

## Isaiah 41

As we cover this chapter, we must remember that Isaiah is giving additional input relating to the fact that one day the Jewish nation's *warfare* will end (read the notes associated with Isaiah 40:2). This warfare will finally cease at the Second Coming of Christ, but until then much transpires in the life of the Jewish nation. Isaiah, stating a prophecy that will be fulfilled 150 years later, makes it clear that with the defeat of the Babylonians by the Persians, the Babylonian captivity will cease for the Jews. This release from captivity comes about through Cyrus, who is addressed as *one from the east* (Isaiah 41:2). His name is not given until Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1, but it is *Cyrus* who overthrows the Babylonian empire and allows the Jews to return to their homeland (in 536 BC). With this overthrow and destruction of Babylon, the Babylonian idols gods) will be humiliated and destroyed, confirming their total inability to deliver in the heat of the battle. The same will occur during the Tribulation when the Jewish nation again falls into idolatry, and Babylon, which will be the economic and political headquarters of the Antichrist, is destroyed by the believing Gentiles of Isaiah 13:3. Isaiah, therefore, places these false gods (idolatry) on trial (note the phrase, "*Present your case,*" in Isaiah 41:21), proving their total worthlessness when it comes to protecting their followers through predicting the future, explaining the past, or defining the present. Without this backdrop, Isaiah 41, as well as Isaiah 42-48, has little meaning. So "enjoy" as we proceed.

*Is. 41:1 "Coastlands, listen to Me in silence, And let the peoples gain new strength; Let them come forward, then let them speak; Let us come together for judgment.*

In verses 1-7 of this chapter, Isaiah gives a short-term prophecy that will be fulfilled by Cyrus, leader of the Persian Empire, approximately 150 later. Note that the word "*peoples*" is used (v.1), pointing to the Gentile nations. They are encouraged to *speak* in favor of their idols, in other words, prove that they are worthy of worship. God realized that no such proof existed—the very point He is making in this chapter.

*Is. 41:2 "Who has aroused one from the east Whom He calls in righteousness to His feet? He delivers up nations before him, And subdues kings. He makes them like dust with his sword, As the wind-driven chaff with his bow.*

Isaiah, in verses 2-4, proves that God is superior to idols by addressing His ability to predict the future. God will arouse a leader *from the east*, Cyrus of Persia (Persia being *east* of the holy land), although Cyrus is not called by name until Isaiah 44 and 45. God called Cyrus *in righteousness to His feet* in that God was "right" in calling him for the purpose of fulfilling His prophecies concerning these *nations*—including Babylon. (Note that Isaiah is not saying that Cyrus himself was righteous.) This was a short-term prophecy that would occur in approximately 150 years. Isaiah also predicted that Cyrus would overthrow *nations* with ease. This came to fruition, for Cyrus overthrew *Babylon* (Daniel 5) with no resistance and the city was eventually destroyed. In fact, Cyrus experienced little resistance from the *nations* as he expanded his empire. The fulfillment of this short-term prophecy validated Isaiah's prophetic ministry and legitimized his long-term prophecies as well (read Deuteronomy 18:22).

*Is. 41:3 "He pursues them, passing on in safety, By a way he had not been traversing with his feet.*

As was addressed briefly in verse 2, Cyrus would face little resistance as he conquered *nations*. In fact, he did not bother to spy out the lands he overthrew—"By a way he had not been traversing with his feet." Even though *Cyrus* took everything in his path without fear of defeat, it

was God who made him successful (Isaiah 45:1-2). Cyrus had a free will to do as he pleased, but God placed him in a position of leadership knowing exactly how he would respond to the different scenarios he faced as head of the Medo-Persian Empire. Therefore, God strengthened Cyrus to perform the different tasks that Cyrus chose to perform, never violating Cyrus' right to choose.

*Is. 41:4 "Who has performed and accomplished it, Calling forth the generations from the beginning? 'I, the Lord, am the first, and with the last. I am He.'"*

What was the key to Cyrus' success? It was *the Lord*, who is *the first and...the last*, the eternal *I am*, who made it happen. Therefore, the God who has been predicting and fulfilling prophecies *from the beginning* would continue doing so in the case with Cyrus—something idols could never accomplish. Not only that, but this eternal *I am* will continue fulfilling, not just short-term prophecies, but prophecies relating to the distant future as well.

*Is. 41:5 ¶ The coastlands have seen and are afraid; The ends of the earth tremble; They have drawn near and have come.*

Verses 5-7 describe the futility of idolatry, for the response of the idol worshippers to Cyrus' imminent advance would be anything but one of confidence. Why? The Gentile nations would experience fear and trembling, the standard reaction when man's trust has been misdirected. If their idols were so superior, why had they failed to warn these nations ahead of time concerning this impending danger?

