

"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!" (Isaiah 41:10)

In last week's lesson on Isaiah 40:21-31, the great prophet Isaiah wrote what one commentator called "the greatest piece of poetic literature ever written," extolling the God of Israel as Creator and Ruler of all the world--and "the One in whom all the people were to put their trust"!

Constable describes Him as "the incomparable, transcendent God who not only created the world but presides over all its affairs"!

Isaiah's intent in writing this chapter (and those to follow) was to encourage "His chosen people," as they about to be taken off into Babylonian captivity, to continue to depend on, and submit to, Him! The God over all, who could--and would--deliver them (eventually)!

Isaiah, in fact, closes chapter 40 with the assurance that "they who wait on 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"! (A passage which would continue to encourage those who trust in the Lord down through the generations, including to our day!)

In Tuesday night's lesson, on Isaiah 41:1-30, this message of hope and comfort is extended to all the "peoples" of the "coastlands," including all the Gentile nations surrounding Israel and the Mediterranean Sea--and Wiersbe adds, "to the most distant places from the holy land"! (Motyer notes that "the heart of Isaiah's message is that the Gentiles--one day--are to be fellow-heirs with Israel," and that "the presentation of judgment is more invitational than confrontational"!)

The Lord would "arouse one from the east" (later identified as Cyrus, king of Persia), Isaiah writes in Isaiah 41:2, who would be used by God "to perform His righteous work on earth" by defeating other nations for the sake of His people, and making it possible for the Jewish captives to return to their land! (Motyer notes that "every movement in world affairs originates in heaven, and that the Lord is the initiator, purposing and achieving that which accords with His righteous nature and policies"! A.T. Pierson used to say that "history is His story"!)

Meanwhile, rather than "waiting on the Lord," the (other) nations--out of fear--would turn to their idols for help! Wiersbe writes that "with keen satire, Isaiah describes a pitiful scene of various workmen helping each other manufacture a god who could not help them"!

Constable notes that while verses 1-7 record a "near prophecy" of the coming Cyrus, and address the plight of the pagan nations, exposing the uselessness of their gods, verses 8-20 record "far prophecy" of Israel, and address the assurance of its final deliverance!

In verse 9 the Lord reminds His people that He has called them "from the remotest part of the earth" to be His servant and, in verse 10, that "they need not fear for He was with them...and was their God, and would strengthen them, and surely help them, and surely uphold them with His right hand"! (Wiersbe notes that as the Jewish remnant would face the challenge of the long journey home and the difficult task of rebuilding, they could think of many causes for fear! But there was "one big reason" not to be afraid: the Lord was with them and would bring it to pass!)

In verse 14, the Lord restated His promise that He was with them and that they need not fear--comparing them to a "worm" that was weak and vulnerable, but with a "next of kin" (i.e., a Redeemer!)-

-the Holy One of Israel, who would make them strong enough to "thresh the mountains" (figuratively representing the warring foreign nations)!

And, finally (in verses 17-20), the Lord promised that though Israel was presently (picturesquely speaking) in a drought-like condition, He would bring them into "a paradisiacal garden-like existence--like a desert becoming a garden with luxuriant vegetation (reminding us of Israel's wandering in the wilderness, and suggesting a return to Edenic conditions--in the "eschatological day" to come)!

All this, verse 20 says, so the nations (and all the world) "would 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"!

Isaiah is obviously looking beyond the return of His people from Babylon to a future kingdom "when the wilderness and the desert will be glad... and blossom"! (Isaiah 35:1) What a day that will be!

Meanwhile--do not fear, for God is with us!

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