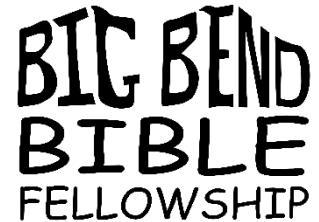


Fear Not!

Isaiah 41

By Scott Huckaby

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Isaiah 41:1-7 – Glory of God over the coastlands (NIV)

“Be silent before me, you islands! Let the nations renew their strength! Let them come forward and speak; let us meet together at the place of judgment. ² “Who has stirred up one from the east, calling him in righteousness to his service? He hands nations over to him and subdues kings before him. He turns them to dust with his sword, to windblown chaff with his bow. ³ He pursues them and moves on unscathed, by a path his feet have not traveled before. ⁴ Who has done this and carried it through, calling forth the generations from the beginning? I, the Lord—with the first of them and with the last—I am he.” ⁵ The islands have seen it and fear; the ends of the earth tremble. They approach and come forward; ⁶ they help each other and say to their companions, “Be strong!” ⁷ The metalworker encourages the goldsmith, and the one who smooths with the hammer spurs on the one who strikes the anvil. One says of the welding, “It is good.” The other nails down the idol so it will not topple.

v1 – Who is God calling to be silent before Him?

Keep silence before Me, O coastlands: The Hebrew word translated coastlands is also translated islands or isles in other passages. The idea is probably best expressed as “distant lands.”

- Why? Because they are coming to God’s courtroom:
Let us come near together for judgment.

Why would the distant peoples who do not know God need their strength?

If you are coming into God’s courtroom, you will need your strength and had better be prepared.

- The problem is that while those who wait upon the LORD have the LORD’s limitless strength, those from distant lands have no god of strength to help them.
- The repetition of the phrase ‘renew their strength’ (cf. 40:31) may well be ironic. But their man-made deities provide no strength!

Will God allow the idol worshipers make their case before Him?

Let them come near, then let them speak: Apparently so, though they must enter His courtroom in silence, out of respect for His majesty.

Why must the idol worshipers enter God’s courtroom in silence?

There are many different reasons for silence. There is the silence of shame, the silence of attention, the silence of submission. The silence of being awe-inspired speechlessness.

v2-3 – Who is the one from the east?

Most commentators believe him to be either Abraham, the patriarch of the Jewish people and the father of the faithful, or Cyrus, the king who joined the Medes and the Persians into a fighting force which conquered Babylon — which, prophetically, is the broad time context Isaiah speaks to.

Who is in control of the course of human events?

This is the question all from distant lands who come to reason with God have to wrestle with. Who has performed and directed history, calling the generations from the beginning?

Is there a point, a direction to human history? Is it just a random, meaningless combination of undirected events?

Is it a cycle, fated to repeat itself endlessly? Or, is there a God in heaven who directs human events, always moving to a final resolution and fulfillment? Our answer to this question influences almost everything in our lives.

v4 – So, who is it that directs the course of human events?

I, the LORD, am the first; and with the last I am He: The LORD God of Israel declares that He has performed and done it, calling the generations from the beginning. He lifts up and puts down kings and nations.

How is God the first and the last?

He is the “bookend” both before and after the saga of human history, starting the story, ending the story, and keeping the whole story together.

- If God is both the first and the last, then He also has authority over everything in-between.

To what end is God directing human history?

There absolutely is a plan of God for human history, and He directs the path of human events toward His designed fulfillment. Our lives are not given over to blind fate, to random meaninglessness, or to endless cycles with no resolution. Instead, the Lord wants all of us to recognize Him and embrace His provision to spend eternity with Him.

If all we knew about Jesus was His words in Revelation 22:13, what could we conclude about Him?

Revelation 22:13 – *I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.*

If the Lord-God is the first and the last according to Isaiah 41:4, and if Jesus is the First and the Last according to Revelation 1:17 and 22:13, since there cannot be two firsts or two lasts, Jesus must be the Lord-God.

v5-6 – What was the reaction of those who did not know God to His revelation?

The coastlands saw it and feared: When they met this God of all authority and power, they feared. They were brought so low by this encounter with God that they had to encourage one another to go on! (*Everyone helped his neighbor, and said to his brother, “Be of good courage!”*)

Why is being fearful when the power of God is revealed a logical reaction?

How else should you react? It is the same kind of reaction Peter had when he saw the great power of Jesus...