*Is. 41:6 Each one helps his neighbor, And says to his brother, "Be strong!"*

Their encouragement to their *neighbor* to "*Be strong!*" would be empty words which would fall on darkened minds. Therefore, their only alternative (in their estimation at least) would be to muster more confidence in their incompetent idols.

*Is. 41:7 So the craftsman encourages the smelter, And he who smooths metal with the hammer encourages him who beats the anvil, Saying of the soldering, "It is good"; And he fastens it with nails, That it should not totter.*

Instead of repenting and trusting Jehovah for deliverance, these idolatrous nations would place their trust in additional idols built by man's hands—the more the merrier. They would make sure that each idol looked "*good*" and would *not totter*. But *totter* they would when Cyrus came on the scene. Can you believe the depths of the foolishness entertained by the ungodly?

*Is. 41:8 "But you, Israel, My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, Descendant of Abraham My friend,*

In verses 8-20, Isaiah states a prophecy relating to the return of the Jews to their land in conjunction with the spiritual regeneration of the nation and Second Coming of Christ. Note first the phrase, "*My servant.*" The word "*servant*" is used in three different ways in Scripture. It can point to the entire Jewish nation, as in Isaiah 41:8-16, 42:18-22, and 43:10. It can also point to the believing remnant of the Jews, as in Isaiah 44:1-5, 44:21-23, and 65:8-16. The final use relates to the Messiah, as in Isaiah 42:1-9, 49:1-7, and 52:13-53:12. Obviously, the word "*servant*" carries much weight in the book of Isaiah. It presents no theological problem if interpreted in context. Out of context it presents a theological nightmare, but the good news is that the context is easily determined when taken through the full counsel of God's word.

Another major term that Isaiah uses in verse 8 is the word “*chosen*.” There is no doubt that the Hebrew people were *chosen* by God, but for what were they *chosen*? They certainly were not *chosen* for salvation; for Paul confirms in Romans 2:17-3:8, 9:6-8, and other portions of that wonderful book, that a *Jew* does not possess eternal life just because he is a *Jew*. For what then were they *chosen*? Based on Exodus 24:1-8, they were *chosen* to be God’s wife. They were *chosen* to be the people through whom the Messiah would be born, a special race of people who were given special promises. Have you considered that both Jews and Gentiles obtain eternal life through the same avenue—through faith in the *seed* of Genesis 3:15, the *seed* being *Christ* (Galatians 3:16)? Therefore, no Jew is *chosen* by God for eternal life; for only an individual choice to place faith in Jesus, the seed, can bring that about. The Jews were *chosen*, therefore, to receive God’s Law and covenants, take the truth of the coming Messiah to the world (read the notes associated with Isaiah 61:6), and to be part of a special race of people through which the Messiah would be born. Obviously, it is of utmost importance to interpret the word “*chosen*” in the context of its usage. If not, it can present theological issues that are illogical and irreconcilable, especially as they relate to God’s character and intent for man.

We will note that God, through Isaiah, contrasts the nation of Israel, the *servant*, with Jesus the Servant. The nation of Israel has been a disobedient *servant* for most of her existence, but Jesus the Servant is flawless. Therefore, it is Jesus, the perfect Servant, who accomplishes salvation for the imperfect *servant*, Israel. This is a thread of truth that runs from the beginning to the end of the book of Isaiah.

Every Jew is a descendant of Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation. *Abraham* was also God’s *friend* (also read 2Chronicles 20:7 and James 2:23). It is interesting that *Abraham* lived and was buried in the city of Hebron, which in Hebrew means “*friend*.” Therefore, Abraham’s place of residence was named Hebron (*friend*) because of Abraham’s unique friendship with God. Even when the Arabs gained control of Hebron, they renamed it “el-Khalil,” which in Arabic means “*friend*.” It is too bad that Israel, the nation that descended from God’s *friend*..., *Abraham*, has failed to establish the same type of friendship with her Creator. The Jews, who have rebelled most of their existence, will continue to do so until they accept Christ as Messiah shortly before His Second Coming.

*Is. 41:9 You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, And called from its remotest parts, And said to you, 'You are My servant, I have chosen you and not rejected you.*

After the national regeneration of Israel and Christ’s Second Coming, the Jews will be gathered *from the ends of the earth* to enjoy the *land* promised to Abraham in Genesis 15:18. They will live in this land during the Millennium, proving that God has *not rejected* His people whom He has *chosen*. This will serve to encourage the Jews when they are taken captive into Babylon during the days of King Nebuchadnezzar. In fact, this prophecy will encourage any Jew who might question God’s faithfulness to the Hebrew people.

