

Bible Study Notes - Isaiah Chapters 41 - 43

Chapter 41 Study Notes

The Helper of Israel – Verses 1-29

1 "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 each helps the other and says to his brother, "Be strong!" 7 The craftsman encourages the goldsmith, and he who smooths with the hammer spurs on him who strikes the anvil. He says of the welding, "It is good." He nails down the idol so it will not topple. 8 "But you, O 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, O worm Jacob, O little Israel, 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 pines 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. 21 "Present your case," says the LORD. "Set forth your arguments," says Jacob's King. 22 "Bring in [your idols] to tell us 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; he who 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 tidings. 28 I look but there is no one-- no one among them 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.

41:1-29 The "one from the east" is Cyrus II of Persia, who would be king within a century and a half (he is also mentioned by name in 44:28). He conquered Babylon in 539 B.C. and was responsible for the decree releasing the exiled Jews to return to Jerusalem. God could even use a pagan ruler to protect and care for Israel, because God is in control of all world empires and politics.

41:4 Each generation gets caught up in its own problems, but God's plan embraces all generations. When your great-grandparents lived, God worked personally in the lives of his people. When your great-grandchildren live, God will still work personally in the lives of his people. He is the only one who sees 100 years from now as clearly as 100 years ago. When you are concerned about the future, talk with God, who knows the generations of the future as well as he knows the generations of the past.

41:8-10 God chose Israel through Abraham because he wanted to, not because the people deserved it (Deuteronomy 7:6-8; 9:4-6). Although God chose the Israelites to represent him to the world, they failed to do this; so God punished them and sent them into captivity. Now all believers are God's chosen people, and all share the responsibility of representing him to the world. One day God will bring all his faithful people together. We need not fear because (1) God is with us ("I am with you"); (2) God has established a relationship with us ("I am your God"); and (3) God gives us assurance of his strength, help, and victory over sin and death. Are you aware of all the ways God has helped you?

41:21-24 Israel was surrounded by many nations whose gods supposedly had special powers, such as helping crops grow and providing victories in war. These gods, however, failed to deliver. A god with limited or no power at all is not really a god. When we are tempted to put our trust in something other than the living God—money, career, family, or even military power—we should stop and ask some serious questions. Will it come through? Will it unfailingly provide what I am looking for? God delivers. When he makes a promise, he keeps it. He is completely trustworthy.

Chapter 42 Study Notes

The Servant of the LORD - Verses 1-9 1 "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. 2 He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. 3 A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; 4 he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope." 5 This is what God the LORD says-- he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it: 6 "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, 7 to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. 8 "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to

another or my praise to idols. 9 See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you."

42:1-4 These verses are quoted in Matthew 12:18-21 with reference to Christ. The chosen servant reveals a character of gentleness, encouragement, justice, and truth. When you feel broken and bruised or burned out in your spiritual life, God won't step on you or toss you aside as useless, but will gently pick you up. God's loving attributes are desperately needed in the world today. Through God's Spirit, we can show such sensitivity to people around us, reflecting God's goodness and honesty to them.

42:1-9 Sometimes called the Servant Song, these verses are about the Servant-Messiah, not the servant Cyrus (described in chapter 41). Israel and the Messiah are both often called servant. Israel, as God's servant, was to help bring the world to a knowledge of God. The Messiah, Jesus, would fulfill this task and show God himself to the world.

42:6-7 Part of Christ's mission on earth was to demonstrate God's righteousness and to be a light for the Gentiles (to all nations). Through Christ, all people have the opportunity to share in his mission. God calls us to be servants of his Son, demonstrating God's righteousness and bringing his light. What a rare privilege it is to help the Messiah fulfill his mission! But we must seek his righteousness (Matthew 6:33) before we demonstrate it to others, and let his light shine in us before we can be lights ourselves (Matthew 5:16; 2 Corinthians 4:6).

Song of Praise to the LORD - Verses 10-17

10 Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise from the ends of the earth, you who go down to the sea, and all that is in it, you islands, and all who live in them. **11** Let the desert and its towns raise their voices; let the settlements where Kedar lives rejoice. Let the people of Sela sing for joy; let them shout from the mountaintops. **12** Let them give glory to the LORD and proclaim his praise in the islands. **13** The LORD will march out like a mighty man, like a warrior he will stir up his zeal; with a shout he will raise the battle cry and will triumph over his enemies. **14** "For a long time I have kept silent, I have been quiet and held myself back. But now, like a woman in childbirth, I cry out, I gasp and pant. **15** I will lay waste the mountains and hills and dry up all their vegetation; I will turn rivers into islands and dry up the pools. **16** I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them. **17** But those who trust in idols, who say to images, 'You are our gods,' will be turned back in utter shame.

42:10 Look at all that the Lord will do for us and through us (42:6-9)! Majestic works prompt majestic responses. Do you really appreciate the good that God does for you and through you? If so, let your praise to him reflect how you really feel.

