

# OpenTheo

## Isaiah 40 - 41



### Isaiah - Steve Gregg

Isaiah 40-41 is a section of the Bible that speaks of God's promises to deliver his people back to Zion and foresees the coming of the Messiah. In this section, God reassures his people and reminds them of his power and control over all things. The speaker, Steve Gregg, goes in-depth about the historical and internal evidence found in these chapters, and how they relate to the fulfillment of God's promises. He also discusses the themes of good and evil and the worthlessness of false gods and prophets.

## Transcript

Now, when we come to Isaiah chapter 40, we're coming to a very different atmosphere. The first 39 chapters, Judah is in crisis because of the Assyrian threat and sometimes because of the threat of the Syro-Ephraimite Union. The mood is largely that of judgment.

Now, when you come to chapter 40, it is the Babylonian period that we come to, but it's the end of the Babylonian period. In other words, Isaiah 40 is not like the earlier chapters in, let's say, just transferring to a later time when now there's a new threat, and that is Babylon. It is the Babylonian period, but it is not focusing on the threat that Babylon poses, but rather the threat that God poses to Babylon by bringing the Persians under Cyrus to conquer Babylon and to release the Jewish people who had been taken captive 70 years earlier.

Because there is this abrupt change in circumstance, in milieu, it is hard for some people to believe that the book, the second part of Isaiah, is written by the same author. We've talked about the arguments for that. But, I mean, having a little sympathy for those who are skeptical, it is interesting that Isaiah 40 begins as if we already know about the Babylonian exile, and it has run its course, and we already know that God is fulfilling an earlier promise that he's going to deliver his people back to Zion, and we don't know that.

We do know from how chapter 39 closed that there would be a Babylonian exile, but at the end of chapter 39, we don't know that it has happened. In fact, it didn't happen in

Isaiah's day. It happened 100 years later in Jeremiah's day, and then there were the 70 years of the captivity, and then Cyrus comes on the picture.

So, you've got almost 200 years from the time of Isaiah's prediction at the end of chapter 39 of the Babylonian exile, and, well, it's about 100 years until the exile, and almost 200 years before the restoration. But it is that restoration that is immediately in view. So, it seems like there's a lot of ground been covered historically, a lot of changes between chapter 39 and 40.

And for that reason, you know, some have thought, well, chapter 40 and following sounds much more like it's written by somebody who's in the exile or at the end of the exile and has seen Cyrus, and what he's doing, conquering Babylon and sending Israel back to their land as, you know, God's fulfillment of some promise. Of course, there were promises made in Jeremiah. Jeremiah 25 predicted that the Babylonian exile would last for 70 years, and that at the end of that 70 years, Babylon would be judged.

And so Israel's - I'm using the word Israel now to say Judah, but really, after the fall of the northern kingdom, the word Israel was used for all the remainder of the Jews, which was mostly Judah and some remnant of the other tribes. But Israel's captivity in Babylon ended with the judgment of Babylon, with the fall of Babylon, and that an author would just leap to that remote time and that remote circumstance without even setting us up, without even having a paragraph or two saying, now, in the interim, just as Isaiah told Hezekiah it would happen, Nebuchadnezzar came and took Israel into captivity, and 70 years later, God delivered them. Now, here's the story about that.

You know, I mean, there's no setup of that sort. And so if one was not otherwise inclined to see Isaiah in the days of Hezekiah as the author of these chapters, and you just had the chapters before you with no other connection, you would assume, well, this is - I mean, this is written by somebody in the Babylonian exile near the end when Cyrus is about to deliver them. And that would be a reasonable deduction from internal evidence.

It's just that we have external evidence, the testimony especially of the New Testament writers, as well as the consistent Jewish tradition forever, since the time of Isaiah, that these chapters were written by the same Isaiah who wrote the first 39 chapters. So in a sense, internal evidence would incline us to believe it's written by another author at a later time. But what Jesus or the apostles have to say about the New Testament is another kind of internal evidence.

I've said on other occasions, I think when we were talking about the book of Revelation, that there is internal and external evidence for authorship of a book. And the internal evidence should be counted as more weighty than external evidence because, especially in the case of the book of Revelation, the external evidence is people like Irenaeus saying it was written at such and such a time. But the internal evidence might point to an earlier time than that.

