

Isaiah 40B-41

- Let's begin the first third of Second Isaiah
 - Remembering the breakout of each third, the first third focuses on
 - The greatness of God the Father
 - His work in preparing a way for His Son
 - We begin with Isaiah reflecting on the Father's incomparable greatness
 - This will sound familiar probably
 - It reflects Job, Psalms and other works of Scripture in its descriptions of God

[Is. 40:12](#) ¶ Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand,
And marked off the heavens by the span,
And calculated the dust of the earth by the measure,
And weighed the mountains in a balance
And the hills in a pair of scales?

- Isaiah begins with a series of contrasts between our experience and God's experience
 - Isaiah uses human terms to describe God's limitless, and the absurdity of using one to measure the other quickly becomes evident
 - Isaiah asks a series of questions beginning with "who"
 - Each questions examines God's power
 - And in each case, we're supposed to place God in our place and make the contrast
 - And Isaiah uses opposites (water verses dirt) to illustrate the completeness of his comparison
 - For example, "who" measured the seas in his palm?
 - We can barely measure an ounce or two
 - But God is capable of holding all the waters of Earth in His hand
 - Though it's not literal in the sense that God does not have a physical hand in the same way that we do

- It is literal in the sense that God's power to control creation includes the ability to move and control all the water of the earth as He wishes
- God marked off the universe with the span of His hand
 - A span is the distance from the tip of your thumb to the tip of your pinkie
 - God's "hand" was able to measure out the distance of the entire universe
 - The vastness of the universe seems as no greater than God's own hand
 - Impossible to imagine much less understand how powerful and vast God Himself is
- God can measure the dust of the earth precisely
 - Another unimaginable wisdom
- Finally, God could weigh mountains precisely as if on a set of scales
 - To the question of God's power, it is without limit and without comprehension
- Secondly, in verse 13 Isaiah asks questions regarding God's wisdom

[Is. 40:13](#) Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD,
Or as His counselor has informed Him?

[Is. 40:14](#) With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding?
And who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge
And informed Him of the way of understanding?

- Who has directed God's work by His Spirit?
 - Caused God to do something apart from God's own will and purposes
 - Who has ever counseling God and taught God something He didn't know
 - Or explained what justice should require or shown Him the way of truth on some matter?
 - Obviously, there is nothing apart from God except His own create, so there is no source for knowledge apart from God

[Is. 40:15](#) Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket,
And are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales;
Behold, He lifts up the islands like fine dust.

[Is. 40:16](#) Even Lebanon is not enough to burn,
Nor its beasts enough for a burnt offering.

[Is. 40:17](#) All the nations are as nothing before Him,
They are regarded by Him as less than nothing and meaningless.

- The third part of God's great power is found in a comparison to the insignificance of men and nations
 - All the nations of people, as numerous as we see them to be, are like a drop in a bucket
 - That's a favorite metaphor, but consider what it really means
 - If you add or remove a single drop from a bucket, you would never notice
 - From God's point of view, He would barely notice if all the nations of Earth ceased to exist
 - Likewise, men are like specks of dust on scales - we don't even register
 - Lebanon was renown for its forests, but it wasn't even enough wood to light a suitable sacrifice for God
 - Nor were there enough animals in the land to create a worthy sacrifice
- Altogether, the nations of men are nothing
 - In Hebrew the phrase is nothing, nothingness and utter confusion
 - God's greatness is magnified by His creation
 - Not in the sense that the Creation's grandeur speaks to God's power
 - But rather that it's insignificance contrasts with God's limitless power and wisdom and significance

[Is. 40:18](#) ¶ To whom then will you liken God?

Or what likeness will you compare with Him?

[Is. 40:19](#) As for the idol, a craftsman casts it,

A goldsmith plates it with gold,

And a silversmith fashions chains of silver.

[Is. 40:20](#) He who is too impoverished for such an offering

Selects a tree that does not rot;

He seeks out for himself a skillful craftsman

To prepare an idol that will not totter.

[Is. 40:21](#) ¶ Do you not know? Have you not heard?

Has it not been declared to you from the beginning?

Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?

[Is. 40:22](#) It is He who sits above the circle of the earth,

And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers,

Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain

And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in.

[Is. 40:23](#) He it is who reduces rulers to nothing,

Who makes the judges of the earth meaningless.

[Is. 40:24](#) Scarcely have they been planted,

Scarcely have they been sown,

Scarcely has their stock taken root in the earth,

But He merely blows on them, and they wither,

And the storm carries them away like stubble.

[Is. 40:25](#) “To whom then will you liken Me

That I would be his equal?” says the Holy One.

[Is. 40:26](#) Lift up your eyes on high

And see who has created these stars,

The One who leads forth their host by number,

He calls them all by name;

Because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power,

Not one of them is missing.

- The third set of questions demonstrate God’s uniqueness
 - Theme: nothing can compare to Him
 - He begins with a comparison to idols filled with irony
 - Would you compare God compare to the idols made by men?
 - The better craftsman at least takes gold and silver to make an idol
 - But the poor idol worshipper must go out to the forest to find wood for his idol

- So the value and worth of the person's god depended on their financial condition
- To the poor person, Isaiah mocks them by reminding them not to pick wood that might rot
 - We wouldn't want our god to rot!
- And in the world of idols, the best idol was one that was so stable that it never moved, wouldn't topple over
 - In contrast to the Living God Who is active in Creation
- Then Isaiah rebukes the reader who might have considered something to equal God's glory
 - Didn't you listen to what was declared from the beginning?
 - What declaration?
 - The "beginning" refers to Creation, and the declaration is found in Gen 1 and in Rom 1

[Rom. 1:19](#) because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

[Rom. 1:20](#) For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

- The creation came out of God, so how can men every believe that anything in the creation could compare with it's creator
 - That we should worship the creation instead of the Creator
- Next, Earthly rulers are absolutely nothing in comparison to God the Father's authority and majesty
 - Notice in verse 22 we're told God sits above the circle or round of the earth
 - Does that strike you as interesting? Remember, these words are written nearly 2,200 years before a man named Christopher Columbus proves the earth is round
 - Isaiah goes on to repeat God's power over the universe
 - We're as insignificant as grasshoppers, and the rulers and judges are meaningless as well

- So if men are so insignificant, how important are the idols they create with their own hands?
- So who can compare to God?
 - If you still need the answer, Isaiah recommends you start counting the stars
 - And when you tire, realize the God not only created them, and can count them, but has named them

[Is. 40:27](#) ¶ Why do you say, O Jacob, and assert, O Israel,
 “My way is hidden from the LORD,
 And the justice due me escapes the notice of my God”?

[Is. 40:28](#) Do you not know? Have you not heard?
 The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth
 Does not become weary or tired.
 His understanding is inscrutable.

[Is. 40:29](#) He gives strength to the weary,
 And to him who lacks might He increases power.

[Is. 40:30](#) Though youths grow weary and tired,
 And vigorous young men stumble badly,

[Is. 40:31](#) Yet those who wait for the LORD
 Will gain new strength;
 They will mount up with wings like eagles,
 They will run and not get tired,
 They will walk and not become weary.

- So, in light of God’s greatness, omnisciences and power Isaiah turns to Israel to make His application
 - Do you think a God this great will be fooled concerning your sin?
 - Do you think you’ll escape His discipline?
 - He doesn’t tire or give up watching
 - He is prepared to support those who rely on Him and stumble those who try to walk proudly on their own
 - This is the reality for Israel
- Continuing in our theme of God the Father and His might preparing a way for His Son
 - Now we turn to a new scene in which the setting is a trial

- God is placing the idols of the Gentile nations on trial in a sense
- And one nation becomes a representative for all Gentiles at this trial
 - It is a nation that didn't even exist in Isaiah's day
 - Yet he describes it so perfectly, it's easy to know who Isaiah' is describing
- The nation is Persia, and its leader is Cyrus
 - Cyrus isn't names until Chapter 44, but the details in this chapter match him and his nation perfectly
- As we enter this chapter, remember the patterns we should expect to see
 - First, Isaiah writes as if He is living in the future, about 150 years in the future
 - Secondly, he weaves together prophecies of that near future with prophecies of the far future in Tribulation
 - So we need to look for where those breaks occurs

[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.

- God commands the "peoples" come forward for judgment
 - The word for peoples is another way of saying Gentiles and refers to the world of Gentile nations
 - The coming together for judgment refers to the a court of law
 - The word in Hebrew literally means judgment but can also be used in the sense of court or charge
 - Remember, the point of the trial is to prove God the Father's superiority over any idol or other so-called God
 - So God opens the trial by setting forth His case as supremely powerful
 - And He does it in two ways, a story within the story

- First, God is going to relate how He controlled world events concerning Persia and Cyrus
 - Secondly, the very fact that Isaiah could reveal this 150 years in advance of it happening proves God's power to accomplish exactly what He wishes in the course of human history

[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.

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

[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.'"

- God's case begins with a description of "one" whom God calls from the East
 - This one is called to his feet
 - The second use of "his" probably shouldn't be capitalized
 - The best view in my opinion is that God calls one in righteousness to his feet
 - Whoever this is, God has placed him on his feet, in the sense that God has placed this one in power and set him on his way
 - The purpose of this one is to subdue nations by God's authority
 - He passing through them in safety, even attacking places he had never seen and prevailing
 - But Who made (will make) this happen? God of course

[Is. 41:5](#) ¶ The coastlands have seen and are afraid;
The ends of the earth tremble;
They have drawn near and have come.

[Is. 41:6](#) Each one helps his neighbor
And says to his brother, "Be strong!"

[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,
So that it will not totter.

- Remembering that Isaiah is writing as if this were present tense, but in reality he is writing about the future
 - He says that in the future, this nation that God is raising up will come from the east and the coastlands (western Palestine) will tremble in fear over them
 - They encourage one another in the face of this threat
 - And their chief response is to encourage their idol craftsmen to work all the harder to produce new and better gods
 - Ones that won't topple over
- God's is making His case against the Gentile idols by two contrasts
 - First, the contrast between the true God who brought this country into the land
 - Verses the manmade idols who merely strive to stay on the feet when the invader arrives
 - Secondly, the fact that Isaiah could foretell these events 150 years in advance proves God's sovereignty
 - While the people and their idols are taken by surprise when it happens, showing their weakness
- Moving forward, God strengthens His case against the futility of idols by demonstrating His power in a far future day when idols will be completely eliminated

[Is. 41:8](#) "But you, Israel, My servant,
Jacob whom I have chosen,

Descendant of Abraham My friend,
[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.

[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.'

[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.

[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.

[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.'

[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.

[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.

[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.

- Israel was chosen by God to follow and serve Him
 - Because Israel follows the true God, in contrast to the idols of the nations
 - Therefore, Israel won't have anything to fear
 - In part because God gave them this forewarning through Isaiah
 - God will strengthen and uphold that nation, clearly illustrating the difference between Himself and the false gods of the nations
 - And in a far future day, the nation will search for an enemy and not find one (v.12)
 - And this rescue for Israel will come for Jacob, for Israel when the nation is like a worm

- The term may sound disrespectful, but it isn't in Hebrew
- It means prostrate or helpless
- The Messiah is described this way in Psalm 22:7
- Israel's rescue by the hand of God comes when it is at its weakest and seemingly prostrate
 - We know this is the moment described in Zech 12 when Israel is rescued by the return of Christ
 - This is the meaning of "I will help you...your Redeemer"
- This section ends with a promise that in that far future day, Israel will suddenly become the powerful nation that fights back and threshes the nations
 - Zech 12 also describes this moment

[Zech. 12:1](#) ¶ The burden of the word of the LORD concerning Israel. ¶ Thus declares the LORD who stretches out the heavens, lays the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him,

[Zech. 12:2](#) "Behold, I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that causes reeling to all the peoples around; and when the siege is against Jerusalem, it will also be against Judah.

[Zech. 12:3](#) "It will come about in that day that I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples; all who lift it will be severely injured. And all the nations of the earth will be gathered against it.

[Zech. 12:4](#) "In that day," declares the LORD, "I will strike every horse with bewilderment and his rider with madness. But I will watch over the house of Judah, while I strike every horse of the peoples with blindness.

[Zech. 12:5](#) "Then the clans of Judah will say in their hearts, 'A strong support for us are the inhabitants of Jerusalem through the LORD of hosts, their God.'

[Zech. 12:6](#) ¶ "In that day I will make the clans of Judah like a firepot among pieces of wood and a flaming torch among sheaves, so they will consume on the right hand and on the left all the surrounding peoples, while the inhabitants of Jerusalem again dwell on their own sites in Jerusalem.

[Zech. 12:7](#) "The LORD also will save the tents of Judah first, so that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem will not be magnified above Judah.

[Zech. 12:8](#) "In that day the LORD will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the one who is feeble among them in that day will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the angel of the LORD before them.

[Zech. 12:9](#) "And in that day I will set about to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

- Israel is made too strong for the Gentile nations to handle, by God's power
 - And God will be seen as the one who comes to their rescue, even as they struggle in their weakness

[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.

[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.

[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,

[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.

- The afflicted here are the remnant of Israel awaiting their rescue
 - And it will be God Himself who will rescue them
- Then He will provide for them an oasis in the desert
 - Ultimately, this is a reference to the way God restores Israel in their land
 - But it also a reference to way God will protect Israel in the time of Tribulation
 - Making miraculous provision for them as He protects the remnant from the antichrist
 - Isaiah discusses this more later in the book
- And the effect of all this provision and protection is that the people of Israel will see and recognize that the Lord has done all this
- This is God's court case in defense of His name and power
 - Now He turns to the nations and their false gods and says present your case

[Is. 41:21](#) ¶ “ Present your case,” the LORD says.

“Bring forward your strong arguments,”

The King of Jacob says.

[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;

[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.

[Is. 41:24](#) Behold, you are of no account,

And your work amounts to nothing;

He who chooses you is an abomination.

- God’s challenge to the false gods is to have them declare what will take place in the way God is prepared to do through Isaiah
 - Explain the future to prove their deity
 - The ability to predict the future is inherently a power of GOD
 - Because predicting the future requires the ability to make it so
 - Only the one who can control all things can say with confidence how anything will turn out in the future
 - Or on the other hand, explain the past
 - Particularly, the creation
 - Explain how everything came to be
 - God can explain the creation and do so in perfect harmony with what we observe today because He was there and He did it
- Finally God challenges the man made idols to do “anything”
 - Do something good or evil, but just do something to cause the people to look around anxiously and fear
 - Again, this is something the true God is about doing all the time
 - The events of the world unfold according to His plan
 - At times bringing fear and anxiety
 - But the idols sit idly (no pun intended)

- So God declares the verdict of this trial
 - The idols are of no account, their work amounts to nothing
 - Therefore, those who might chose an idol above God are an abomination
 - Remember that today, roughly 4 billion people around the world worship idols in one form or another
 - Idol worship is hardly something old fashioned
 - God sees them as an abomination (or detestable)
- So now God pronounces sentence

[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."

[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.

[Is. 41:27](#) "Formerly I said to Zion, 'Behold, here they are.'
And to Jerusalem, 'I will give a messenger of good news.'

[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.

[Is. 41:29](#) "Behold, all of them are false;
Their works are worthless,
Their molten images are wind and emptiness.

- This same "one" will come, this time from the North
 - This nation is coming as a sentence against those with idols, including those in Israel who follow idols
 - This nation who is coming will come because of God
 - He call the name of God
 - We know Cyrus wasn't a true believer, but he did recognize that the God of Israel brought him to power

[2Chr. 36:23](#) "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 the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up!'"

- And God boasts who else could have known this so specifically
 - His boast is based in the details of east and north
 - The nation that is coming to bring punishment is the Persian empire under Cyrus
 - They invade in 150 years to defeat the Babylonians and bring Israel back into Her land
 - And the king of Persia at that future time is Cyrus the Great
 - He comes from both the North and the East because one parent is a Persian (the east) and the other parent is a Mede (the north)
 - He unites the Medes and Persians to form the Medo-Persian empire
- Such detail is clear evidence of God's omniscience and power
- Isaiah finishes by speaking as if in the future looking back to Isaiah day
 - Behold, I told you this would happen
 - You have to imagine someone in Israel reading the prophet Isaiah during the time of Cyrus' rise to power
 - And they come upon these words written as if in their own day
 - Saying, "See, Isaiah told you about this long before."
 - Therefore, you can know that the Lord is the true God
 - "Formerly I delivered good news..." in the sense that Isaiah wrote this in former time, as seen from the point of view of someone living in the day of Persian conquest