

**Is. 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.

As I read through this chapter, it is obvious that God is the speaker. It seems to be a call to the peoples on earth to come together for a time of judgment.

**Is. 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.

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

**Is. 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.

I had to remind myself that this speech from God is being directed to the Jews surviving the end of captivity in Babylon. As you continue to read in the next few chapters, God is very specific in naming Cyrus as His righteous servant.

*Isaiah 44:28* That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.

*Isaiah 45:1&13* Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus...I have raised him **up in righteousness**, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the LORD of hosts.

I think the following quote from the NIV Commentary is also helpful: "Cyrus, king of Persia, crossed the Tigris from the east and so entered the Babylonian Empire. He marched swiftly and victoriously against Croesus, king of Lydia, and took his capital, Sardis, in western Asia Minor, having already subdued the Medes in the north (cf. v. 25). He could therefore be described as being both from the east and from the north."

Cyrus and his armies were the ones the nations feared because of their victories and success. God is saying that it wasn't because of the strength and prowess of Cyrus and his armies that they enjoyed such a position of power and dominance, it was because God had a purpose in bringing Cyrus to power at just that point in history to accomplish His purposes. Events in the generations of man begin and end according to the purposes of God.

I was listening to Joe Foch, and he pointed out how all of this was phrased in the past tense as if it had already happened. That is how God views it. Whatever He purposes is as good as done and has been since before the foundation of the world.

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

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

**Is. 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 sodering: and he fastened it with nails, that it should not be moved.

As distant nations became aware of the expansion of Cyrus' kingdom, they too feared being conquered. They began to form alliances to defend against invasion and took courage from their combined strength and resources. They also increased production of their "gods/idols." Verse 7 ties in with Isaiah 40:20 regarding the importance of a "god" that cannot be moved, that can't be knocked down. How foolish to put your faith in a god that depends upon you to fix it so that it cannot fall!

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

**Is. 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.

The people of Israel, on the other hand, have a powerful, living God. They had been specifically chosen (selected / appointed) as God's servants, to declare the truth of God to the nations. Again God reiterates that Israel is a reference to the direct descendants of Abraham through Jacob.

Note also the beautiful declaration that Abraham was God's friend. Three times in scripture Abraham is declared to be God's friend.

*2Chronicles 20:7* Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever?

*James 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.

I think we would all desire to be known as God's friend. It made me decide to look for some scripture that would help define friendship from God's point of view. These principles provide some very specific characteristics that need to be prominent in our lives if we truly desire to be known as God's friend.

- *Psalm 41:9* Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted....  
A friend is someone you can trust. God knows men are not perfect, but in the man Abraham God identified someone whom He could trust to put forth his best efforts to serve and obey Him.
- *Proverbs 17:17* A friend loveth at all times....  
God also identified Abraham as a man who truly loved Him—to the point that he was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac in obedience to God's command (Genesis 22). If ever there would be a difficult time that could cause one to reject God, this would be one of the toughest. Abraham never waivered; he loved God and trusted in God's love for him.

- *Proverbs 27:19* As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man. This verse defines a friend as someone who reflects your heart. God identified Abraham as a man whose heart's desire was to reflect the heart of God. His actions proved that his desires found their source in the desires of God as revealed to him.
- *John 15:14* Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Jesus was very clear in stating that the friends of God will obey His commands.

As I continue to read through the next few verses, it seems clear that the context is directed to a time yet future in Israel's existence. God begins verse 9 by declaring that He has taken/recovered them from the ends of the earth. That is reference to a gathering that has begun in recent history; it was not applicable to the return of the people from Babylonian captivity. Though Israel may feel that God has abandoned them for their sin and disobedience as they have experienced hatred and terrible persecution at the hands of the nations throughout the time of their dispersion, God is assuring them that they have never and will never lose their position as God's chosen people. He has already and will yet bless the world through Israel.

**Is. 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.**

God's people can know that though they may rebel against Him, He will never leave them or refuse to be their God. As their God, He will provide them strength to get through the toughest times. The word for *help* indicates to surround with protection. To *uphold* is to sustain. God's right hand is indicative of His power and authority, which He exerts in righteousness.

That last phrase is the one that really jumped out to me. God's people are always ready to accept His strength, protection and sustenance; but we don't often think of what it means for Him to act towards us in righteousness. That righteousness requires that He chastise, correct and teach us; judgment and testing are part of that process. The problem is that we are such slow learners.

This promise of God will be quite precious to His people as they begin to experience the blessings of restored fellowship with God as they enter the Millennial Kingdom. They will have been greatly weakened through the events of the tribulation and will be grateful to look to God for their strength, protection, sustenance, and righteous rule.

**Is. 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.**

**Is. 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.**

This message is specifically addressed to the people of Israel, but there is also truth to be applied to all of God's people of any age or period of history.

The nations that were filled with such hatred and disdain for Israel will one day experience shame and reproach themselves. They will be destroyed. Israel will no longer have any enemies among the nations. Again, this emphasizes that the time being described is yet future; Israel has never experienced such a position among the nations in its history since the Babylonian captivity.

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

Isaiah continues to convey God's message to Israel in his poetic, repetitive style. God again declares that He, Jehovah, the covenant-keeping God of Israel, will securely/powerfully hold their right hand. This would seem to be a declaration of God establishing Israel in a position of power and authority among the nations (as indicated by the right hand). Israel will not have to depend upon their own strength to secure their position; God will be their protector.