So which do you go with, internal or external? Well, the internal evidence is inspired. External evidence is not. So the internal evidence, to me, would weigh more heavily than the external in a case like that.

The problem here is the external evidence for the unity of Isaiah is also inspired. Because the external evidence is not the opinion of church fathers, but the opinion of the apostles of Jesus Christ who identified both segments of Isaiah as being by the same author. In that, they agreed with other external evidence, that is the traditions of the Jews, and frankly, the unanimity of the church up until about the 18th century or later.

So I have no trouble going along with the Jewish, Christian, and New Testament testimony that we have the same author, although it is remarkable that he is transported in vision to a much later time. That's not too surprising because in the earlier chapters he was sometimes transported to a later time, just not that much later. I mean, he did describe the Philistines being conquered by Assyria before it happened.

He described Judah being overrun by Assyria before it happened. He described the fall of Samaria before it happened. It's just that those things were fulfilled within his lifetime, so he foresaw them only a few years, maybe, or decades before their fulfillment.

But to foresee something so graphically 200 years before, so graphically that you can even name one of the main players in the drama, Cyrus, and give his name before he's even born, this is stunning. These chapters, therefore, are among the most decisive chapters for the inspiration of scripture. And that is one reason, I believe, why they've come under the critical attack they have.

Daniel would be among those things that are criticized also. Daniel's chapters, especially the later chapters in Daniel and these chapters in Isaiah, have come under heavy scholarly attack as to their authorship. Not because of there being objective proof that they aren't authentically written by those men, but because of the presupposition that there can't be inspiration of scripture.

And there's no way Daniel could have written what he wrote, or that Isaiah could have written these things so accurately without being inspired. But apart from that particular prejudice being applied, all the evidence is favorable. And so we'll go with the evidence and not be prejudiced, and assume that apparently predictive prophecy is indeed a real phenomenon that God used to demonstrate that his prophets are really inspired.

Okay, now, chapters 40 through 66, I keep saying through 66, there's 66 chapters in this section. 40 through 66, 27 chapters. These chapters are divided into three segments of nine chapters each.

As I pointed out in our introduction, each set of nine chapters, at least the first two, end with the same refrain. The first of those is at the end of chapter 57. I'm sorry, that's the

second one.

Chapter 48. Chapter 48 ends the first nine chapter segment with the words, There is no peace, says the Lord, for the wicked. Chapter 48, verse 22.

The next nine chapters end at the end of chapter 57, in verse 21, where it says, There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked. And so we have three roughly equal length sections of this portion of Isaiah. Each one, they're divided from each other by this statement.

Now, even though it is affirmed that there is no peace for the wicked, the prophecies in these sections are very strongly affirming that there is peace for the righteous. And the section begins with a comforting word that the war is over. Her warfare has ended.

And there is peace for the remnant of God's people. And so chapter 40 begins with what I think most of the Jews would understand, and many scholars would understand to be a comforting word to the exiles in Babylon, that God's punishment of them for their sins has now reached its full limit. They've spent 70 years in Babylon.

It's now time for God to say, OK, I'm going to be on your side again. Now, I was against you. I fought against you.

I sent you into Babylon. I punished you. I preset the length of time, 70 years.

That time has passed. Now it's time for me to say good things to you, comforting things to you, because basically your time has been served, and I still have plans for your future. So the words comfort, yes, comfort my people, says the Lord.

Speak comfort to Jerusalem and cry out to her that her warfare has ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, for she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. She's received all the punishment for her idolatry that he intends to inflict, and therefore their war against God is over, and God's complaint against them is over. So Jerusalem can be comforted with the promise that there will be a restoration of the city, because after all, it had been burned down during the Babylonian exile, and those who were sent back from Babylon rebuilt it.

But no sooner does he mention this than we have a messianic age reference, and we know that while these verses could apply to the return of the exiles, that the New Testament applies them to the coming of Christ, announced, preannounced by John the Baptist. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, that is, the low areas be brought up to the normal height of the main road, and every mountain and hill be made low.

They're going to level the ground, so the highway will be not rough. The highway is

apparently the king's highway. It's the way the Messiah is coming, and the nation of Israel has to be prepared for the king's arrival.

