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Who Has Stirred Up the One from the East?

41: 1-7

Who has stirred up the one from the east? DIG: Having reassured the exiled Jews in Chapter 40, whom does God address here? What do you picture is happening to these nations? The one from the east was Cyrus, the Persian king who overthrew Babylon in 538 BC (Isaiah 45:1-7). What is God saying about Himself by claiming that He is the One behind Cyrus' success? Why was the victory of Cyrus good news for the Jewish exiles in Babylon (2 Chron 36:22-23)? How are the other nations reacting to this onward march of Cyrus' army in 41:5-7? How is their response different from the one God urges upon the Jews in 40:8-10?

REFLECT: What world problems today seem to be beyond solution? What forces in the world appear to you to be out of control? Do you react to these problems with: Helplessness? Cynicism? Sorrow? Disgust? Hope? Why? What does this chapter show us of God's involvement in human history? How should this affect our attitude toward world problems?



This is the first of several more trial scenes that are common in this part of the book (also see **41:21-29, 42:18-25, 43:8-13, 44:6-20, 45:20-25**). **Isra'el** is the intended audience. There is no doubt about the outcome. **God** is the judge and jury, bailiff and prosecutor. **He** summons the court, makes **His** case and then declares the verdict. **Be silent before Me, you islands (41:1a)!** Of the fifteen occurrences of **islands** in the TaNaKh, fourteen are in **Isaiah**. Together **the islands** and **the**

nations in the next sentence suggest the ends of the earth, therefore, all the people in the world. **Let the Gentile nations renew their strength! Let them come forward and speak; let us meet together at the place of judgment (41:1b).** Since **Isaiah** was writing in advance for the Jewish people who would be enslaved in Babylon, this **near historical prophecy** points to the coming of **Cyrus (44:28, 45:1)** at least a hundred years before he was born. **The LORD** confronted **the Gentile nations** and **the islands** by calling them to trial. **He** calls on them to **renew their strength** or come and present the strongest case for **their idols**.

First, **ADONAI** presented **His** case. **Who has stirred up one from the east (41:2a)?** The evidence that **God** produces is the future **Cyrus**. It was **Cyrus**, the first emperor of **Persia**, who came **from the east**. The **east** here refers to **Persia**. **Who has called him in righteousness to his service (41:2b)?** It was **the LORD** who called **the Persian king in righteousness**. How is this so, because we know from history that **Cyrus** was anything but righteous? The answer is that **God** is not calling **Cyrus** righteous, but the *providence* of **God** in raising **Cyrus** to the throne, shows the outworking of **God's righteousness**. So it was **God's righteousness**, not that of **Cyrus**. Then **Isaiah** recites the victories that **Cyrus** will have. **ADONAI** handed **nations over to him and** subdued **kings before him**. **He** turned **them to dust with his sword, to windblown chaff with his bow (41:2c)**. **Nations** are conquered, **kings** are subdued and will offer no resistance. **His victorious march is so rapid that his feet do not seem to touch the ground.**

He pursues them and moves on unscathed, by a path his feet have not traveled before (41:3). **God** says **Cyrus** will be able to conquer territories he had never seen **before**. Normally, when conquering a new land, spies are sent out to see if there is anything about the geography that would hinder or aid any conquest. But **Cyrus** will not even bother doing that and will still be able to conquer new territories with ease. Although an invasion would normally involve many dangers, **the Persian king** would face none of them.

Then **the LORD's** case comes to a conclusion. **He** asks a rhetorical question: **Who has done this and carried it through, calling forth the generations from the beginning (41:4a)? Who is responsible for Cyrus' spectacular victories?** **ADONAI** is **the One** who had done it, and accomplished it. So **God** is both the author and finisher of these prophetic events, saying: **I, I the LORD**, referring to **God** as a Covenant Keeper, **with the first of them, the One** who exists before all, **and with the last**, the One who will prophesy to the last generation of men, **I am**

He, meaning the eternal One (**41:4b**). **I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End (Revelation 22:13)**. So we see **God's** case.

Then we are shown the reaction of the pagan **idol** worshipers when **Cyrus** arrived on the scene. What was the response to the evidence **God** has given? **Isaiah** mocked the notion that **the nations** could withstand the advance of **Cyrus** and **the Persians** as **they** carried out **God's** will. **The islands have seen it and fear; the ends of the earth tremble (41:5a)**. **The ends of the earth** is a phrase that **Isaiah** uses frequently to suggest people everywhere (**5:26, 24:16, 40:28, 41:5 and 9, 42:10, 43:6, 45:22, 48:20, 49:6, 52:10, 62:11**). From one end of **the earth** to the other they will be terrified of what they see. **The nations tremble and run for protection to their newly manufactured gods.**

They approach and come forward, each helps the other and says to his brother, "Be strong" (41:5b-6)! Facing the prospect of **Cyrus** and **his** army crashing down on **them**, **they** are terrified of what they see **and try in vain to seek mutual help**. **Fear**, because while the **God of Isra'el** gave **the Jews** warning of the coming of **Cyrus** 150 years in advance, **the idols** themselves said nothing. These **nations** were not warned about the conquests of **Cyrus**. So the only reaction they can have is **fear**. How sad it is for those whose only hope is to whistle in the dark and try to convince themselves that **their** protection will be to simply build more **gods**.

Rather than turning to the true **God of Isra'el**, **they** continue in idolatry and build even more **gods**. They cannot be created by just one **Person**; it takes a whole range of people to keep **them** coming. **The craftsman encourages the goldsmith, and he who smooths with the hammer spurs on him who strikes and the anvil (41:7a)**. After all, maybe more **gods** will help. One **idol** maker encourages another **idol** maker in the hopes that this would be of help to them. They make every effort to make it look good. It's not nice for **gods** to look ugly. **They** also strengthen the base of **the idols**. After all it's not nice for **gods** to topple over. But in the last analysis, **the idols**, which have already been mocked by **Isaiah (40:19-20)**, would not help **them** against the onslaught of **Cyrus'** coming conquests.

He says of the welding, "It is good." He nails down the idol at its base so it will not topple over (41:7b). One cannot help but see **Isaiah** reflecting on **Genesis** here: **God saw all that He had made and it was very good** (see my



commentary on **Genesis, to see link click [Ao](#) - Let Us Make Man in Our Image, In Our Likeness**). In both cases the maker sees his product as being **good**. But there the similarity ends. In **Genesis** it is the quality **the Creator** attributes to **His** creatures; here it is the creatures saying it of a “creator” they have made. These few words expose the difference between creation as described in the Bible and the lie of evolution. It reveals the conflict of a world where the truth of our existence comes from beyond us, to one which we can create our own values, indeed, our own **gods**.