderness to this day are as desolate as any desert on the earth. Yet, the day is coming when even those barren areas will be forested with the most desirable of trees. The word translated as desert (hbre arabah) refers to the southern deserts of Israel. Though the Jews have certainly planted forests in Israel in the twentieth century, that has not been done in the Arabah region. That remains desert to this hour.

Moreover, the text makes it clear that it is Jehovah God who will plant the forests in this region. That again is yet to happen. Come that day, there will be no question that it is Jehovah God, the Holy One of Israel who has so blessed their land. He will open the windows of heaven with a blessing upon His people on that day.

III. The Futility of Idols

Isa 41:21 Produce your cause, saith the LORD; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob.

Isa 41:22 Let them bring them forth, and shew us what shall happen: let them shew 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.

Isa 41:23 Shew 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.

Isa 41:24 Behold, ye are of nothing, and your work of nought: an abomination is he that chooseth you.

The focus of the chapter now returns to the idolatrous nations of the earth. This is the only place in the Bible where God refers to Himself as the King of Jacob. The thought hearkens back to verse 1 where God summoned the nations of the earth to judgment. He here orders them to show cause why He should not find them guilty. Again in verse 22, God orders pagan nations to show cause why He should not judge them.

Referring to the idols of the nations, God challenges them to prophecy of future events. He challenges them to prove they are gods. He sarcastically demands them to show their authority and ability. Of course, they cannot. The conclusion is apparent. Idols are nothing and their purported abilities are worthless. Anyone choosing an idol is an abomination to the true God.

Isa 41:25 I 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.

Isa 41:26 Who hath declared from the beginning, that we may know? and beforetime, that we may say, He is righteous? yea, there is none that sheweth, yea, there is none that declareth, yea, there is none that heareth your words.

The prophecy may look forward to Cyrus, the Persian king. He came from the north and east and God, in His perfect time, called upon Him. His great power and authority are noted. Verse 26 refers back to the challenge of idols to foretell the future. None of them could do what God had just done. None of them were reputed righteous. None of them could do anything or hear the voice of another. Also implicit is a warning to Judah who, even as Isaiah wrote, was dabbling in idolatry. God delivered a stern warning to idolatry abroad as within Judah itself.

Isa 41:27 The first shall say to Zion, Behold, behold them: and I will give to Jerusalem one that bringeth good tidings.

Isa 41:28 For 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.

Isa 41:29 Behold, they are all vanity; their works are nothing: their molten images are wind and confusion.

The first refers to the 'first and last'—Jehovah God. His challenge to Judah in Zion and Jerusalem was to behold the various pagan priests of the idols. In contrast, God promised good tidings. Among all of these idolaters and their impotent idols, there was none who could answer God's challenge to foretell the future as noted above. The chapter concludes by noting that all idolaters and the nations that have given to them are nothing and confusion. They are worse than useless.

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Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

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