It was apparently customary in ancient times for a king to send word ahead of time that he was going to visit one of his dominions, and the people would be given some idea that he was coming at a certain time, and they were given advance notice so they could smooth the roads. We take for granted smooth roads. We've got continual road crews out there filling potholes and widening roads and resurfacing roads so that we don't have a rough ride in our cars, which have rubber wheels and shocks.

They had no shocks, they had no rubber wheels, and they had no paved roads to speak of. They had some that were paved with stone, but for the most part, roads were a rough arrangement. If you get off road in a four-wheel drive vehicle, it doesn't have to be very rough before you feel jostled pretty big time.

If you're moving more than a few miles an hour, just a little rut, just a little bump can send you flying off your seat. We take for granted smooth roads. We're not used to the problems of rough roads unless we do off-road driving, and then we have special vehicles that are equipped for that.

In those days, a carriage, a chariot over a road moving, what, how fast a horse can run? 20 miles an hour maybe? It was really a rough ride. There were very few paved roads. That's what changed at a later time when the Romans conquered.

They were famous for paving roads all over their empire to make it possible to mobilize their troops anywhere they needed to. But before that time, paved roads were a rarity. So when a king was coming, it seemed inappropriate for him to be bounced around and jostled around on the rough roads to get to the city he's visiting.

So the people of the city would go out and say, the king's coming. We need to prepare the roads. There's some low spots here we need to fill up.

There's a mound here, a bump, a big rock sticking out. We need to take that out. We need to make the level, the rough places level.

And that's the image of John the Baptist saying, the king is coming. We need to prepare that his arrival will not be painful to him. And since this is a spiritual phenomenon that John's preaching, he's talking about repentance.

We need to repent. The king's coming. The obstacles to his coming peaceably to us is that we are sinners.

And we need to remove those obstacles by repentance. So John called people to repent. But he identified himself as the voice crying in the wilderness.

Now, we know that wilderness in Isaiah speaks of a condition of fruitlessness. And John came at a time when Israel or Judah was fruitless. But he also lived out in the physical wilderness as a sort of a sign.

John lived out in the desert. And so he was a voice literally out in the wilderness crying. But the figurative meaning is that Jerusalem has become a wilderness because of the Babylonian exile.

But although it is a wilderness, there is a voice now crying out that there's restoration coming. Jews will return from Babylon. The road has to be prepared for this company that will be traveling through the wilderness back to Jerusalem to rebuild it.

This is the time for Jerusalem to be comforted and to be rebuilt. And so at one level, the prophet's voice is an encouragement to the exiles that God is paving the way for their return, as it were. But John the Baptist in the New Testament, I see this as having a spiritual application to what John was doing.

So it applies to the time of Christ as well. Every valley shall be exalted, verse 4 says. Every mountain and hill shall be made low.

The crooked places shall be made straight. The rough places smooth. The glory of the Lord shall be revealed.

And all flesh shall see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken. Now, the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.

All flesh shall see it together. Probably, in the first instance, refers to God being glorified by conquering Babylon and restoring his people. And it'll be a marvel to the world that God has fulfilled his promises to bring Jerusalem back from its captivity.

The lion that had seized its prey has been deprived of its prey by a stronger hand, God's hand, who's saved them from Babylon, restored his city, Jerusalem. And that is to his glory. And the world will see God glorified in this.

But obviously, when these verses are quoted in the New Testament, the assumption is that the glory of the Lord is revealed in Christ. In his ministry, Jesus is the embodiment of the Shekinah glory. John said that in the first chapter of John, John 1. And the well-known verse 14, where it says, the word was made flesh, tabernacled among us, and we beheld his glory.

The glory of the Lord is revealed in Christ. And so there's double meanings here. The deliverance of the Jews from Babylon is to the glory of God.

They'll travel through the wilderness. God's paving the way for them. The highway is being prepared for them to leave and come home to Jerusalem and rebuild it.

But this is all a type and a shadow of the building of the spiritual Jerusalem and Christ coming to restore the remnant to a position of being the new city, the new Jerusalem. And John is there to announce it, as Isaiah announced it here. Verse 6, the voice said, cry out.

And he said, what shall I cry? Here's what you should cry. All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades.

Because the breath of the Lord blows upon it. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades.

