

A recent poll showed an 8% decline in Christianity in the USA in just 7 years. The news media informs us on an almost daily basis of a new political scandal. Racial tension is on the rise. Our debt is reaching incomprehensible numbers, while the stock market is reaching record highs. What’s wrong with this picture? We are waiting for the next terrorist plot to unfold. The Middle East is in complete turmoil as a genocide of Christians in that area of the world is underway. It’s not a rosy picture. That is what we see. But what does God see? What is heaven’s perspective?

God’s address to the people of Israel and future captives was a challenge to them see what was actually happening. Many of the first readers of Isaiah’s prophecy probably felt like we do about the condition of the world in their day. The turmoil and national conflicts were just as frequent if not more so. The reign of Manasseh was a sudden decline in the worship of God. Those in power were literally getting away with murder on a frequent basis. Idolatry filled the land. Just imagine how the true believers felt as they watched all that take place then.

It was in such a setting that these words came through Isaiah. *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.* Isaiah 41:1 The coastlands of that day included Philistia, Egypt, Tyre, Sidon, as well as distant lands. God asks them to draw near and quietly listen. Listening to God renews our strength (Isaiah 40:31). God wants even these gentile lands to hear him and find true strength in Him (Isaiah 42:6).

This is an invitation to all people. God is always speaking. Will we come near and quietly listen (John 10:3)? We often run to God in time of need, but we can’t stop talking and sit in silence to hear God’s solution (Habakkuk 2:20). Instead, we dictate to God what we think He should do. Should it not be the other way around? If your strength is sapped away and you don’t know what to do, go listen to God and find your strength renewed (Psalm 27:14).

The next word in the verse is “then.” Then you can speak. Hear God first. Wait on Him. **If we hear what He has to say first, it may change our requests.** I’m as guilty as anyone in bringing my laundry list of things for God to fix before I will stop and listen. Good thing God is patient. This verse has taught me there is a proper order to prayer. Listen first. Let His words strengthen you by giving you a proper perspective. Then speak according to what you have heard.

God speaks; you are strengthened; you approach and then speak. That is when you can hear God’s verdict on what you are asking. “Judgment” is not referring to a sentence for guilt, though it can include that. Judgment is a verdict. It may be, “Go ahead and be blessed.” It may be, “Don’t do it, for if you do, it will cost you dearly.” Or

Commented [PW1]: Isaiah 40:31 (ESV)
³¹ but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

Commented [PW2]: Isaiah 42:6 (ESV)
⁶ “I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations,

Commented [PW3]: John 10:3 (ESV)
³ To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

Commented [PW4]: Habakkuk 2:20 (ESV)
²⁰ But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.”

Commented [PW5]: Psalm 27:14 (ESV)
¹⁴ Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!

it may be to wait for another time. Sometimes there is no answer at all, and that is the answer of “not now.”

² 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. ³ He pursues them and passes on safely, by paths his feet have not trod. Isaiah 41:2-3 God’s question sets us on the right course by asking “who” instead of “what”? We make the mistake of looking to conditions or individuals instead of God who is behind it all. We should search out what He is doing, instead of crediting circumstances alone with any power to direct our course or the world’s direction.

As they listened in silence God asks, “Who stirs up future conquerors?” God is predicting one hundred years in advance how He will raise up Cyrus to return the Jews to the Promised Land. Who gives kings their power and determines the outcome of wars? It is God Almighty (Romans 13:1). He sets up kings and removes them. He often gives a people a king like themselves. We have a difficult time understanding that God can put a murderous despot on a throne. God has His divine purposes. It is often in difficulty that people turn back to God and become serious about faith. We cannot know all God’s reasons, but we can still trust Him.

⁴ Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he. Isaiah 41:4 The second question they were to hear is even more inclusive. Who has planned every generation? God had preordained Cyrus and every life and the length of each before the world began. He is before all things and never changes throughout eternity (Hebrews 13:8). In the fulfilling this prophetic word we should be convinced of the omniscience and sovereignty of God.

This expression of being the first and the last is seen three times in Isaiah (Isaiah 44:6; 48:12). It is also seen three times in Revelation (Revelation 1:17; 2:8; 22:13) where it is applied to Jesus. The first of each set of three contains the “I am he” reference to God’s name. Both sets contain the phrase, “Do not be afraid.” John’s writing is clearly saying that Jesus is the “I am.” He uses the same words (*eigo eimi*) as the Greek version (LXX) of Isaiah. John’s letters also apply “he who is from the beginning” to Jesus (1 John 1:1; 2:13-14).

Jesus sets up kings and removes them. Jesus has determined the generations of man. He is the first and the last, the alpha and the omega (Revelation 1:8).

⁵ The coastlands have seen and are afraid; the ends of the earth tremble; they have drawn near and come. Isaiah 41:5 When we do draw near and hear of impending judgment for rebellion, of the need for God to take away that which our culture depends on so that we will turn to God, we fear and tremble. Last week I told you how we prepare for those times. Get close to God! Be in the center of His will. Tune your ear to the Holy Spirit.

Commented [PW6]: Romans 13:1 (ESV)

¹ Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

Commented [PW7]: Hebrews 13:8 (ESV)

⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Commented [PW8]: Isaiah 44:6 (ESV)

⁶ Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: “I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.

Commented [PW9]: Isaiah 48:12 (ESV)

¹² “Listen to me, O Jacob, and Israel, whom I called! I am he; I am the first, and I am the last.

Commented [PW10]: Revelation 1:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last,

Commented [PW11]: Revelation 2:8 (ESV)

⁸ “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.

Commented [PW12]: Revelation 22:13 (ESV)

¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

Commented [PW13]: 1 John 1:1 (ESV)

¹ That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—

Commented [PW14]: 1 John 2:13-14 (ESV)

¹³ I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father.

¹⁴ I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

Commented [PW15]: Revelation 1:8 (ESV)

⁸ “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

Rebels against God do just the opposite. They turn to idols. ⁶ *Everyone helps his neighbor and says to his brother, "Be strong!"* ⁷ *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.* Isaiah 41:6-7 People within a society can unite together to rebel against God. They come up with human ideas to avoid God's judgments. There is a kind of anti-god comradery. We see it in the rebellions in the wilderness wandering and during the period of the Judges when everyone did what was right in his own eyes (Judges 40:25). We saw it under the northern ten tribes and some of the kings of Judah. We saw it demonstrated against Jesus. History has seen it against the church numerous times in different lands. Today it is evident in the western education system and entertainment. They strengthen one another and boast about how well their idol is welded together and influencing culture.

Isaiah is using a bit of tongue in cheek when he tells us they use nails to fasten it. One little bump and it might fall over. What a contrast with the God who is the beginning and the end. As beautiful as their manmade schemes appear, as convincing as their rhetoric may seem, they have to try hard to secure it against one little bump that will knock down their idolatrous house of cards. Their remark, "It is good," is quite a contrast with the marvel of creation of which God said, "It is good." (Genesis 1:25) Do you see the huge difference in what God does compared to man's pathetic efforts?

Next week we will go into greater depth on the vanity of idols. These first seven verses of the chapter have declared God to be sovereign and His decisions final. He moves kings to carry out His will and the efforts of man to stop Him are nothing. Now God turns to His plan for Israel.

⁸ *But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend;* ⁹ *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";* Isaiah 41:8-9 Remember that this is for those captives that have yet to return to Jerusalem. He reminds them of who they are. They are God's servants. That is how the prophets referred to themselves. It is an honor to be a servant of the most high God. And though they had fallen into idolatry that led to captivity, God had not forgotten them or His promises to the patriarchs. They thought they were cast off, but God had not forsaken them. He was just refining them for what was to come. They needed to recognize the destructiveness of idolatry.

God will take us through whatever it takes to prepare us for the calling He has on our lives. I would never suggest my path for anyone else. Nor would I want your path. We each have the path we need to show us what we need to see and reveal to us what we need to understand to serve our good God.

He hasn't cast you off. It may be tough, but He is preparing you. You are Abraham's heir if you are a person of faith (Romans 4:16). You are chosen to be God's servant, to represent Him in the earth. But we all need to experience God's preparation and hear

Commented [PW16]: Judges 21:25 (ESV)

²⁵ In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Commented [PW17]: Genesis 1:25 (ESV)

²⁵ And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

Commented [PW18]: Romans 4:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,

His words of encouragement. ¹⁰ *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.* Isaiah 41:10 If Almighty God is with us, do we have anything to fear? I'm concerned about the process but I don't fear the outcome.

Someone told me they had a dream that I jumped off a high cliff diving down into a little pool of water. They said it looked real risky. I immediately knew it was abandoning oneself to God that looks risky to the world (1Corinthians 2:14). We leap out in faith telling God we'll go wherever He says and do whatever He tells us regardless of the cost. That looks risky. But if you have faith, it's a sure thing. If God is with you, you may lose your life but you will win (Matthew 10:39).

If God is your God you should not be dismayed regardless of the circumstances that come your way. You can know He is the One that allowed them to be what they are and that He already has a plan to see you through. Dismay is a sign of a lack of trust in His power and sovereignty.

He promises to strengthen us, help us, and uphold us with His righteous right hand. The right hand is the hand of power and authority. What a promise to cling to when we feel like the end of our captivity will never come. This is a verse we should all memorize for those times when we are tempted to fear and be dismayed.

¹¹ *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.* ¹² *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.* Isaiah 41:11-12 Justice sometimes happens quite quickly, and other times it may only come on the Day of Judgment. But it will come. If you stand for righteousness and act as you are led by the Word and the Holy Spirit, if you lean upon the Lord and are upheld by His righteous right hand, you will prevail in the end. The righteous judge will rule in your favor because of Jesus' sacrifice. The mouth of liars will be stopped. The motivations of their hearts will be revealed (Psalm 44:21). Their self-serving agendas will be clear for all to see. If they have not repented and trusted in the sacrifice of Jesus, they will be as nothing and perish. You will never have to face them again. They will never harm another godly soul.

¹³ *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."* Isaiah 41:13 God promised to uphold us with His righteous right hand, and here He promises to hold our right hand (Psalm 139:9-10). This is the Creator of the universe telling us how intimate and caring He is with us. I was thinking about how He upholds us with His righteous right hand while holding our right hand. My granddaughter walked up to the front of the church during the Call to Worship and sat down by me. I put my arm around her and then she held my other hand. There it was! After a few minutes she got up and went back to where she was sitting. Thanks Lord! What an intimate picture!

While He directs the nations and sets up kings, He is right here with you and me, right arm around us while holding our right hand. He is transcendent and immanent. He is

Commented [PW19]: 1 Corinthians 2:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

Commented [PW20]: Matthew 10:39 (ESV)

³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Commented [PW21]: Psalm 44:21 (ESV)

²¹ would not God discover this? For he knows the secrets of the heart.

Commented [PW22]: Psalm 139:9-10 (ESV)

⁹ If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.

everywhere in space and time, and right here with you and me this very moment. This is the God who tells us we don't need to be afraid. He will finish what He started in us. He will see us through the battles and pain that are a part of life in this world. And He will see us safely home to glory. Don't be afraid. In Christ we have nothing to fear. His grace will always be sufficient for our every experience (2Corinthians 12:9).

If Almighty God is the One who helps us, can we ever lack the strength or assistance we need to endure? Would you let this verse be the voice of the LORD to you right now? *¹³ 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."* Isaiah 41:13 What a comfort this must have been to the captives in Babylon.

¹⁴ 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. Isaiah 41:14 In case we didn't hear the "fear not" in verses 10 and 13, He repeats it for the third time, reminding them that if God is for them, who can be against them (Romans 8:31). He is the Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. He took on the gods of Egypt and Canaan and showed them to be powerless. He has all power and knows all things. If He is the One that helps us, why would we fear?

This is the first mention in Isaiah of God being our Redeemer. There are two words in Hebrew for "redeemer." The one used here is used for the duty of a kinsman. You might recall how Boaz became the kinsman redeemer for Ruth, buying her dead husband's property and marrying her (Ruth 4:9-10). It can encompass avenging a wrong done to a kinsman, or redeeming them from a debt. The choice of words here looked forward to the Word becoming flesh so that have God as our kinsman redeeming us from our sin debt that held us captive.

When God asked Job a few questions about creation and revealed some of His glory to Job, Job said he was of small account (Job 40:4). God acknowledges that we are pretty insignificant compared to Him. He calls Jacob/Israel a worm, a little dirt eating slimy food for birds and fish. That should help us deal with our pride. But God holds the right hand of us little dirt sucking worms. He tells us He is for us and not against us. That makes us treasured little worms indeed. So treasured are we that He would send His Son to be a worm like us. That is how Jesus saw Himself on the cross (Psalm 22:6). God helps us and strengthens us. And one day He'll transform us into the butterflies He intends for us to be.

¹⁵ 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; ¹⁶ 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. Isaiah 41:15-16 A threshing sled is several boards fastened together on the bottom of which are inserted sharp rocks every few inches. It is dragged through the grain to break it up and loosen the kernels. Armageddon will be such a day when those who hate God will be on the receiving end of justice.

Commented [PW23]: 2 Corinthians 12:9 (ESV)

⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Commented [PW24]: Romans 8:31 (ESV)

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Commented [PW25]: Ruth 4:9-10 (ESV)

⁹ Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, "You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and to Mahlon.

¹⁰ Also Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place. You are witnesses this day."

Commented [PW26]: Job 40:4 (ESV)

⁴ "Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth.

Commented [PW27]: Psalm 22:6 (ESV)

⁶ But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people.

Then when the books are settled and evil is purged from us by an act of God, we will rejoice at the outworking of this plan we have watched unfold. Good will prevail. Evil will be punished. Righteousness will reign. We will not glory in man or his passing illusion of power and wealth (Proverbs 23:4,5), but in the Holy One of Israel.

¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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. Isaiah 41:17-18 Israel can be a very dry land. It often rains in November and February with very little rain the rest of the year. There is a constant battle over water. Animal husbandry and agriculture compete for every drop that comes from the few springs and the Jordan River. Like our own area, a sudden cloud burst can have the arroyos (wadis) raging, only to be dry in a week's time. While God is speaking of a future blessed time of an abundance of water, He is primarily addressing the spiritual thirst of the people. At the well in Samaria, ¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." John 4:13-14 Jesus was speaking of life giving water for all who would come to Him and drink (John 7:37). He is the fulfillment of the promise in Isaiah.

¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ 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. Isaiah 41:19-20 This passage is also a physical promise that has a spiritual analogy. It has come to pass in our day. Look at these before and after pictures just one hundred years apart. The very trees mentioned here fill what was once a barren land.

Previously we saw trees refer to people such as the forest that represented the Assyrian army (Isaiah 10:18). Not only is Israel bursting at the seams with residents, but Messianic Jews and Arabs are increasing in the land. No one thought that was possible.

Do you see and know, do you consider and understand together, that the hand of the LORD has done this, the Holy One of Israel has created it. He told us before it came to pass so that we might know and believe.

The jump is not risky. God has proven He knows the end from the beginning. What is risky is going the way of the world. Do you recognize that you are poor and in need of the Redeemer? Is your spiritual tongue parched with thirst? Jesus says, "Come to me and drink!" Let him uphold you with his right hand and take hold of your right hand. Know that the One who is the first and the last has all things under His control.

Questions:

1 What does the passage suggest is the first thing we should do when we pray?

2 Who appoints kings and decides the outcome of wars?

Commented [PW28]: Proverbs 23:4-5 (ESV)

⁴ Do not toil to acquire wealth; be discerning enough to desist.

⁵ When your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven.

Commented [PW29]: John 7:37 (ESV)

³⁷ On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

Commented [PW30]: Isaiah 10:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ The glory of his forest and of his fruitful land the LORD will destroy, both soul and body, and it will be as when a sick man wastes away.

3 How are "first and the last" sayings in Isaiah and Revelation similar?

4 What do these sayings show us?

5 How does Isaiah mock idols?

6 What are the first 7 verses about?

7 What is the focus of the rest?

8 Why should we be fearless?

9 What wonderful promises are here?

10 Who is a worm? How is that good?

11 What proofs has God given us that He can be trusted?