



# ISAIAH 41

## GOD PROMISES TO HELP ISRAEL ~ PAGAN GODS ARE NOTHING

Most of us have heard references to President Donald Trump as a “Modern Day Cyrus.” It is in Isaiah 41 that we first get a glimpse of God’s plan to send an unrighteous man to accomplish his righteous plan. Talk about the book of Isaiah being revealed in layers, historically. We may be seeing the prophetic nature of the Scriptures being played out in real life. This should be a lot of fun!

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English Standard (ESV)	Passion Notes	Passion Translation (TPT)
<p>Isaiah 41:1 Listen to me in silence, O coastlands; let the peoples renew their strength; let them approach, then let them speak; let us together draw near for judgment.</p> <p><sup>2</sup> Who stirred up one from the east 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. <sup>3</sup> He pursues them and passes on safely, by paths his feet have not trod. <sup>4</sup> Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he.</p> <p><sup>5</sup> The coastlands have seen and are afraid; the ends of the earth tremble; they have drawn near and come. <sup>6</sup> Everyone helps his neighbor and says to his brother, "Be strong!" <sup>7</sup> 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.</p>	<p><b>a</b> 41:1 Or "hold a feast to me."  <b>b</b> 41:2 See Isa. 46:11.  <b>c</b> 41:2 Or "Righteousness summoned him to his foot." Some see King Cyrus as the conqueror mentioned here; others, Abraham. It can also be viewed as a prophecy of the Lord Jesus. He is the Mighty One who conquers nations with his love.  <b>d</b> 41:2 See Gen. 12:1–3; Ps. 2:8; Rev. 2:26–29.  <b>e</b> 41:2 See Ps. 149:6–9.  <b>f</b> 41:2 See Eph. 6:17–18; Heb. 4:12.  <b>g</b> 41:2 See Rev. 6:1–2.  <b>h</b> 41:3 Or "No shackle is placed on his feet" (Old Aramaic).  <b>i</b> 41:4 Or "calling nations (to be formed) from the beginning."</p>	<p><b>God Promises to Help Israel</b></p> <p>Isaiah 41:1 You lands of the sea, stand silent before me! <b>a</b> Let the people renew their strength! Let them approach me and state their case. Let's come together to decide who is right.</p> <p><sup>2</sup> Who raised up the conqueror from the east? <b>b</b> Who commissioned him for his righteous purpose? <b>c</b> The Lord hands nations over to him <b>d</b> to trample kings under his feet, <b>e</b> to make them like dust with his sword <b>f</b> and like windblown chaff with his bow. <b>g</b> <sup>3</sup> Swiftly he pursues them and advances unscathed as he passes over unfamiliar land. <b>h</b> <sup>4</sup> Who achieved all this and made it happen? Who guides the destiny of each generation <b>i</b> from the first until now? I am the one! I am Yahweh, the first, the unchanging one who will be there in the end!</p> <p><sup>5</sup> The islands see it and panic; the ends of the earth tremble; they approach and draw near. <sup>6</sup> The idol-makers all bolster one another up, saying, "Take courage!" <sup>7</sup> The woodworker encourages the metalsmith; the one who flattens with the hammer spurs on the one who strikes the anvil, saying of the welding, "Looks good!" They nail down the idol so it won't topple.</p>