But the word of our God stands forever. Verse 8 is actually this whole imagery of the man being like grass and so forth is repeated a number of times in the New Testament. First Peter chapter 1, verses 24 and 25 have it.

James chapter 1, verse 10. Man being as transient as grass is. Even Jesus spoke about how transient grass is.

When he talks about conserve the lilies of the field, how they don't make clothing for themselves. They don't spin or weave cloth. But God clothes them.

He says, now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow it's not. It's thrown in the oven tomorrow. It's just transient.

How much will he clothe you more? Oh, you of little faith. So man being like grass, we don't think of it that way. Grass really does come and go each season.

It's all green when it's rainy. And then as the summer progresses, it all dries up unless it's cared for in water. So it lasts so short a time.

And yet man's lifetime is compared to that. We are short-lived creatures compared to eternity. And yet our lives seem significant to us.

But this is suggesting an individual man's life is not that significant. It comes and it goes rather quickly. It's the bigger plan that is significant.

God's plan is more protracted. It's bigger, more long-lasting, more significant than just a man's lifetime and what he can accomplish. Verse 9, Oh, Zion, you who bring good tidings, get up into the high mountain.

Oh, Jerusalem, you who bring good tidings, lift up your voice in strength. Lift it up and be not afraid. Say to the cities of Judah, Behold your God.

Now, the word good tidings here is going to come up in this section of Isaiah numerous times. How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, Isaiah 52 is going to say. Good tidings is the word gospel.

In fact, that very verse I mentioned, how beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, is quoted by Paul in Romans 10, and he actually quotes it, those who bring the gospel. Because the word gospel is the word good tidings. So, Jerusalem that preaches good tidings is us, the church.

The church preaches the good tidings. And notice it calls to people, the cities of Judah and everywhere else, Behold your God. But the good tidings that Isaiah's readers probably would be thinking about would be the good tidings of rescue from Babylon and the cities of Judah are to be told, look what God has done.

Your God has rescued you. This is the good news for you. Behold, the Lord God shall come with a strong hand and his arm shall rule for him.

Behold, his reward is with him and his work before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs in his arm and carry them in his bosom and gently lead those who are with young.

Obviously, we can't help but think of this as a messianic statement. And no doubt, we are right to do so. Jesus said he was the good shepherd.

But in the original context, this would have to do probably with God shepherding his people, leading them back from exile to their land. That he gathers his lambs in his arm and gently leads those who are with young suggests that God is sensitive to the limitations and weaknesses of different people. Some people are stronger than others.

Some have to be led gently. Some have to be carried. And so a shepherd knows that and treats his sheep sensitively with reference to their special needs.

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, measured heaven with a span and calculated the dust of the earth in a measure, weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? Who has directed the spirit of the Lord or as his counselor has taught him? With whom did he take counsel and who instructed him and taught him in the path of justice? Who taught him knowledge and showed him the way of understanding? Now, I just want to say that generally speaking, verses 13, well, verse 13 is, excuse me, 12, would be imagined to be referenced to God having done these things. But it's a rhetorical question and you can see how verse 13 and 14 go on. It's talking about people.

What man can direct the spirit of the Lord? What man could be God's counselor? What man can measure the heavens with the span of his hand? Obviously, God can do these things. That's a given. But the question here is rhetorical.

Man is grass. What man is there that measures up to God in any way? What man is there who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand or heaven with a span or calculated the dust of the earth? This is beyond man's powers, you know, in a big way.



That God can do this goes without saying.

But the statement is not affirming that God does this. It's raising questions about what man has any significance at all. He's like grass.

Man can't measure the universe or even the dust of the earth that he lives on. He can't direct the spirit of the Lord. He can't tell God what to do or give him counsel.

That's what this means. And by the way, it's very similar to a passage that is equally misunderstood, in my opinion, by Christians, and that's over in Proverbs 30 where Agur gives a similar set of rhetorical questions. Agur, who wrote chapter 30 of Proverbs, says in verse 2, Surely I am more stupid than any man, and I don't have the understanding of a man.

I neither learned wisdom nor have knowledge of the Holy One. He's not claiming to know much. And he says in verse 4, Who has ascended into heaven or descended? Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has bound the waters in his garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? Once again, most people say, well, the obvious answer he's asking, he's looking for us to say God.