**Is. 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.**

Even as God promises to be their strength and protection, He reminds them from whence they came. The word *worm* that references Jacob and the men of Israel has some interesting implications.

- To swell out or up – This seems to be a statement of pride. Pride caused Israel to declare that God wasn't sufficient; they wanted a king. Pride always causes us to make decisions that indicate that God isn't sufficient or fair or \_\_\_\_\_.
- To circumvent (as if tripping up the heels) – Circumvention is not just going around something to avoid it. It is to gain the advantage through the use of arts, trickery and/or deception. There are many examples of circumvention in the history of Israel, but the first to come to mind is that of Jacob himself in obtaining the blessing of His father in place of Esau.
- Webster adds the idea of "A being debased and despised." – This has been descriptive of the Jewish people as a whole throughout history.

In spite of their unworthiness, God is faithful. He is Jehovah, the covenant-keeping God of Israel. He is their Redeemer, the One Who will restore them to a place of fellowship as their kinsman-redeemer. The Holy One of Israel is a reference to His being clean and pure and totally above reproach—the total opposite in character of the "worm Jacob."

**Is. 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.**

**Is. 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.*

These verses are difficult. When the Son of God comes to set up His kingdom, Israel will not have to fight. In the times leading up to His coming Israel will face many battles. Maybe this is a reference to battles such as the one in which Israel is miraculously delivered from Gog and his armies (Ezekiel 38); maybe it is a general reference to the battles that Israel will win in the face of overwhelming odds from the time they again become a nation until Messiah comes (i.e., the 1967 Six-Day War and the 1973 Yom Kippur War). The point of emphasis is that a time is coming when Israel will rejoice in the Lord and recognize His deliverance as He restores them to a place of privilege among the nations.

I am reminded that mountains often represent nations or kingdoms in scripture, so this could be another way of saying that Israel will be established as the most powerful among the nations on earth.

**Is. 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.*

**Is. 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.*

I think in context one has to continue to apply these verse to the time during which the Lord is regathering His people to the nation of Israel. The water supply is a continual concern to the people of this region. God is assuring His people that He will supply their need—through the use of miracles if necessary. I can't help but make some application to the time when the remnant of Israel is being protected during the last 3.5 years of the tribulation period yet to come.

This won't be the first time God has provided for His people in this way. This sounds remarkably similar to His provision for them during the wilderness wanderings after He delivered them from Egypt.

**Is. 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:*

During the rule of the Ottoman Turks, most of the trees in the land of Israel were cut down since taxation was based on the number of trees on your land. According to Bridges for Peace, at least 220 million trees have been planted in Israel. Obviously, God is going to use humans to carry out the planting process; but the success of these efforts is ultimately dependent upon God's provision of the water, sunshine etc. necessary for their growth.

**Is. 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.

At some point the people of Israel are going to understand that God is the power at work regarding their military victories, their water supply, and the fruitfulness of the land. Their success will go against all practical odds. As I read this verse, it's like a gradual realization of God's hand at work.

See – visible evidence

Know – through observation, to comprehend

Consider – think on with care, ponder, study

Understand – apprehend the meaning, intelligent conclusion

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

This chapter started with a call for the nations to listen as God presents His case proving that He is God as evidenced by His workings on behalf of the nation of Israel, the children of Abraham, God's chosen people. Now He is calling for the nations to present their case on behalf of their gods.

**Is. 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.

God is asking for the gods of the nations to present themselves and declare the future. Let them point out their actions on behalf of the nations throughout history that can be considered evidence of their position of power and authority. He challenges them to declare the future as He has done so often and so accurately (as the record of history proves).

**Is. 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.

The ability to declare the future with total accuracy is a singular proof of God as Supreme in power and authority. He is basically challenging the false gods to prove that they have done anything to benefit those that worship them or that has resulted in destruction of their enemies in conjunction with their prophecies that would qualify as evidence worthy of consideration by the God of Israel and His people

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

God declares the obvious truth—There is no evidence. These *gods* are gods in name only; they have no power; the people who trust in them are morally disgusting (from the Hebrew for *abomination*) in the eyes of God. The Psalmist states this same truth.

*Psalm 115:2-8 Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God? But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.*

**Is. 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.**

As explained in the comments on the first few verses, Cyrus can be described as coming from both the east and the north. The fact that Cyrus acknowledged God as the One who had made him the powerful ruler that he was is corroborated by Ezra.

*Ezra 1:2-3 Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem.*

Verse 3 clarifies that Cyrus is referencing the God of Israel. It also implies that Cyrus considers God as only one of many gods as referenced by the phrase "his God be with him" (not *my* God).

The last half of the verse is a statement of the relative ease with which Cyrus will achieve his military conquests.

**Is. 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.**

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

**Is. 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.**

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

The prophecy concerning Cyrus will be fulfilled about 150 years future to the time Isaiah declared it. God is making this fantastic prophecy for the benefit and consideration of future generations. This is something that no false *god* could do.

The God of Israel is the first to declare not only the captivity to come, but also the good news regarding Israel's restoration to a position of fellowship with their God and a place of prominence in the world. None of the false gods or their servants on earth could give a single piece of evidence to testify to their own

credibility. Why? Because they are powerless. They only exist in the wind/breath/verbal expression of the people who claim them; they are worthless.