

## **ISAIAH CHAPTER 41**

### ***CONQUERING FEAR AND ANXIETY***

Fear is a universal emotion. Everyone experiences it at one time or another, in one form or another. Some people live in a constant state of fear, often referred to as anxiety or worry. Others experience fear or terror in reaction to a crisis or a catastrophe, or some other real life type of situation. In the next four chapters of Isaiah we will see the phrase, “*Fear not!*” used seven times (41:10, 13, 14; 43:1, 5; 44:2, 8), and God says, “*Fear not!*” to us today. It is interesting to note in Scripture that God does not expect us to blindly give up our fears. Whenever He says, “*fear not,*” He gives a reason why we do not have to fear. I encourage you to take special note of that as we proceed through these chapters.

The stage for chapter 41 is set approximately two hundred years in the future from the time Isaiah is actually writing these verses, as a small remnant of Jews are about to start the long journey back to Jerusalem. As the Jewish remnant would face the challenge of the long journey home from Babylon and the difficult task of rebuilding Jerusalem, which had been destroyed by the Babylonian army seventy years earlier, they would be able to think of many reasons to be afraid. But there was one big reason not to be afraid: God would be with them and would lead them home.

God speaks to these fears in order to calm them by assuring them that He is going before them and working on their behalf. God tells them that He has three servants He will use who will accomplish His will for their safe return: **Cyrus, king of Persia** (41:1–7); the nation of **Israel** (Isaiah 40:8–29; 43:1–44:27); and the **Messiah** (42:1–25).

#### Isaiah 41:1-7:

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.

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.

3 “He pursues them, passing on in safety, By a way he had not been traversing with his feet.

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.’”

5 The coastlands have seen and are afraid; The ends of the earth tremble; They have drawn near and have come.

6 Each one helps his neighbor And says to his brother, “Be strong!”

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, So that it will not totter.*

The call for silence opens the imaginary proceedings of a court. God convenes the court and asks the nations to present their case against Him, if they can. At least seventeen times in his prophecy, Isaiah writes about “*the islands*” (KJV) or “*the coastlands*” (NAS), referring to the most distant places in the world from the holy land of Israel (Isaiah 11:11; 24:15; 41:1, 5; 42:4, 10, 12). Together the islands and nations suggest all the world’s population. In suggesting that they meet together, God wasn’t asking that they negotiate; instead He was asking that they come together and realize the truth of His words.<sup>1</sup> In verse 21 God tells the nations to present their case. The Lord confronted the nations and the islands face to face in judgment.

In verse 2, “*the one from the east*” is referring to Cyrus the king of Persia. We will be learning more about him in future chapters. God used Cyrus to deliver the Jews from the Babylonian captivity. Isaiah called **Cyrus of Persia** by name over a century before he was born (590?-529 BC); and while Isaiah never uses the term, “*God’s servant*,” to describe Cyrus, Cyrus did serve the Lord by fulfilling God’s will here on earth for the nation of Israel. Cyrus is summoned in “*righteousness*” for God’s purpose of judgment on Babylon and the deliverance of His captive people, Israel. God called Cyrus to serve Him. He called Cyrus to follow at his heels, that is, “*at His feet*,” in verse 2. God handed the nations over to Cyrus and helped him conquer them (Isaiah 45:1-4). Cyrus would carry out God’s righteous plan. He would fulfill God’s will even if he was unaware of what he was actually doing. The Babylonians were blown away like chaff and dust because in actuality God was leading the army of Cyrus. God makes it clear that He is the One who brings such events to pass.

As Cyrus moved across the territory east and north of the holy land (Isaiah 41:25), the nations were afraid and turned to their idols or false gods for help. With a touch of satire (humorous ridicule), Isaiah describes various workmen helping each other manufacture a god who cannot help them! After all, when the God of Heaven is in charge of the battle, how can men or gods of metal or stone possibly oppose Him?

Cyrus may have thought that he was in charge, but in reality he was doing the will of God (Isaiah 44:28). By defeating Babylon, Cyrus made it possible for the Jewish captives to be released and allowed to return to their land to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple (Ezra 1:1-4). Sometimes we forget that God can use even unbelieving world leaders to accomplish His will for the good of His people. God raised up Pharaoh in Egypt when Israel was held captive there so that He might demonstrate His power (Romans 9:17). He used Herod and Pontius Pilate to accomplish His plan in the crucifixion of Christ (Acts 4:24-28). Proverbs 21:1 GNB<sup>2</sup> sums it up so well:

*1 The Lord controls the mind of a king as easily as he directs the course of*

<sup>1</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. 1983-c1985. The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures . Victor Books: Wheaton, IL

<sup>2</sup> “Today’s English Version.”

*a stream.*

Isaiah 41:8-10:

8 “*But you, Israel, My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, Descendant of Abraham My friend,*

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.*

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.’*

God chose Israel, also called Jacob and Abraham’s descendants, to be His servants (43:10) and to do His will.

Unfortunately Israel often failed to be a faithful servant and as God had warned them when He gave them His Law, disobedience would result in punishment. The servant is the nation of Israel, as opposed to the unbelieving Gentiles. They are descendants of Abraham, God’s friend, and they are therefore heirs of the covenant promises (Genesis 12:1-3). As an immigrant from Ur in Sumeria, Abraham came from the “*ends of the earth*.” So were these captive exiles to be gathered back from Babylonia in 537 B.C.; even though no exiled nation had ever before in history been brought back to start life anew in their ancestral homeland.

Also, in the last days, God will bring His people back to Israel from her worldwide dispersion, just as He once brought them back from Egypt during the exodus and from Babylon after the exile, because Israel is God’s chosen nation. Even though Israel was exiled because of sin and unbelief, she was not rejected by God. The Lord remains their God (Isaiah 43:3) so He will continue to be with them (43:5) and strengthen (40:31), help (41:13-14), and provide for them.

In spite of their past rebellion, Israel was not rejected by God. The Jewish captives did not need to fear either Cyrus or Babylon, because Cyrus was working for God and would eliminate Babylon from the picture altogether. We can sense the love of God for His people in these verses and His desire to encourage them to trust Him for the future.<sup>3</sup>

Then in verse 10 we have one of God’s wonderful promises to His people of all times: “*Do not fear.*” Why? “*For I am with you.*” “*Do not anxiously look about you.*” Why? “*For I am your God.*” Therefore don’t look around at your situation, but look up, up to the God who can control your circumstances. Fix your gaze on Him because if you know Him as your Savior, He holds you in the palm of His hand.

Isaiah 41:11-16:

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<sup>3</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. 1996, c1992. Be comforted. An Old Testament study. Victor Books: Wheaton, Ill.

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.*

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.*

13 *“For I am the Lord your God, who upholds your right hand, Who says to you, ‘Do not fear, I will help you.’*

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.*

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.*

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.*

God goes on to be more specific about why the people should not fear. God is going to destroy their enemies. In verse 13 He reiterates His instruction not to fear and tells them that not only does God hold them in His right hand, but also He is going to strengthen their right hand. They don’t have to be afraid because God is going to help them.

With God’s help Israel’s enemies will be defeated. When the word “worm” is used in reference to Israel, **God is referring to the contempt that the ungodly nations have of Israel.** The same term is used of the Messiah (Jesus) on the cross in Psalm 22:6. Just as God purchased His people from the bondage of Egypt by the blood of the Passover Lamb, He will do the same thing from their exile here in Babylon by sacrificing the nations of Egypt, Cush, and Seba (Isaiah 43), and from the worldwide exile in the end times by the blood of the true Lamb, Jesus Christ, when they turn to Him in faith (Zechariah 12:10-13:1). The mountains and hills in verses 15 and 16 could also be figurative representations of foreign nations, whom Israel will grind into nothingness just before Jesus returns to set up His kingdom on earth.