God has. And then he says, What is his name and what is his son's name if you know? And therefore, this passage is often used as a proof text that God, even in the Old Testament, is declared to have a son. That is a reference to Christ.

Even the new King James capitalizes the word son as if this is a reference to Christ. That is, God, it is thought, is brought into view with these questions. He's the one who gathers the wind in his fists and bound the waters in his garment, establishes the earth, and so forth.

What is his name? Well, the answer is Yahweh. What's his son's name? Jesus is what many Christians would take this to mean. However, Agur is doing the same thing Isaiah is doing.

He's not looking for God as the answer. That God would be the right answer is a given. But he's asking who, that is, who among men, can do these things that obviously are God's prerogative alone.

Actually, it begins, Who has ascended into heaven or descended? Well, Jesus has, but that's not what he's talking about. He's talking about how, you know, I don't have the knowledge of God. I'm more stupid than anyone.

I don't have the knowledge of the Holy One. Who does? Has anyone been up to heaven and come down? Is there anyone who's at God's level who could claim to know him? Who is there? I'd like to know his name. Tell me his son's name, for crying out loud.

I'd even like to meet his son. He's not saying, he's not talking about God. He is obviously listing things that are God's prerogative alone, but in the rhetorical use of them, he's saying, Can you think of a man who, like God, can do these things? No.

Therefore, anyone who claims to have the knowledge of God is boasting about things above his pay grade, is what he's saying. You really can't know that much. Now, Agur isn't necessarily right about that, although he might be, but the point is, whether Agur's right or not, the point he's making is, I'm not claiming any special knowledge.

Do you think I ascended into heaven and came down? I don't know anyone who's done that. Do you? Give me his name. I'll go interview him.

I'd like to talk to his son, too. That's what he's saying. Isaiah is using this the same way.

He's talking about the inferiority of man to God. True, he expects his reader to know that God does do all these things, but the who has done these things, rhetorical questions, is not asking for you to answer it. I know the answer.

God. God's the answer. He's saying there is no answer other than God, of course, but the point is, what man is there who could make claims like this? None.

There's no man that measures up to God. There's no man that has been his counselor or instructed him. So these verses actually are diminishing the competence and sophistication of man in contrast to God.

Now, Isaiah 40, 15, Behold, the nations are as a drop in the bucket and are counted as a small dust in the balance. The balance is, of course, we use for transactions in the marketplace, and you'd put some silver on one side and maybe some grain on the other side, and you're buying the grain, and you balance it out so that you get the right, you pay the right amount of silver for the grain, but you don't bother to wipe the dust out of the scales before you do it. They don't affect the outcome.

Small dust in the balances, who cares about those? Now, if you've got the finger on the scale, that's another story. But a little bit of dust there, no one's going to be concerned about. It doesn't affect the outcome of the weighing.

So he's saying that all the nations of the world are as inconsequential to God as dust is on a scale. It doesn't change the weight even a little bit. They're like a drop in the bucket.

The context here, no doubt, is look at Babylon. That was a great nation. Boy, there was a powerful nation for you.

They were wise. They were militant. They were powerful.

They terrified the world. They conquered the whole region. But even they, compared to

God, they're just nothing.

They're like a drop in the bucket, and therefore, God is capable of bringing them down and bringing his people back out of captivity. I think the import of this. Look, he lifts up the isles as a very little thing, and Lebanon is not sufficient to burn.

Now, Lebanon was known for its huge cedar trees. That was Lebanon's fame, huge cedar forests. That's not even enough to burn.

He can't even make matches out of those. Nor its beasts sufficient for burnt offering. You take all the animals of Lebanon and all the trees, you can't even make a fire and a sacrifice there that would be worthwhile to God.

He's much bigger. He can hardly see that. It's so small.

All nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted by him as less than nothing and worthless. To whom, then, will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to him? The workman molds a graven image. The goldsmith overspreads it with gold.

And the silversmith casts silver chains. Whoever is too impoverished for such a contribution chooses a tree that will not rot and seeks for himself a skillful workman to prepare a carved image that will not totter. Now, what he's saying here is idolatry is worthless, and it was idolatry that led the Jews initially to be taken into Babylon.