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<p><sup>8</sup> But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; <sup>9</sup> you whom I took 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”; <sup>10</sup> fear not, 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.</p> <p><sup>11</sup> Behold, all who are incensed against you shall be put to shame and confounded; those who strive against you shall be as nothing and shall perish. <sup>12</sup> You shall seek those who contend with you, but you shall not find them; those who war against you shall be as nothing at all. <sup>13</sup> For I, the LORD your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, “Fear not, I am the one who helps you.”</p> <p><sup>14</sup> Fear not, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel! I am the one who helps you, declares the LORD; your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel. <sup>15</sup> 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; <sup>16</sup> you shall winnow them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the tempest shall scatter them. And you shall rejoice in the LORD; in the Holy One of Israel you shall glory.</p> <p><sup>17</sup> When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the LORD will answer them; I the God of Israel will not forsake them. <sup>18</sup> 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.</p>	<p><b>j</b> 41:8–20 Yahweh sings three poems of comfort in this chapter: to his chosen servant, Israel (vv. 8–13), to his redeemed warrior-bride (vv. 14–16), and to the poor and needy (vv. 17–20).</p> <p><b>k</b> 41:8 See James 2:23.</p> <p><b>l</b> 41:10 Or “Don’t be frightened.” The Hebrew root word sha ah means “to gaze, to look around.”</p> <p><b>m</b> 41:10 See Deut. 31:6–8.</p> <p><b>n</b> 41:14 David used this term to prophetically point to Jesus as he was being crucified. See Ps. 22:6. The Hebrew word is tola, which is a species of worm found in the Middle East (<i>Coccus ilicus</i>) that reproduces itself when the female fastens herself to a tree and lays eggs between her body and the tree. When the eggs hatch, the baby worms feed on her living body. When the eggs emerge, the blood remains on the tree as a crimson stain. When Jesus died on the cross (tree), his blood left a crimson stain and he gave birth to the church. He nourishes us and sustains us with body and blood. A kinsman-redeemer (go’el) is a male relative who was culturally responsible to act on behalf of a relative who was in trouble or danger, needed to be redeemed from slavery, or was in need of rescue. He became like a “savior” or “family protector” for his next of kin. Jesus, our next of kin, is our Kinsman-Redeemer. The Hebrew verb ga’al (“to act as redeemer”) is found more than one hundred times in the Hebrew Bible. See Ruth 2:20.</p> <p><b>p</b> 41:14 Although God is holy, he stoops to tenderly help those who feel unholy.</p> <p><b>q</b> 41:15 Or “a threshing sledge,” a board with iron studs like teeth that is driven over wheat to grind the chaff off the grain, which is then winnowed.</p> <p><b>r</b> 41:15 Or “the owner of two mouths.” The Word of God is like a “two-mouthed sword” (Heb. 4:12), for it is spoken from God’s mouth and is released in power as it is spoken from our mouths. We will become God’s two-mouthed threshing instrument!</p> <p><b>s</b> 41:15 Mountains are a frequent biblical metaphor for kingdoms and nations.</p> <p><b>t</b> 41:16 The Hebrew word for “rejoice” (giyl) implies “twirling, spinning, shouting with delight and joy.”</p> <p><b>u</b> 41:16 Or “You will rejoice among the holy things of Israel.”</p> <p><b>v</b> 41:18 See John 7:37–39.</p> <p><b>w</b> 41:18 See Ps. 84:6.</p> <p><b>x</b> 41:18 See Isa. 35:1–10.</p> <p><b>y</b> 41:18 See 68:5–6.</p>	<p><sup>8</sup> But you—my servant, Israel, <b>j</b> Jacob, whom I’ve chosen, seed of my beloved friend <b>k</b> Abraham— <sup>9</sup> I drew you to myself from the ends of the earth and called you from its farthest corner. I say to you: “You are my servant; I have chosen you. I have not rejected you! <sup>10</sup> Do not yield to fear, for I am always near. Never turn your gaze from me, <b>l</b> for I am your faithful God. I will infuse you with my strength and help you in every situation. <b>m</b> I will hold you firmly with my victorious right hand.</p> <p><sup>11</sup> All who rage against you will be ashamed and disgraced. All who contend with you will perish and disappear. <sup>12</sup> You will look for your enemies in vain; those who war against you will vanish without a trace! <sup>13</sup> I am Yahweh, your mighty God! I grip your right hand and won’t let you go! I whisper to you: “Don’t be afraid; I am here to help you!”</p> <p><sup>14</sup> Jacob, although you feel like a grub worm, <b>n</b> have no fear! O men of Israel, I am here to help you! I am your Kinsman-Redeemer, <b>o</b> the Holy One of Israel! <b>p</b> <sup>15</sup> I am making you into a powerful threshing instrument, <b>q</b> with teeth <b>r</b> new and sharp! You will reduce hills to chaff and crush mountains <b>s</b> into dust! <sup>16</sup> You will winnow them, and the stormy wind will blow them away! Then you will spin and dance with rejoicing <b>t</b> in Yahweh, boasting with admiration in the Holy One of Israel! <b>u</b></p> <p><sup>17</sup> I, Yahweh, will respond to the cry of the poor and needy when they are thirsty and their tongues are parched with thirst! When they seek a drink of water but there is none, I, the God of Israel, will not abandon them. <sup>18</sup> I will open up refreshing streams <b>v</b> on the barren hills and springing fountains in the valleys. <b>w</b> I will make the desert a pleasant pool <b>x</b> and the dry land springs of water. <b>y</b></p>

