



*"THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME"*  
ISAIAH 61:1

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## THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

### CHAPTER 41

AND HIS NAME  
WILL BE CALLED  
WONDERFUL COUNSELOR,  
MIGHTY GOD,  
EVERLASTING FATHER,  
PRINCE OF  
PEACE.  
ISAIAH 9:6

Isaiah is called "The Book of Salvation." The name *Isaiah* means "the salvation of the Lord" or "the Lord is salvation." Isaiah is the first book containing the writings of the prophets of the Bible. And the author, Isaiah, who is called the Prince of Prophets, shines above all the other writers and prophets of Scripture. His mastery of the language, his rich and vast vocabulary, and his poetic skill have earned him the title, "Shakespeare of the Bible." He was educated, distinguished, and privileged, yet remained a deeply spiritual man. He was committed to obedience over the long haul of his 55-60 year ministry as a prophet of God. He was a true patriot who loved his country and his people. Strong tradition suggests that he died a martyr's death under the reign of King Manasseh by being placed within the hollow of a tree trunk and sawed in two.

Isaiah's calling as a prophet was primarily to the nation of Judah (the southern kingdom) and to Jerusalem, urging the people to repent from their sins and return to God. He also foretold the coming of the Messiah and the salvation of the Lord. Many of his prophecies predicted events that occurred in Isaiah's near future, yet at the same time they foretold the events of the distant future (such as the coming of the Messiah), and even some events still to come in the last days (such as the second coming of Christ).

In summary, the message of Isaiah is that salvation comes from God—not man. God alone is Savior, Ruler and King.

Commentary on the book of Isaiah is by noted theologian Rev. William G. Most (1914-1999). His contributions to theology have been recognized all over the world. He published 12 books and a host of articles on topics ranging from biblical studies to Mariology and Latin grammar.

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## **Book of Isaiah**

### **Summary of Chapter 41**

God Sends Cyrus. Chapter 41. Summary and Comments

Solemnly the prophet bids the foreign lands to be silent, and to come to a place of judgment for a lawsuit to see if God is true or not.

Who has stirred up someone from the east and called him in righteousness to serve Him? Of course it is God, who has called Cyrus to serve Him by conquering Babylon and then releasing Israel from captivity and even encouraging them to rebuild the temple.

Isaiah says God has done this in righteousness. For God to observe the covenant was

righteous, for He could not enter into a covenant, and then refuse to fulfill what He had promised. He promised to save Israel if they were faithful, to punish if they were not. They had deserved punishment, and by this point, had fully received it. So now it is time as righteousness says to rescue them. For that, He calls Cyrus of Persia.

The prophet says God hands over nations to Cyrus. On God's handling of things in the external economy cf. our comments on 10:5 ff. above. He subdues the king before Cyrus. Then "he" turns them to dust with his sword. The "he" here is probably Cyrus. But soon: God asks: Who has done this? It is the Lord who has predicted it and has done it. In contrast, the idols have never predicted anything and brought it to fulfillment: they have done nothing at all.

But now that their debt has been paid by the exile, He calls Israel His servant and friend. He says He took them from the ends of the earth. This is probably a hyperbolic expression for the fact that God called Abraham, the beginning of the chosen people, from Ur of the Chaldees.

He then says He has chosen and not rejected them. We must ask: Why did He chose Israel for special favor? In Dt 7:7-8 we read that God did not chose them because they were the greatest of nations, but because He loved them, and was keeping the promise He swore to Abraham.

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To love is to will good to another for the other's sake. When we humans love, we need a starter for that, seeing something fine in another. But God is the only one who can love without a starter. What good did He see in me when He first loved me? Nothing, for I was then nothing. And if he looked a bit farther up and saw me already in existence, what good did He see there that He had not put there? Nothing at all. 1 Cor 4:7: "What have you that you have not received?"

So Israel did nothing to earn the beginning of the favor they received - we speak of the beginning, since in Ex. 19:5: "If you really hearken to my voice and keep my covenant, you will be my special people." If you obey, you get favor. They had done very badly in the matter of obeying, and had received their punishment. Now, gladly He says that is all over, and He can begin to give favor within that covenant, in righteousness as we said above.

But we ask further: Why did He make the choice of that people for such special treatment? It seems the reason is the same as that for which He chooses people for the special favor of being full members of His Church, as He says in Romans 8:29ff and all through to the end of chapter 11. It was not for merits. What was it for then? Paul in Romans does not say what for. But at the end of 1 Cor 1 we notice that God has chosen the weak to confound the strong. In Ezek 5:6-7 God told the prophet: "I am not sending you to a people with obscure speech and difficult language. . . . If I were to send you to these, they would listen to you, but the house of Israel will refuse to listen to you, since they will not listen to me. For the whole house of Israel is hard of brow and obstinate in heart." And Ezek 5:6: "She [Jerusalem] has changed my judgments into wickedness more than the gentiles." And so when God sent Jonah to the pagan Nineveh, he found they welcomed him at once, in contrast to what happened to the prophets sent to the Holy People of Israel. The <Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael>, a late 4th century work, a Midrash on Exodus, imagines Jonah as saying that since the gentiles are more inclined to repent, he might be bringing on the condemnation of Israel by going to Nineveh.

Similarly in the New Testament, the parable of the good Samaritan pictures two officials of the holy people passing by the wounded man, but a Samaritan takes good care of him. And in Luke 17:11-19 ten lepers are cured; the only one who came back to say thank Jesus was an outsider, a Samaritan. Cf. also Matthew 11:21.

So we gather that the reason was not only not merits, but instead greater need: they were, as Ezek 3 and 5 said, more hard of heart than the gentiles.

This is quite uncomplimentary to Israel - but also to those chosen for full membership in the Church of Christ.

Isaiah continues saying that all who rage against them will be ashamed and disgraced and become as nothing. If they look for their erstwhile enemies, they will not even be able to find them.

But then, to try to keep Israel from pride: "Do not be afraid, O worm Jacob. . . . Your redeemer is the Holy One of Israel." Redeemer here is <goel> the next of kin who has the right and the duty to rescue his kinsman who has fallen into captivity or terrible straits. So God by the covenant became their kinsman, as signified by the ceremony of the sprinkling of the blood at the foot of Mount Sinai.

By His power they will thresh the mountains and winnow the hills. But you will rejoice in the Lord and glory in the Holy One of Israel. Holy One as we saw above refers to the fact that He is perfectly righteous, both in rewarding and in punishing. To be righteous in rewarding, He created a covenant, so that if they fulfilled their condition, He would owe it to Himself to do what He had said. He loves to have one thing in place to serve as the reason for granting a second thing, even though that first thing does not really move Him: St. Thomas I. 19. 5. c.

So <if> they are poor and needy and search for water and do not find it, the Lord will take care of them and turn the desert into pools of water. We filled in the word <if> on the ground that we could take the structure as paratactic, i.e., one in which subordinate conjunctions are not expressed, but carried by the thought.

After all of this, He returns to the lawsuit: Who has predicted all these things and has brought them to pass? Not the idols, which do nothing at all. But the God of Israel.

So to help them He again says He has stirred up one from the north, Cyrus. Here He says from the north, before He had spoken of the East. Really Cyrus came from lands to the East, but came north around the upper bend of the fertile crescent. Only God predicted and brought to reality these things, not the dumb idols who cannot do anything at all.

End of Chapter 41