It was a punishment for their idolatry. And he said, I hope you've learned your lesson. God is real.

God is big. No man, no army, no nation even counts for anything compared to God. It's like the small dust in the bounces.

So what are you going to liken to God? What, this tree? You're going to make a little tree, and that's going to be God? Even though all the trees of Lebanon are inconsequential to him. He can't even make a fire with that. It's not enough fuel.

It's hyperbole, of course, but the point is, he's talking about how great and big God is compared to everything earthly. He says, now, what are you doing making a stick and worshipping that like that's God? And verse 21, have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who stretches out the heavens like a curtain and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. He brings the princes to nothing.

He makes the judges of the earth useless. Scarcely shall they be planted. Scarcely shall they be sown.

Scarcely shall their stock take root in the earth, when he will also blow on them, and they

will wither, and the whirlwind will take them away like stubble. Now, a nation, a kingdom like Babylon may start to take root, but they barely begin to grow before God sneezes on them and blows them over. There's basically, you know, Babylon's kingdom didn't last very long.

It was in Nebuchadnezzar's day that the Neo-Babylonian Empire arose, and like within the lifetime of a single individual, 70 years, it was gone. That was a short-lived kingdom. They hardly took root.

God just blew on them and blew them over. They were very powerful and intimidating and imposing in their day, but how long did that last? They're like grass withers suddenly. I will just comment, since you may have noticed it, in verse 22 it says, It is he who sits above the circle of the earth.

This is often a verse that's used to show that the Bible is inspired because it mentions the earth being round. In fact, some say that the Hebrew word circle could actually be translated sphere, so that it would seem that he's giving a description of the spherical shape of the earth, something that had not been documented or proven scientifically in Isaiah's day at all, and therefore reflecting knowledge beyond human knowledge, and that one of those little indicators that the Bible is inspired, at least this chapter. I say it seems like that could be true.

It's not entirely clear how Isaiah means the circle of the earth, but it is entirely possible that he is talking about the shape of the earth. I'll just leave it at that. Certainly, God knew the earth was round before man discovered that, and he could have given that away here, although there are perhaps other ways the circle of the earth could be referred to, but I tend to go with it as a revelation of the actual shape of the earth.

Right. Now, verse 25. To whom then will you liken me? Or to whom shall I be equal, says the Holy One? Lift up your eyes on high and see who has created these things, meaning the stars in this case, who brings out their host by number.

He calls them all by name. The fact that God calls the stars by their name is also mentioned earlier in a psalm. Psalm 147, verse 4, that the stars have names is brought up here also by the psalmist.

He says he counts the number of the stars. He calls them all by name. Now, in saying he calls them all by name might be literally the case.

God might have given names to all the stars. I have a hard time naming a few children. It's hard to think of good names, but God's infinitely creative, and he's got billions and billions and billions of stars, and he may indeed have named every one of them, although it may be a poetic figure of speech saying that he calls them forth like someone calls by name their children.

He calls them by their name. In other words, the stars obey him like a man's children come when they're called. It's possible it means that.

Some have felt that God really has given names to the stars, and that would explain, they say, the constellations, how it is that almost all cultures have recognized certain constellations the same way, like, for example, Virgo, the Virgin. In almost all cultures, that particular cluster of stars, that constellation, is in their own language the word for a virgin, and yet when you look at the stars in that constellation, you couldn't see a virgin there. You've got, what, five or six stars there? How do you put a random smattering of stars across the sky and say, that looks a lot like a woman to me, a virgin to be exact? I mean, that God may have named them that, and that all cultures know it because all cultures came from Noah's family, and Noah knew it, could be possible.

Of course, there could be other explanations. Like I said, he calls the stars by their name might be simply a figurative way of saying, they come when they're called, and he's the one who calls them. They obey his orders, like servants being called to the foot of their master to receive assignments.

He calls them by their name. Hard to know, but both Psalms and Isaiah say it. By the greatness of his might and the strength of his power, not one is missing.

Not one star is missing. Now, have any stars died since then? I don't know. But anyway, all the stars that God wants to be there are still there.

Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, my way is hidden from the Lord, and my just claim is passed over by my God? Have you not known, have you not heard, the everlasting God, the Lord, the creator of heaven, of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary? There is no searching of his understanding. He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might, he increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.