Israel Blind and Deaf - Verses 18-25

18 "Hear, you deaf; look, you blind, and see! **19** Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like the messenger I send? Who is blind like the one committed to me, blind like the servant of the LORD? **20** You have seen many things, but have paid no attention; your ears are open, but you hear nothing." **21** It pleased the LORD for the sake of his righteousness to make his law great and glorious. **22** But this is a people plundered and looted, all of them trapped in pits or hidden away in prisons. They have become plunder, with no one to rescue them; they have been made loot, with no

one to say, "Send them back." **23** Which of you will listen to this or pay close attention in time to come? **24** Who handed Jacob over to become loot, and Israel to the plunderers? Was it not the LORD, against whom we have sinned? For they would not follow his ways; they did not obey his law. **25** So he poured out on them his burning anger, the violence of war. It enveloped them in flames, yet they did not understand; it consumed them, but they did not take it to heart.

42:19-20 How could Israel and Judah be God's servants and yet be so blind? How could they be so close to God and see so little? Jesus condemned the religious leaders of his day for the same disregard of God (John 9:39-41). Yet do we not fail in the same way? Sometimes partial blindness—seeing but not understanding, or knowing what is right but not doing it—can be worse than not seeing at all.

42:23 We may condemn our predecessors for their failures, but we are twice as guilty if we repeat the same mistakes that we recognize as failures.

We may be so ready to direct God's message at others that we can't see how it touches our own lives. Make sure you are willing to take your own advice as you teach or lead.

Chapter 43 Study Notes

Israel's Only Savior - Verses 1-13

1 But now, this is what the LORD says-- he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. 2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. 3 For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead. 4 Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give men in exchange for you, and people in exchange for your life. 5 Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. 6 I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth-- 7 everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made." 8 Lead out those who have eyes but are blind, who have ears but are deaf. 9 All the nations gather together and the peoples assemble. Which of them foretold this and proclaimed to us the former things? Let them bring in their witnesses to prove they were right, so that others may hear and say, "It is true." 10 "You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. 11 I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior. 12 I have revealed and saved and proclaimed-- I, and not some foreign god among you. You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "that I am God. 13 Yes, and from ancient days I am he. No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?"

43:1-28 Chapter 42 ends with God's sorrow over the spiritual decay of his people. In chapter 43, God says that despite the people's spiritual failure, he will show them mercy, bring them back from captivity, and restore them. He would give them an outpouring of love, not wrath. Then the world would know that God alone had done this.

43:1-4 God created the people of Israel, and they were special to him. God redeemed them and called them by name to be those who belong to him. God protected Israel in times of trouble. We are important to God, too. If we claim to belong to God and bear his wonderful name, we must never do anything that would bring him shame.

43:2 Going through rivers of difficulty will either cause you to drown or force you to grow stronger. If you go in your own strength, you are more likely to drown. If you invite the Lord to go with you, he will protect you.

43:3 God gave other nations to Persia in exchange for returning the Jews to their homeland. Egypt, Cush, and parts of Arabia (Seba) had attacked Persia, and the Persians defeated them.

43:5-6 Isaiah was speaking primarily of Israel's return from Babylon. But there is a broader meaning: All God's people will be regathered when Christ comes to rule in peace over the earth.

43:10-11 Israel's task was to be a witness (44:8), telling the world who God is and what he has done. Believers today share the responsibility of being God's witnesses. Do people know what God is like through your words and example? They cannot see God directly, but they can see him reflected in you.

God's Mercy and Israel's Unfaithfulness - Verses 14-28

14 This is what the LORD says-- your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "For your sake I will send to Babylon and bring down as fugitives all the Babylonians, in the ships in which they took pride.¹⁵ I am the LORD, your Holy One, Israel's Creator, your King." 16 This is what the LORD says-- he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters, 17 who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick: 18 "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.¹⁹ See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. 20 The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, 21 the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise. 22 "Yet you have not called upon me, O Jacob, you have not wearied yourselves for me, O Israel. 23 You have not brought me sheep for burnt offerings, nor honored me with your sacrifices. I have not burdened you with grain offerings nor wearied you with demands for incense. 24 You have not bought any fragrant calamus for me, or lavished on me the fat of your sacrifices. But you have burdened me with your sins and wearied me with your offenses. 25 "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more. 26 Review the past for me, let us argue the matter together; state the case for your innocence. 27 Your first father sinned; your spokesmen rebelled against me. 28 So I will disgrace the dignitaries of your temple, and I will consign Jacob to destruction and Israel to scorn.

43:15-21 This section pictures a new exodus for a people once again oppressed, as the Israelites had been as slaves in Egypt before the Exodus. They would cry to God, and again he would hear and deliver them. A new exodus would take place through a new wilderness. The past miracles were nothing compared to what God would do for his people in the future.

43:22-24 A sacrifice required both giving up a valuable animal and pleading with God for forgiveness. But the people presented God with sins instead of sacrifices. Can you imagine bringing the best of your sins to God's altar? This ironic picture shows the depths to which Israel had sunk. What do you present to God—your sins, or a plea for his forgiveness?

43:25 How tempting it is to remind someone of a past offense! But when God forgives our sins, he totally forgets them. We never have to fear that he will remind us of them later. Because God forgives our sins, we need to forgive others.