Luke 5:8 – *When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!”*

v7 – Did the fear for the Lord cause the unbelievers in distant lands to repent and turn to Him?

Apparently not... They let the fear drive them away from the true God. Instead of surrendering to this God of glory and majesty and power, they turned from Him, and made for themselves their own gods, idols of gold.

Is this a problem today, people making their own god even after seeing the glory of our Creator-God?

Absolutely, this was Paul’s whole message in Romans 1:18-25. Most people have rejected the idea that since there is a creation, there had to be a Creator and replaced Him with their own human-fabricated theory of evolution. Most people today essentially worship evolution... it is not just an un-proven theory, it is “settled science.”

How does creationism vs. evolution impact how a person views the world?

The key difference between creationism and evolution comes down to our certainty about everything we think we

know. Think about it: if our five senses and our brains are merely the product of random, purposeless evolution, how can we be sure that they’re giving us reliable information?

If we are merely the products of random, purposeless evolution, what, do the terms “good” and “evil” mean? “Good” as compared to what? “Evil” as compared to what? Indeed, without a measuring stick (e.g., God’s nature), we have no basis for saying that something is good or evil; it is merely an opinion, which really has no weight in judging how I act or how I judge the acts of others.

- But if there is a God who created us in His image, then we are not only created with a sense of what is right or wrong, but we also have an answer to “Says who?” Good is what comports with God’s nature, and evil is anything that does not.

What are some flaws in the theory of evolution?

Science has yet to provide consistent answers to how evolution operates at the molecular, genetic, or even ecological levels in a consistent and supportable way.

- There is a contradiction between “punctuated equilibrium” and “gradualism” when it comes to mutations. Also, almost all observed mutations are not beneficial. There is no evidence for gradualism in the fossil record.
- There is the problem in projecting “microevolution” into “macroevolution.”
- The irreducible complexity seen in organisms is better explained by intelligent design than evolution.

Isaiah 41:8-20 – God encourages Israel (NIV)

⁸ “But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend, ⁹ I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, ‘You are my servant’; I have chosen you and have not rejected you. ¹⁰ So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. ¹¹ “All who rage against you will surely be ashamed and disgraced; those who oppose you will be as nothing and perish. ¹² Though you search for your enemies, you will not find them. Those who wage war against you will be as nothing at all. ¹³ For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you. ¹⁴ Do not be afraid, you worm Jacob, little Israel, do not fear, for I myself will help you,” declares the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. ¹⁵ “See, I will make you into a threshing sledge, new and sharp, with many teeth. You will thresh the mountains and crush them, and reduce the hills to chaff. ¹⁶ You will winnow them, the wind will pick them up, and a gale will blow them away. But you will rejoice in the Lord and glory in the Holy One of Israel.

¹⁷ “The poor and needy search for water, but there is none; their tongues are parched with thirst. But I the Lord will answer them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them.” ¹⁸ I will make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys.

I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs. ¹⁹ I will put in the desert the cedar and the acacia, the myrtle and the olive. I will set junipers in the wasteland, the fir and the cypress together, ²⁰ so that people may see and know, may consider and understand, that the hand of the Lord has done this, that the Holy One of Israel has created it.

v8 – How was Israel different from those in distant lands?

But you, Israel, are My servant: In contrast to the God-rejecting and idol-making people in distant lands, Israel — remember the name means, “Governed by God” — Israel is the servant of the LORD.

Why is Israel also referred to as Jacob here?

Jacob, whom I have chosen: Lest Israel become proud, God pops their swelling quickly. If they are Israel — “Governed by God” — then they are also Jacob — “Conniving, untrustworthy con-man.” They are only the servant of God because He has chosen them.

How was Israel a friend of God?

The descendants of Abraham My friend: Israel was a friend of God because of their family relationship to Abraham. Since Abraham was the friend of God, so his descendants had a special place before God also.

How are the followers of Jesus a friend of God?

We are friends of because of our relation to the Son of God, Jesus...

John 15:14-15 – *You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.*

v9 – How is it Israel was taken from the ends of the earth?

Before God called them, they were far from Him, like those in distant lands.

- Israel’s special place before God is because of God’s initiative, not because of Israel’s achievement.

Why would God have to remind Israel that He had not cast them away?

Because of the consequences of unfaithfulness, it looked at times like God was no longer helping Israel. But He had made unconditional promises to them starting with the

Abrahamic Covenant that He intended to keep because His very character was at stake.

v10 – Why should Israel fear not?