They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint.

Now, in verse 37, he suggests that the Jews who are taken into Babylon, probably, or maybe the remnant in the time of Christ, or both, they feel kind of passed over. They feel like God is not paying attention to their cause. Their way is hidden from him.

Their just cause has not come before him. But he's saying God's aware of everything and in control of everything, and therefore, you know, he is aware of your cause, and he's going to demonstrate it. But you may have to wait.

There is a waiting period to see God's deliverance, and that is often stated in Scripture. God will act when it is his time to act, and until he does, our hope is in his promises, and

our hope is what is equivalent to waiting, waiting on the Lord and hoping in the Lord are used as interchangeable terms in Scripture. And therefore, you're hoping, you're waiting hopefully, but you are waiting.

It's not happening, so you have to wait. You can't make it happen, but God will make it happen. In the meantime, you wait patiently for God, wait expectantly for God, and as you wait on God, then your focus is on God, not on the hopelessness of your situation, and you receive divine strength.

Now, it says about God's strength, he gives power to the weak. Remember, he said to Paul in 2 Corinthians 12, my strength is made perfect in your weakness, he said. And God gives power to people who are weak because they trust in him.

They can't trust in their own strength. Those who have no might, he increases their strength. He says, even youths and young men do grow weary.

Now, this is, you know, youths and young men are the people that would seem to have the most energy. And he'd say, even old people get weary. You'd say, duh, isn't that the definition of old? You know, you get tired easy.

But even the young people, the strongest of people have limits to their strength. Even they grow weary and faint, but not God. He says that the Lord, he does not slumber or sleep.

He doesn't grow weary or faint. It says that in verse 28, neither faints nor is weary. And in verse 31, those who wait on the Lord renew their strength.

Now, the word renew actually in the Hebrew means exchange. And apparently what it means is that those who have no strength of their own, or they have very, very little strength, they're very faint. If they wait on God, they exchange their limited strength for his unlimited strength.

Because they'll run and not be weary. They'll walk and not faint. That's God who does not get weary or faint.

His strength is characterized by no limits. In verse 28, God neither faints nor is weary. So if you have his strength, you won't faint or get weary.

You have to exchange yours for his though. How do you do that? You do that by resting in him, by trusting in him, by hoping in him, by waiting for him. You wait expectantly on God.

And you receive strength that goes beyond natural strength. You exchange your limited strength for his unlimited strength. And it's like an eagle flying.

There's a huge difference between the way an eagle flies and the way, let's say, a

hummingbird flies. An eagle has far more weight to keep aloft than a hummingbird has. But a hummingbird is beating its wings continually, hundreds of times per minute.

It's restless. It's nervous. It's continually exerting its own energy.

It works. It stays aloft. But it's not doing much heavy lifting.

The hummingbird's body weighs almost nothing. The eagle, however, is a big bulky bird. It has a lot of weight to keep off the ground.

But it doesn't flap its wings nervously. It uses its strength to get to the place where it can catch the winds, the higher trade winds or whatever. And then it just kind of positions itself, as you know if you've seen eagles soar.

They just kind of set their wings in position to catch the wind, and then they just soar. It's not their strength. It's the wind that holds them up.

They're not using their muscles except to hold their wings steady in place. They're holding still with all their might. And the wind, which is, of course, seemingly limitless in strength, is what they tap into.

It's a limitless power that they have because they're not resting in their own power. They're counting on a power that is far greater than their own, and so they soar. And that's how those who wait on the Lord will be.

They'll exchange their strength, their nervous energy, for God's strength, which is limitless. And therefore, though they run, they won't get weary. Though they walk, they will not faint.

This walking and not being weary, or running and not being weary, is an image that we also find presented in a slightly different way in Jeremiah 12. Where Jeremiah is in trials 100 years later, life is hard for him because he's a good guy, and he's going to jail. He's being persecuted.

He's being mocked. He has no friends, no converts. But the wicked, they're doing great.

They're prospering. In Jeremiah 12.1, he says, let me talk to you about your judgments, God. I've kind of got some complaints about the way you do things.

Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are those happy who deal so treacherously? He says, you have planted them, yes, they have taken root. They grow, yes, they bear fruit. You are near in their mouth, but far from their mind.