*Is. 41:10 'Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.'*

Because God has *chosen*...*Israel* and *not rejected* her (vv.8-9), the nation is *not* to *fear* nor *anxiously look about* (v.10). After all, *God*...*will strengthen*...*help*, and *uphold* the nation regardless of the circumstance. Have you considered that there has never been a time in the past when Israel has been void of a believing remnant? Nor will there be a time in the future when a believing remnant will not exist. It is this faithful remnant within Israel that God protects and

comforts. Therefore, when you meet a Hebrew Christian, know that you are looking at the reason the Jews will never become extinct. This same point is made in Isaiah 1:9 and 65:8.

*Is. 41:11 "Behold, all those who are angered at you will be shamed and dishonored; Those who contend with you will be as nothing, and will perish.*

The Gentile nations who come against the Jews during The Campaign of Armageddon *will be shamed and dishonored? They will perish.*

*Is. 41:12 "You will seek those who quarrel with you, but will not find them, Those who war with you will be as nothing, and non-existent.*

Again, we see that Jesus will totally annihilate the enemies of the Jews at His Second Coming. It will be as though they never existed.

*Is. 41:13 "For I am the Lord your God, who upholds your right hand, Who says to you, 'Do not fear, I will help you.'*

God again promises to *help* the Jews as they face the Antichrist and his Gentile armies during the closing stages of the Tribulation.

*Is. 41:14 "Do not fear, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel; I will help you," declares the Lord, "and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.*

The nation of *Israel* is referred to as a "worm." This does not mean that God views the nation as a literal worm but rather that she will one day be broken and humbled. Once this occurs (at the end of the Tribulation), God *will help* the nation; for He is her *Redeemer* who is also *the Holy One of Israel*. Note: Job makes reference to himself as a *worm*, not because he disliked himself, but because he was in a situation where he was unable to help himself (Job 17:14). The same applies to Jesus in Psalm 22:6; for His accusers viewed him as a *worm* due to, at least from their perspective, His hopeless condition.

*Is. 41:15 "Behold, I have made you a new, sharp threshing sledge with double edges; You will thresh the mountains, and pulverize them, And will make the hills like chaff.*

During a particular segment of the end times, the Jews will *thresh* their enemies. This prophecy will be fulfilled during **Stage 3 of The Campaign of Armageddon** (read the notes associated with Isaiah 13:3) when the Antichrist and his armies come against *Jerusalem* (Zechariah 12:2-3; Micah 4:11). According to Micah 4:12-13 and Zechariah 12:4-9, God will greatly energize *the inhabitants of Jerusalem*, and many of the Antichrist's soldiers will die at the hands of the Jews. *Jerusalem* eventually will fall to the Antichrist (Micah 5:1; Zechariah 14:2), and he will proceed to Bozrah to attempt to destroy the Jews in hiding there (read the notes from Isaiah 13:3 relating to **Stage 4 of The Campaign of Armageddon**).

*Is. 41:16 "You will winnow them, and the wind will carry them away, And the storm will scatter them; But you will rejoice in the Lord, You will glory in the Holy One of Israel.*

Soon after God empowers the Jews living in Jerusalem, all the Jews on the earth will accept Christ as Messiah and *rejoice in the Lord* as well as *glory in the Holy One of Israel*. In other words, they will be spiritually regenerated. (The notes associated with Isaiah 13:3, relating to the

**Stage 5 of The Campaign of Armageddon**, would be helpful to read at this time.)

*Is. 41:17 ¶ "The afflicted and needy are seeking water, but there is none, And their tongue is parched with thirst; I, the Lord, will answer them Myself, As the God of Israel I will not forsake them.*

Verses 17-20 describe the manner in which God provides for the Jews dwelling in Bozrah during the last half of the Tribulation. They will escape to Bozrah at the middle of the Tribulation (Matthew 24:15-16; Revelation 12:6), Bozrah being situated in a mountainous *wilderness* just east of Jerusalem (ancient Edom, which is modern day southern Jordan). These Jews will have refused to enter into the covenant with the Antichrist at the beginning of the Tribulation (they are the *non-many* of Daniel 9:27) and will have nothing to do with the *mark...of the beast* halfway through the Tribulation (Revelation 13:16-17). Therefore, they will not be permitted *to buy or to sell* during the last three and one-half years of the Tribulation (Revelation 13:16-17). Obviously, Jehovah will need to care for them through supernatural intervention. Read Isaiah 33:16 and 65:13-14, along with the notes associated with those verses, to see that He does just that, but at the same time refuses to assist the Jews who enter the covenant with the evil son of Satan. Note: Not all of the Jews who become believers at the end of the Tribulation will reside in Bozrah, for there will be Jews living elsewhere who accept Christ as well.

*Is. 41:18 "I will open rivers on the bare heights, And springs in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, And the dry land fountains of water.*

God will supernaturally provide *water* for the remnant residing in Bozrah.

*Is. 41:19 "I will put the cedar in the wilderness, The acacia, and the myrtle, and the olive tree; I will place the juniper in the desert, Together with the box tree and the cypress,*

These seven types of trees are listed to confirm that Jehovah will provide food for the Jews at Bozrah. After all, He provided the same for the Jews when they came out of Egypt (Deuteronomy 8:3), as well as for Elijah while by *the brook* (1Kings 17:3-6).

*Is. 41:20 That they may see and recognize, And consider and gain insight as well, That the hand of the Lord has done this, And the Holy One of Israel has created it.*

This miraculous provision will allow these Jews to *see... , recognize... , consider... , and gain insight* into the fact that Jehovah alone could accomplish such a feat. This revelation will cause them to obey God and walk in His truth.

*Is. 41:21 ¶ "Present your case," the Lord says. "Bring forward your strong arguments," The King of Jacob says.*

In Isaiah 41:1, the Lord asked the Gentile nations to justify their involvement with idols. He will at this point ask the idols themselves to *Present* their *case* as to why they are worthy of worship. God has already proven His own *case* in verses 1-20 by stating a short-term prophecy relating to Cyrus (verses 1-7) and a distant prophecy relating to end time events (verses 8-20). Can the idols provide evidence to substantiate their importance? Of course not, as verses 22-24 confirm.

*Is. 41:22 Let them bring forth and declare to us what is going to take place; As for the former events, declare what they were, That we may consider them, and know their outcome; Or announce to us what is coming.*

God challenges the idols to predict the future as well as to explain the meaning of the events of the past.

*Is. 41:23 Declare the things that are going to come afterward, That we may know that you are gods; Indeed, do good or evil, that we may anxiously look about us and fear together.*

The idols are challenged to justify their existence (to prove *that they are gods*) by predicting the future.

*Is. 41:24 Behold, you are of no account, And your work amounts to nothing; He who chooses you is an abomination.*

Those who would choose to worship idols are *an abomination* because the idols *are of no account*.

*Is. 41:25 ¶ "I have aroused one from the north, and he has come; From the rising of the sun he will call on My name; And he will come upon rulers as upon mortar, Even as the potter treads clay."*

Because the idols have been tried and found guilty in verses 21-24, God pronounces judgment on them in verses 25-29. He begins in verse 25 with a very specific prophecy relating to Cyrus. He states that Cyrus will come *from the north*, as well as from *the rising of the sun* (the east). How could Cyrus' origin be associated with two different geographical locations? The answer is simple. One of his parents was a Persian (from the east) and the other a Mede (*from the north*).

God states that Cyrus would call on His *name*. Cyrus was not a believer in Jehovah (Isaiah 45:4-5); but in Ezra 1:2-3 we find:

***"Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. 'Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with him! Let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel; He is the God who is in Jerusalem.***

Clearly, Cyrus used God's *name* in the process of allowing the Jews to return to Canaan, although he did not submit to the God of the Jews.

Isaiah finishes verse 25 by reemphasizing that Cyrus would destroy many *rulers*. All of these prophecies relating to Cyrus were fulfilled.

*Is. 41:26 Who has declared this from the beginning, that we might know? Or from former times, that we may say, "He is right!"? Surely there was no one who declared, Surely there was no one who proclaimed, Surely there was no one who heard your words.*

None of the idols of the nations had *declared* or *proclaimed* (prophesied) any of Cyrus' activities, much less his coming by name. Only Jehovah possesses the capability of divulging such pertinent information.

*Is. 41:27 "Formerly I said to Zion, 'Behold, here they are.' And to Jerusalem, 'I will give a*

*messenger of good news.'*

Only Jehovah, possessing foreknowledge (He is omniscient, meaning that He sees all events before they transpire—review notes associated with Isaiah 40:22), could state prophecies relating to the coming of Cyrus.

*Is. 41:28 "But when I look, there is no one, And there is no counselor among them Who, if I ask, can give an answer.*

No idol could speak to defend itself, for idols are incapable of verbal communication.

*Is. 41:29 "Behold, all of them are false; Their works are worthless, Their molten images are wind and emptiness.*

All idols are *false; Their works are worthless*; and they are nothing more than *wind and emptiness*. In Isaiah 41, God condemns all forms of idolatry, especially Babylonian idolatry. Isaiah addresses the destruction of the *Babylon* of the Old Testament in chapters 46-48, confirming that Babylonian idolatry was temporarily destroyed. It will be revived, however, for the Babylon of the future will be rebuilt and eventually serve as the political and economic headquarters of the Antichrist.