Isaiah 41:17-20 NAS:

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.*

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.*

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,*

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.*

From the pictures of a servant and a worm, Isaiah turned to the picture of a desert becoming a garden. The image reminds us of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness and God's provision for their every need. Water and trees are important possessions in the East, and God will supply both to His people. Certainly Isaiah was also looking beyond the return from Babylon to the future kingdom when "*the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the rose*" (Isaiah 35:1).<sup>4</sup>

Isaiah 41:21-29 NAS:

- 21 *"Present your case," the Lord says. "Bring forward your strong arguments," The King of Jacob says.*
- 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;*
- 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.*
- 24 *Behold, you are of no account, And your work amounts to nothing; He who chooses you is an abomination.*
- 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."*
- 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.*
- 27 *"Formerly I said to Zion, 'Behold, here they are.' And to Jerusalem, 'I will give a messenger of good news.'*
- 28 *"But when I look, there is no one, And there is no counselor among them Who, if I ask, can give an answer.*
- 29 *"Behold, all of them are false; Their works are worthless, Their molten images are wind and emptiness.*

The final picture in this chapter is that of *the courtroom*. God begins in verse 21 by insisting: "*Present your case!*" God challenged the idols of the nations to prove that they were really gods-- by predicting future events. Did any of their predictions come true? What have they predicted about the future? Did they announce that Cyrus would appear on the scene or that Jerusalem would be restored? Not only were the idols unable to make any valid predictions, but they were not even able to speak. The judgment of the court was correct: **All of them are false**. Their deeds amount to nothing. Their images are but wind and confusion.

The idols were not what humans claimed them to be because they could not predict the future, nor could they judge or deliver people. They were useless (Isaiah 44:9; Psalm 115:2-8; 1 Corinthians 8:4). Cyrus, the king of Persia, a land east of Babylon, approached

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<sup>4</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. 1996, c1992. Be comforted. An Old Testament study. Victor Books: Wheaton, Ill.

Babylon from the north according to verse 25, where he had conquered Media before coming to Babylon. And there was no one who had predicted these future events as God had. Because these idols, these false gods, were helpless in predicting the future and there was no one among these nations that could counsel the people about such things, these false gods were useless and they are still useless today.

And this is just another piece of evidence about why God's people do not have to fear. They know the one and only God, the One who silences all other voices and who is the true counselor.

### **ISAIAH CHAPTER 42**

## ***THE SERVANT OF GOD***

As we move into chapter 42, we are presented with a dramatic contrast to these



statements about false gods and misguided leaders. We are introduced to God's Servant in whom His soul delights.

### Isaiah 42:1-4, NAS

*I "Behold, My servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations.*

2 *"He will not cry out or raise His voice, nor make His voice heard in the street.*

3 "A bruised reed He will not break, and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice.

4 "He will not be disheartened or crushed, until He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law."

Here is the wonderful Counselor (Isaiah 9:6) contrasted with the speechless counselors in chapter 41. Verses 1-9 of chapter 42 give us the first of four servant songs referring to the Messiah. We find the others in Isaiah 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13—53:12. They speak of the Servant's gentle manner and worldwide mission. Verses 1-3 describe the first coming of Jesus.

Israel and Messiah are often both called *servant*. Israel as God's servant was to help bring the world to a knowledge of God. Israel failed over and over again, but The Messiah, Jesus, would fulfill this task and show God to the world. Clearly the Servant is now an individual rather than the nation of Israel as a whole.

God is *delighted* with Jesus (Matthew 3:17). As the Chosen One, He was to be the King of God's elect people. He would be especially empowered by the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 11:2). The Chosen One reveals a character of gentleness, encouragement, justice, and truth. When you feel broken and bruised, or burned out spiritually, God won't toss you aside as useless, but He will gently pick you up. These loving attributes of God are desperately needed by humankind today. Avoiding all manner of self-display, Jesus would carry on a quiet and unassuming ministry, even though multitudes, as we now know, would flock to him out in the fields and hills. The quiet and submissive qualities of Christ at His first coming fulfilled these words of Isaiah (Matthew 11:28-30) which were spoken 700 years before Christ actually came.

Jesus will be particularly tender to the poor as well as to the “*poor in spirit*” (Matthew 5:3), who are as fragile as a “*bruised reed*.” And to those with hardly a spark of hope, like a flickering lamp in which the wick has all but burnt out, Jesus will bring comfort and encouragement to the weak and oppressed (Isaiah 40:11; 50:4; 61:1).

In verse 4 Isaiah looks beyond Jesus' first coming to His second coming, when He will rule all the earth in perfect justice with "*a rod of iron*" (Psalm 2:8,9; Revelation 2:27). He would have a ministry to all nations, bringing them **judgment**. The Hebrew word for "*judgment*" used in verses 1 and 4 is

☐☐☐☐☐ implies the principles of divine holiness and truth. These standards that Christ will bring will take permanent root and spread throughout the world. Jesus, at His second coming, sometime in the future, we

know not when, will bring righteousness for all people and nations throughout the world.

The mission of the **Servant of the Lord** is to establish justice on the earth (verses 1-4) and to be “*a light to the nations*” (verses 5-9).

Isaiah 42:5-9:

*5 Thus says God the Lord, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread out the earth and its offspring, Who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it,*

*6 “I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, And I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations,*

*7 To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the dungeon And those who dwell in darkness from the prison.*

*8 “I am the Lord, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images.*

*9 “Behold, the former things have come to pass, Now I declare new things; Before they spring forth I proclaim them to you.”*

In verse 6 **the Servant, Jesus**, is a covenant in that He provides the blessings of salvation which God promised to all people. Jesus will open eyes that are blind and release the prisoners from the dungeon of unbelief. Part of Jesus’ mission on earth was to demonstrate God’s righteousness and be a light to the nations. Through Christ, all people have the opportunity to share in His mission. We must, however, first seek Christ’s righteousness before we can demonstrate it to others. **We must first let His light shine in us before we can become lights ourselves.**

The LORD had given the prophecy in verses 6 and 7 and He will not let idols take credit for it (Isaiah 41:21-24). In view of all that God had already done for Israel (the former things) these new things (Isaiah 48:6) of which He had been speaking would certainly happen. No other god can foretell such things. Isaiah was affirming that God, unlike idols, can tell the future. And this divine ability adds to His glory (verse 8).<sup>5</sup>

We need to give particular heed to verse 8. This is an eternal principle. It was stated in the first and second of the Ten Commandments. It was true in eternity past when Lucifer was cast out of Heaven and it will be true in eternity to come—in Heaven. We see throughout Scripture that the person who exalts himself or herself and takes the glory due to God is sooner or later destroyed.

The Church needs to pay close attention to this verse as well. It is too easy for a ministry to become man-centered or leader-centered. It is too easy for churches today to use business principles to run their affairs and never consult God. And when those marketing procedures increase the attendance at the church, someone writes a book about how to do

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<sup>5</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. 1983-c1985. The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures . Victor Books: Wheaton, IL



it. But watch out! The Church is God's and is to be run by the Holy Spirit and to follow Scriptural principles for church growth. *"I am the Lord, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another."* Not even to marketing principles. Or here is another scenario: Joe Blow has won hundreds to the Lord; Joe Blow has thousands in attendance at his church every week; Joe Blow has written best-selling books; Joe Blow is on TV every week. But if Joe Blow does not humbly acknowledge it is all God's doing, then all the accomplishments are as nothing. God will not share His glory and no one of us is to take the glory that belongs to God. *"I am the Lord, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another."* That is one thing to properly fear.

Isaiah 42:10-13:

*10 Sing to the Lord a new song, Sing His praise from the end of the earth! You who go down to the sea, and all that is in it. You islands, and those who dwell on them.*

*11 Let the wilderness and its cities lift up their voices, The settlements where Kedar inhabits. Let the inhabitants of Sela sing aloud, Let them shout for joy from the tops of the mountains.*

*12 Let them give glory to the Lord And declare His praise in the coastlands.*

*13 The Lord will go forth like a warrior, He will arouse His zeal like a man of war. He will utter a shout, yes, He will raise a war cry. He will prevail against His enemies.*

Verses 10-13 represent the Gentiles as singing praise for their deliverance and conversion, and rejoicing with faithful Israel over God's conquest of all His enemies and His overthrow of empires and intellectual systems that have scoffed at His authority and truth. When God is on our side, we have nothing to fear because He will conquer. People everywhere will sing and shout to the Lord because of His victory over His enemies at Jesus' second coming.<sup>14</sup> When Christ first appeared on the scene He came as a meek and lowly servant. When He returns at His second coming, He will come as a man of war judging the entire world. The culminating conquest, of course, will be the final conflict of Armageddon.

Isaiah 42:14-17 NAS:

*14 "I have kept silent for a long time, I have kept still and restrained Myself. Now like a woman in labor I will groan, I will both gasp and pant.*

*15 "I will lay waste the mountains and hills And wither all their vegetation; I will make the rivers into coastlands And dry up the ponds.*

*16 "I will lead the blind by a way they do not know, In paths they do not know I will guide them. I will make darkness into light before them And rugged places into plains. These are the things I will do, And I will not leave them undone."*

*17 They will be turned back and be utterly put to shame, Who trust in idols, Who say to molten images, "You are our gods."*

<sup>1</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. 1983-c1985. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Victor Books: Wheaton IL

We have God here portrayed as a mother, gasping, panting, and crying out in the pain of child birth. This is a verse a person should seriously consider if they think God is of the male gender only (see also Deuteronomy 32:18; Genesis 1 and 2; Deuteronomy 32:11). Here in Isaiah 42, as in Romans 8:22, we see that the birth of a new age is painful, especially for the one giving birth. We need to be aware as we read these verses that several words for “love” and “compassion” in Hebrew are related to the word for “womb.” and have in them the concept of a mother’s love. After all, God is the mother and father of us all. He is not confined to one gender, it took two genders to fully express the image of God.

Having restrained himself during Israel’s time of discipline, that is their exile to Babylon, God would now burst forth in judgment upon the powerful nations, symbolized by these mountains and hills, and the various water barriers of Babylonia that would keep the Jewish exiles in captivity (verse 15). The unbelieving and wayward Jews were about to be led through suffering in order to abandon their idolatries and return to God. For their long night of disgrace and sorrow, the Lord would give them spiritual renewal, and he would smooth out all of the difficulties obstructing their return to Palestine. But those who refused to turn to God, the idolaters who clung to their false gods would be destroyed. God will care for His people. But those who still insist on trusting in false gods will be turned aside to the path that leads to Hell. These verses could very well also refer to what will occur during the end times, just before Jesus’ second coming, when God re-unites the Church as He gathers all believers, both Jews and non-Jews, back to Israel where they will be protected during the final days of destruction (Isaiah 43:7).

*18 Hear, you deaf! And look, you blind, that you may see.*

*19 Who is blind but **My servant**, Or so deaf as **My messenger** whom I send? Who is so blind as **he that is at peace with Me**, Or so blind as the **servant of the Lord**?*

*20 You have seen many things, but you do not observe them; Your ears are open, but none hears.*

*21 The Lord was pleased for His righteousness’ sake To make the law great and glorious.*

*22 But this is a people plundered and despoiled; All of them are trapped in caves, Or are hidden away in prisons; They have become a prey with none to deliver them, And a spoil, with none to say, **“Give them back!”***

*23 Who among you will give ear to this? Who will give heed and listen hereafter?*

*24 Who gave **Jacob** up for spoil, and **Israel** to plunderers? Was it not the Lord, against whom we have sinned, And in whose ways they were not willing to walk, And whose law they did not obey?*

*25 So He poured out on him the heat of His anger And the fierceness of battle; And it set him aflame all around, Yet he did not recognize it; And it burned him, but he paid no attention.*

Isaiah 42:10–25, describes a singing nation, giving praise to the Lord, and a silent God

who breaks that silence to become a *shouting conqueror* (verses 13–17). God is patient with sinners, but when He begins to work, He doesn't waste any time. The “*servant*” in verses 18–25 is Israel, blind to their own sins and deaf to God's voice (Isaiah 6:9–10); yet the Lord graciously forgave them and led them out of bondage. Now God says to the Babylonians, “*Send them back to their homeland in Israel!*” (Isaiah 42:22). How sad it is when God disciplines us and we don't understand what He's doing or take it seriously (verse 25). Israel's Captivity in Babylon cured the nation of their idolatry. They would never again worship gods made of wood or stone, but it did not create within them a desire to please God and glorify Him.<sup>6</sup> How typical of their behavior century after century. Is it possible that the United States, by its failure to desire and please God, could be headed for a similar punishment? Possibly, and that may strike fear to your heart. But if it is we can still live with the hope that one day all believers will be called to Israel to rule from there with Christ during the Millennium in a perfect world, and then afterward live in the glory of Heaven for eternity.

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<sup>6</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. 1996, c1992. *Be comforted. An Old Testament study.* Victor Books: Wheaton, Ill.