How come you're doing, how come you're prospering these people? And he says, but you know me, Lord. You've seen me. You've tested my heart toward you.

In other words, I'm a good guy. How come things aren't going good for me? And God answers him in verse five and says, if you have run with the footmen and they have wearied you, how can you contend with horses? And if in the land of peace in which you trusted, they wearied you, then how will you do in the flooding of the Jordan? In other words, things are not really so bad yet. And you're not doing so well.

You're kind of losing faith. You're whining. And really, what you're doing is not much different than running a race against footmen.

Yeah, there's a challenge there. You've got to put up as much, you've got to put out your best effort to fight and win a race. But what about when I up the ante and you're still on foot and your opponents are on horseback? How are you going to run that race? If you've run against footmen and they've wearied you, how are you going to contend with horses? Well, you can't.

A man cannot contend with horses. A man cannot run faster than a horse. Well, some can, actually.

There have been some African runners who have outrun horses in some short races. But the assumption is a horse is going to run faster than a man, and you're going to be outclassed. You're going to be unable in your own strength to do this at all.

Elijah actually outran horses on one occasion, too, but he was not exactly a natural man. I mean, he was natural, but he was empowered by the Spirit of God. And that's just the point.

You're getting tired in the ordinary trials of daily life. What are you going to do when the trials are not ordinary, when they're extraordinary? If you're getting weary now, how are you going to handle the real tough stuff? Well, the answer, of course, is implied by what Isaiah says. If you wait on the Lord, you'll exchange your strength for His strength.

Then you'll run and you won't get weary, and it won't matter whether you're running against people or horses, because it's not your strength, it's God's strength you're tapping into. God can outrun a horse. If you have His strength, you can outrun a horse if He wants you to.

The point is, when you're facing difficulties and you're whining, and really your difficulties are relatively small, you think, well, what will happen if you get chained to a wall and you're hanging in a dungeon and beaten every day like some Christians are every day right now? How are you going to do that? You're already tired. And you've got no serious trials that some Christians even recognize as a pain. You're running against footmen.

And how will you stand against horses? The answer is the only way you will is if you're not running in your own strength. You have to wait on the Lord. You'll mount up like



eagles on wings, like eagles, and you'll run and you will not get weary.

You'll walk and not faint. Now, we actually have about ten minutes. I want to go through Chapter 41 as well.

Keep silence before me, O coastlands, and let the people renew their strength. See? Wait on the Lord. Keep silence.

Why? You'll renew your strength. You'll exchange your strength by doing that. Be still and know that I'm God, and you'll renew your strength.

Let them come near. Let them speak. Let us come near together for judgment.

Who raised up one from the east? Now, this is a reference to Cyrus, is the one from the east. God is claiming that he raised up Cyrus, and that will become evident as the chapters roll on. Who raised up one from the east who in righteousness called him to his feet? Just like he calls the stars to himself to give orders, he called this one from the east, Cyrus, to himself to give orders, called him to his feet to give him an assignment.

Who gave the nations before him and made him rule over the kings? Who gave them as dust to his sword, as driven stubble to his bow? Who pursued him and passed safely by the way that he had not gone with his feet? Who has performed and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I, Yahweh, am the first, and with the last, I am he. Now, Yahweh says he is the first and he's with the last. A strange phrase.

I'm not sure exactly why he adds the with. Because in two other places in Isaiah, chapter 44, 6, and chapter 48, 12, he simply says, I'm the first and the last. The important thing that I would point out is, of course, Jesus calls himself the first and the last in Revelation 1, 8. And Jesus is therefore claiming for himself what Yahweh claims for himself.

It's a divine title, a Yahweh title, the first and the last. And that is also applicable to Jesus, who must therefore be Yahweh also. The coastlands sought and feared.

The ends of the earth were afraid. They drew near and came. Everyone helped his neighbor, said to his brother, be of good courage.

So the craftsman encouraged the goldsmith. And he who smooths with the hammer inspired him who strikes the anvil, saying, it is ready for the soldering. Then he fastened it with pegs that it might not totter.

What they're making here is idols. The imagery is the Babylonians see the enemy coming. This one from the east that God is sending, this Cyrus, is coming to conquer Babylon.

Oh, what shall we do? What shall we do? We're in danger. I know. