

ISAIAH 41 | Fear Not, Worm Jacob

Coastlands Draw Near for Judgement

1 Listen to me in silence, coastlands (אֲרָצוֹת). Let the peoples (אֲמֻמִּים) renew their strength. Let them approach, then let them speak. Let us together draw near for judgement.

2 Who stirred up one from the east [Cyrus the Great]¹ whom victory meets at every step? He gives up nations before him, so that he tramples kings underfoot. He makes them like dust with his sword, like driven stubble with his bow. 3 He pursues them and passes on safely, by paths his feet have not trod. 4 Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, Yahweh, the first, and with the last. I am he (אֲנִי-יְהוָה).

5 The coastlands have seen and are afraid. The ends of the earth tremble. They have drawn near and come. 6 Everyone helps his neighbour [through military alliances] and says to his brother, Be strong! 7 The craftsman strengthens the goldsmith, and he who smooths with the hammer him who strikes the anvil, saying of the soldering, It is good, and they strengthen it with nails so that it cannot be moved.²

Fear Not, Worm Jacob

8 But you, Israel,³ my servant (עַבְדִּי), Jacob, whom I have chosen,⁴ the seed of Abraham (אֲבְרָהָם), my friend (אֲהַבְתִּי), 9 you whom I took [at the end of the 70-year Babylonian captivity] from the ends of the earth and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off, 10 fear not,⁵ for I am with you. Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

11 Behold, all [nations] who are incensed against you [Israel] shall be put to shame and confounded. Those who strive against you shall be as nothing and shall perish. 12 You shall seek those who contend with you, but you shall not find them. Those who war against you

¹ **Is 44:28** 28 ... Who says of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose.... **Is 45:1** 1 Thus says Yahweh to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed....

² Babylonia will turn to military alliances and idols for help against Persia.

³ These promises are for Israel, not the church.

⁴ "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)" (John A. Martin, "Isaiah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1094).

⁵ "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 (41:14; 43:14; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5)" (John A. Martin, "Isaiah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1094).

shall be as nothing at all. 13 For I, Yahweh your God, hold your right hand. It is I who say to you, Fear not! I am the one who helps you.

14 Fear not, you worm (תּוֹלְעָה)⁶ Jacob, you men of Israel! I am the one who helps you, declares Yahweh. Your Redeemer (גֹּאֲלֵךְ) is the Holy One of Israel. 15 Behold, I make of you a threshing sledge, new, sharp, and having teeth. You shall thresh the mountains and crush them, and you shall make the hills like chaff. 16 You shall winnow them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the tempest shall scatter them. And you shall rejoice in Yahweh. In the Holy One of Israel you shall glory.

Rivers on the Bare Heights

17 When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I, Yahweh, will answer them. I, the God of Israel, will not abandon them. 18 I will open rivers on the bare heights and fountains in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.⁷ 19 I will put in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive. I will set in the desert the cypress, the plane, and the pine together, 20 that they may see (רָאוּ) and know (יָדְעוּ), may consider (שִׁימוּ) and understand (שִׁכְלוּ) together, that the hand of Yahweh has done this, the Holy One of Israel has created (בָּרָא) it.

Yahweh Challenges the Idols

21 Set forth [idols] your case, says Yahweh. Bring your proofs, says the King of Jacob (מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל). 22 Let them bring them, and tell us what is to happen. Tell us the former things, what they are, that we may consider them, that we may know their outcome. Or declare to us the things to come. 23 Tell us what is to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods. Do good, or do harm, that we may be dismayed and terrified. 24 Behold, you are nothing, and your work is less than nothing. An abomination (תּוֹעֵבָה) is he who chooses you.

25 I [Yahweh] stirred up one from the north [Cyrus the Great], and he has come, from the rising of the sun [east], and he shall call upon my name. He shall trample on rulers as on mortar, as the potter treads clay. 26 Who declared it from the beginning, that we might know, and beforehand, that we might say, He is right? There was none who declared it, none who proclaimed, none who heard your words. 27 I [Yahweh] was the first to say to Zion, Behold, here they are! and I give to Jerusalem a herald of good news (מְבַשֵּׂר) [Isaiah]. 28 But when I look, there is no one. Among these there is no counselor who, when I ask, gives an answer. 29 Behold, they are all a delusion. Their works are nothing. Their metal images are empty wind.

⁶ **Job 25:6** 6 ...How much less man, who is a maggot, and the son of man, who is a worm! **Ps 22:6-7** 6 But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. 7 All who see me mock me. They make mouths at me. They wag their heads.

⁷ “In many places in the Middle East water is scarce, so this figure is most apt” (John A. Martin, “Isaiah,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1094).

Commentary

1. Isaiah 41.

- a. “The basic content of chs. 41-48 can be stated fairly easily. God will demonstrate his absolute superiority over the idols by doing something new, something unheard-of to that point: causing a people, his people, to return from exile (41:1–44:22). He will do this by destroying proud Babylon through Cyrus, a previously unknown ruler who will not come from any of the established kingdoms of the Mesopotamian valley (44:23–47:15).”⁸

Notes

God has a special relationship with Israel.

Of the 15 occurrences of “islands” in the Old Testament, 14 are in Isaiah. John A. Martin, [“Isaiah.”](#) in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1094.

This isn’t a negotiation. This is summons to judgment.

Isaiah prophesies of Cyrus about 150 years before Cyrus conquers Babylon.

God calls Cyrus in righteousness. This doesn’t mean Cyrus himself is righteous.

Although Cyrus will be a great conqueror, he will be not the one in charge. God will be.

Is Cyrus a type of Messiah? In a limited way, yes. Just as Cyrus will call back the Jewish people to return to the land of Israel, so will Jesus.

Israel is God’s servant to bless the nations.

Ge 12:3 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

Ro 11:11-12 11 So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. 12 Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean.

There are three servants in Is 41-[]: Cyrus, Israel, and Jesus.

This is God’s love letter to Israel!

Is Cyrus is a believer in Yahweh? Very possibly (v. 25).

⁸ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 46.

The God of the Bible is the Lord of history. He knows the past; he knows the future. No other god has this ability. No idolatrous ideology can tell us the past or the future. History is linear, and our God sees the whole line.

But their inability to tell the future shows that their gods are ineffective and **worthless**. John A. Martin, "[Isaiah](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1095.

In contrast with idols (vv. 21–24), which are man-made and unable to help people, God can and does tell the future. John A. Martin, "[Isaiah](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1095.

Describe the military campaigns of Cyrus the Great.