Fear not, for I am with you: This is both a command and a promise.

- Israel is commanded to fear not. Fear, worry, and anxiety are often sin.
- There is also a promise. We fear not, because the Lord has told us, I am with you. What more do we need? *If God is for us, who can be against us?* (Rom 8:31)

Why should Israel not be dismayed?

for I am your God: It was as if God said to His people, “Remember Me? The God of all power and glory? I’m that One. I am your God.” When people forget the greatness of God, they easily become dismayed.

v11-12 – What would become of the enemies of Israel?

shall be ashamed and disgraced: God will deal with our enemies if we keep our trust in Him. He knows how to make our adversaries — whether they be men or devils — ashamed and disgraced.

- This is an outworking of God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3: *I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you.* God has always crushed anti-Semitic nations and movements, and in the reign of the Messiah, He will crush them completely.

v13 – What was significant of God holding Israel’s right hand?

He would be right beside them encouraging and strengthening them over fear, doubt, and our adversaries.

What is the significance of “fear not” being repeated?

God wanted Israel (and us) to get the message... there is no reason to fear when we are close to Him. When we find ourselves becoming fearful, we need to get closer to Jesus.

v14 – Why is the idea of a worm connected to the name Jacob, but men is connected with the name Israel?

The name Jacob, as applied to Israel here, always points back to Israel’s lowly and deceitful past, so that it is by no means an honor.

How is God Israel’s Redeemer?

God continually restored Israel from the consequences of being unfaithful to Him. And personally, God made provisions for their sin to be forgiven in Jesus. And of course, Israel as a nation would enjoy their status as the preeminent nation on earth during the Millennial Kingdom.

v15 – What does it mean that God would make Israel into a new threshing sledge with sharp teeth?

you shall thresh the mountains and beat them small: God will so help Israel and so empower them, that they will be able to cut down mountains as if they were a great threshing machine, removing mountains and seeing their dust blown away. The point is clear: nothing, not even a mountain, will stand in their way when God helps them.

Matthew 17:20 – *If you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, “Move from here to there,” and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.*

v16 – Why would the Israelites rejoice in the Lord?

When we overcome great obstacles with the help of the LORD, we know it is His work. We rejoice in the LORD, not in ourselves.

v17-18 – What would the Lord do for the needy?

He would not forsake them. For those whose tongues fail for thirst, God sends miraculous supplies of water to them. God has resources and supplies we know nothing about, and He loves to supply us from His hidden resources.

v19 – What will the Lord do along with helping the needy?

I will plant in the wilderness the cedar and the acacia tree: God will also make barren places fruitful, and full of beautiful forests. God can take the most barren wilderness and make it a forest.

- Water and shade are the two great needs of the desert traveler... None of the trees mentioned are fruit trees: the point is shelter, not sustenance.

v20 – Why will God help the needy and revive creation?

That the hand of the LORD has done this, and the Holy One of Israel has created it: When it all takes place, everyone will know this. Miraculous supplies of water and forests in the wilderness are impossible without God, so He gets the glory when the work is done.

Isaiah 41:21-29 – Idolatry on trial (NIV)

²¹ “Present your case,” says the Lord. “Set forth your arguments,” says Jacob’s King. ²² “Tell us, you idols, what is going to happen. Tell us what the former things were, so that we may consider them and know their final outcome. Or declare to us the things to come, ²³ tell us what the future holds, so we may know that you are gods. Do something, whether good or bad, so that we will be dismayed and filled with fear. ²⁴ But you are less than nothing and your works are utterly worthless; whoever chooses you is detestable. ²⁵ “I have stirred up one from the north, and he comes— one from the rising sun who calls on

my name. He treads on rulers as if they were mortar, as if he were a potter treading the clay. ²⁶ Who told of this from the beginning, so we could know, or beforehand, so we could say, ‘He was right’?

No one told of this, no one foretold it, no one heard any words from you. ²⁷ I was the first to tell Zion, ‘Look, here they are!’ I gave to Jerusalem a messenger of good news. ²⁸ I look but there is no one— no one among the gods to give counsel, no one to give answer when I ask them.

²⁹ *See, they are all false! Their deeds amount to nothing; their images are but wind and confusion.*

v21 – To whom did God invite to present their case?

To the idolators. God is fair. He will not condemn idols, the false gods of the nations, and those who worship them, without a fair trial.

- “Let’s hear your side of the story.” Bring forth your strong reasons. “Let’s hear your best arguments.”

Why does God refer to Himself as the King of Jacob?

This is the only place in the Bible where God uses this title. King of Jacob is used only here, but the title king of Israel is used 138 times in the Bible, mostly of men, but of the Lord GOD in Isaiah 44:6 and Zephaniah 3:15, and of Jesus in John 1:49 and 12:13.

- God was the God of Jacob even before he was called Israel... and is the God of the idolators even if they do not recognize it.

v22 – What is God’s question to the idolators?

Why don’t the idols present their case and defend themselves? Because they are dumb statues that can’t speak! So, the questioning moves on, and God examines the defendants.

Let them bring forth and show us what will happen: If these idols really are gods, then they certainly know the future and the past. Then let them speak up.

- Only the Creator God can declare the end from the beginning.

Why would God invite the idols to do good or do evil?

It is as if God stands in a courtroom, questioning a thousand idols of different sizes and designs, and finally cries out, “Do something! Do good or do evil! Can’t you do anything?”

v24 – Why can’t the idols do anything?

Indeed you are nothing: The accusation is made based upon the evidence: your work is nothing; he who chooses you is an abomination.

1 Corinthians 8:4 – *Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one.*

How is the statue-less idolatry of today still evil?

Many still fashion a god of their own opinion. Anything that distracts us from the Creator-God is evil,

v25 – Who would God raise up from the north who would call on His name?

The Lord knows that He will bring Cyrus from the north to conquer the Babylonians, who conquered Judah and Jerusalem and took them captive. God would use Cyrus to allow the Jews in exile to return (Ezra 1).

- Cyrus had the greatest respect for Jehovah, as we can read in his proclamation concerning the freeing of Israel in Ezra 1. In it he states correctly that Jehovah had given him all the kingdoms of the earth.

v26-29 – Who has declared from the beginning, that we may know?

Not the idols; they know nothing. Not man, *for I looked, and there was no man...Who, when I asked of them, could answer a word* (v28).

v27 – Who would God give to Jerusalem who brings good tidings?

Principally His Son, Jesus Christ. There would be others but Jesus would be the ultimate.

v29 – What is the verdict of the idols on trial?

Indeed they are all worthless; their works are nothing: Apart from God, in the grand scheme of things, all of the greatness of man is worthless, and all the great works are nothing. And what of the idols? Their *molded images are wind and confusion.*

This chapter is the great I WILL chapter of the Bible. No fewer than fourteen times in the scope of these verses does God reinforce His authority with the promise, ‘I will.’

- I will strengthen you. (Isaiah 41:10)
- I will help you. (Isaiah 41:10, 13, and 14)
- I will uphold you with My righteous right hand. (Isaiah 41:10)
- I will make you into a new threshing sledge with sharp teeth. (Isaiah 41:15)
- I will open rivers in desolate heights. (Isaiah 41:18)
- I will make the wilderness a pool of water. (Isaiah 41:18)
- I will plant in the wilderness the cedar and the acacia tree. (Isaiah 41:19)
- I will set in the desert the cypress tree. (Isaiah 41:19)
- I will give to Jerusalem one who brings good tidings. (Isaiah 41:27)

This is a remarkable contrast with Isaiah 14 — the ‘I will’ chapter of Satan. Here are the ‘I will’ statements of Satan:

- I will ascend into heaven. (Isaiah 14:13)
- I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. (Isaiah 14:13)
- I will also sit on the mount of the congregation. (Isaiah 14:13)
- I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. (Isaiah 14:14)
- I will be like the Most High. (Isaiah 14:14)

What stands out as the difference between the ‘I will’ statements of Satan and God?

- Satan’s were all proud and self-directed. Every ‘I will’ of the Lord in Isaiah 41 is for the benefit and blessing of His people.
- Though Satan was lifted up in pride, and proclaimed ‘I will,’ none of them came to pass. But each and every one of God’s ‘I will’ statements will be fulfilled.

What applications come to mind from our discussion?

- God is in control of human history... recognizing this has great implications on our own lives.
- Idols are worthless... repent of them!
- Idolatry is still a problem today... don’t replace God with anything.
- Worldview is all-important... those with a biblical worldview will be on the right side of history.
- The theory of evolution has become a huge idol in our day... reject it.
- Since God is in control we should fear not!
- We can count on God’s promises!