

An Invitation to Trust

1. When have you struggled with feeling your faith is “inadequate?”

In the second half of Isaiah's book, a new historical situation is anticipated. In the chapters that follow, the prophet looks beyond the immediate events of his day—into the centuries to come. He sees the captivity as past, although it did not begin until about a century after his lifetime. His new message of consolation and comfort (chapters 40-66) is directed to the remnant of Judah, now living in Babylon. Even though only a small remnant survived, it was enough to preserve the nation for another century.

Out of that ruin and destruction, God will bring a cleansed people through whom He will have an opportunity to demonstrate, as never before, that He alone is God. He will show the world His mighty power by delivering the Jewish remnant through a pagan emperor. Through these surprising historical events, God will prove that the greatest of all the pagan gods—the Babylonian ones—are helpless before Him.

Chapters 41-48 continue the same theme of chapter 40 and provide further proof of the infinite power and majesty of the Holy One.

2. To orient yourself to this section, skim through chapters 40-48. Jot down any key words or phrases that you discover.

If this is the first time you have studied these chapters, don't try to absorb every detail; instead, try to let the character of God overwhelm you and alter your perspective of the world.

Read Isaiah 41 in one sitting. You may benefit by reading it in the Amplified Version. Note: the Hebrew word for “islands” (41:1, 5) is a technical term for Gentile world.

3. Verses 1-4 and 21-29 picture a courtroom-like setting where God sets forth His case, and challenges His rivals to refute His sovereignty. This is a figurative way of bringing home to them some great issues that have to be settled. **Carefully re-read** these sections in another translation before answering the questions.
 - a. Why does God summon the nations to enter His courtroom “in silence”?
 - b. Why does He advise the nations to renew their strength?

4. Both Israel and the nations were inclined to think the Lord was no greater than the pagan nations and their idols. After all, it appeared that Assyria and Babylon had subdued Israel by the might of their gods.
 - a. How does the Lord counter the belief that the nations and their idols are as great as He (vv. 2-4)?
 - b. Where do the would-be conquerors come from according to vv. 2a, 25?
 - c. Whose purposes are they serving (v. 2b)?
 - d. How are their victories to be explained (vv. 2c-3)?
5. In summing up His case, how does the Lord's identity authenticate His claims in verse 4?
6. What does it mean that God is both "the first" and "the last?" (Compare Revelation 1:8, 22:13.)

The actual example quoted by the prophet proved to be Cyrus, the Persian, who originated in the East and the North in reference to Palestine (Isaiah 44:28, 45:1). During the time the Jews were exiled to Babylon, Cyrus was beginning to make great conquests, and many nations were becoming alarmed by his success. The exiles were in a position to see for themselves the correspondence between Isaiah's prophecies and the developing events. Refer to the Isaiah Timeline for the broader historical perspective.

7. What would it mean to these humiliated exiles to consider that God was influencing all of world history in order to bring about their deliverance?
8. Verses 5-7 describe the reaction of the nations as they try to withstand the invasion of Cyrus the Great. What strikes you the most about this ironic setting?

9. a. A second trial scene is pictured in verses 21-29. Here God calls the idols and their worshippers to set forth their case. How are the false gods challenged to prove their divinity?
- b. What was the outcome of the trial? (To catch the effect, allow a silence between verses 23 and 24.)

Note: The Hebrew word translated *abomination* (NASB, KJV) reveals the seriousness of the ruling. This word is usually reserved for heathen rites or idols (e.g. 44:19). When referring to the worshippers of the Living God, it shows how shamefully vile it is for them to put their faith in a lie. (Compare Romans 1:22-25.)

10. How does God prove His sole deity and uniqueness to Israel and the nations (vv. 25-29)? Refer to 2 Chronicles 36:23 for the fulfillment of this prophecy.

Today, idolatry is still an abomination. Though few bow down to statues, the modern world is still in its grip. *Money, possessions, status, people, sex, food, and the natural world, are among the false gods of our time.* Even if we do not give our devotion to one of these idols, we are often guilty of trying to make God in our image, molding Him to fit our expectations, desires, and circumstances. When we do this, we end up worshipping “self” rather than the God who created us.

Examine your own heart:

- What is your favorite image of God? Is it biblical? Is it adequate? Do you need to destroy it in order to worship the immeasurably powerful God who delivered you from the bondage to sin?
 - Ask yourself, “Do I take idolatry as seriously as God?” Lay your heart open to God in prayer as you ponder this question. Allow Him to confront you as the Holy One of Israel.
11. After a time of personal reflection and prayer, tell how God has spoken to you in these matters.

In the next segment (verses 8-20), the attention shifts from the idolatrous nations to the nation of Israel. **Re-read** this passage carefully. Notice the contrast between the tone God uses with the nations when He brings them to court (41:1-4), and the deep affection He expresses here in approaching His people (41:8-20).

12. What is the significance of the terms God uses to address the exiles (vv.8-9)?

13. What three pictures of comfort does Isaiah give in this section to strengthen Israel and calm their fears in these traumatic times?

Verses 8-13

Verses 14-16

Verses 17-20

Saturate your soul with the images of God in these verses until you feel refreshed and strong again.

14. How has this portion of Isaiah brought you the encouragement you need today?

15. How is God's dependability and faithfulness to His people bound up with His own divine holy nature (41:14, 16, 20)?

16. How will this passage help you trust God this week? Pick one or two verses that were significant to you to meditate and dwell upon.