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<p><sup>19</sup> 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, <sup>20</sup> that they may see and know, may consider and understand together, that the hand of the LORD has done this, the Holy One of Israel has created it.</p> <p><sup>21</sup> Set forth your case, says the LORD; bring your proofs, says the King of Jacob. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> Behold, you are nothing, and your work is less than nothing; an abomination is he who chooses you.</p> <p><sup>25</sup> I stirred up one from the north, and he has come, from the rising of the sun, and he shall call upon my name; he shall trample on rulers as on mortar, as the potter treads clay. <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> I was the first to say to Zion, "Behold, here they are!" and I give to Jerusalem a herald of good news. <sup>28</sup> But when I look, there is no one; among these there is no counselor who, when I ask, gives an answer. <sup>29</sup> Behold, they are all a delusion; their works are nothing; their metal images are empty wind.</p>	<p><b>z</b> 41:19 Acacia wood was used extensively in the tabernacle and was used to form the ark of the covenant.</p> <p><b>aa</b> 41:19 "Myrtle" is the Hebrew word Hadassah, Esther's Jewish name.</p> <p><b>ab</b> 41:19 Or "trees of oil" (the Holy Spirit).</p> <p><b>ac</b> 41:19 Or "fir trees."</p> <p><b>ad</b> 41:19 These seven trees speak of fullness of new creation life. Compare them to the seven branches of the lampstand and the seven Spirits of God.</p> <p><b>ae</b> 41:20 That is, the Lord created the unity of this forest. God is the one who makes us one.</p> <p><b>af</b> 41:23 Or "Do good, do harm."</p> <p><b>ag</b> 41:25 Or "He is summoned in my name." Some believe that Cyrus fulfilled this prophecy, for he came from the east (Persia) and descended on Israel from the north. Others see the Messiah, who came from the north (Ps. 48:2) and is the Dayspring from the rising of the sun.</p> <p><b>ah</b> 41:27 Fulfilled prophecy is one of many evidences "that God is real and powerful and that he knows all things."</p>	<p><sup>19</sup> I will plant in the treeless desert cedars and achaia, <b>z</b> myrtle <b>aa</b> and olive trees. <b>ab</b> I will set in the wilderness evergreens, <b>ac</b> together with many elm and cypress. <b>ad</b> <sup>20</sup> Everyone will see and know that I, Yahweh, with my mighty hands have done this. They will consider and comprehend that the Holy One of Israel has created it. <b>ae</b></p> <p><b>Pagan Gods Are Nothing</b></p> <p><sup>21</sup> Yahweh says, "Present your case." "Let's hear your arguments," says the King of Jacob's tribes. <sup>22</sup> "Come, you idols, and let's hear your prophecy for the future. Tell us, tell us about your former prophecies so we can test them and see if they were fulfilled, or decree some future event for us. <sup>23</sup> Prophecy what the future holds to prove to us that you are gods. Do something—anything! <b>af</b> Frighten us or put us in awe! <sup>24</sup> But you are nothing at all! What have you ever accomplished? Whoever chooses to worship you is disgusting!</p> <p><sup>25</sup> I stirred up one from the north, who comes from the rising of the sun. He will call on my name. <b>ag</b> He will trample rulers into the mud as a potter treads clay. <sup>26</sup> Which of you foretold this from the start? Who prophesied it from long ago that we can say, 'He is right'? None of you prophesied it! None of you announced it ahead of time! No one heard you say a thing about it! <sup>27</sup> I was the first to decree to Zion, 'Look, this is what's about to happen!' <b>ah</b> I am bringing a messenger to Jerusalem with good news. <sup>28</sup> But when I look, I find no one who is capable to counsel me! There is no one who can respond to me with the right answer! Who could I even ask? <sup>29</sup> Look, all these gods are nothingness! What have they ever accomplished? Their metal images are nothing but empty wind and confusion!</p>

## Bible Knowledge Commentary

JOHN A. MARTIN

- **A CHALLENGE TO THE NATIONS** (CHAP. 41) 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.
  - **God's confrontation of the nations** (41:1-7)
    - **41:1.** 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.

- **41:2-4.** 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 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.
- **41:5-7.** 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). 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, would not help them offset Cyrus' conquests.
- **God's protection of Israel (41:8-20)**
  - **41:8-10.** 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 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.
  - **41:11-16.** 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 (41:14; 43:14; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5). This help from God will cause Israel to rejoice in Him (41:16).
  - **41:17-20.** 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 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.
- **God's knowledge of the future (41:21-29)**
  - **41:21-24.** 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.

- **41:25-29.** 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**. 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.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. God picked Cyrus as an instrument to accomplish his will. Has God ever used you to accomplish his will and you thought, "Why me, Lord?" Discuss a bit how you came to that conclusion and what you think might have been accomplished by God through you.
2. Can you think of a New Testament example of God using an unrighteous person to accomplish great things? Explain.
3. What are some of the advantages of using unrighteous people to accomplish great things? Can you think of any disadvantages?
4. If God can use unrighteous people to accomplish his plans, why do we find it so difficult to associate with "unrighteous" people ourselves? If you found yourself in a situation like this with someone (God might be using this very unlikely person to accomplish his will), what questions might you want to bring before the Lord to gain some clarity?
5. Do YOU believe that President Trump is a Modern Day Cyrus? Why have you come to that conclusion?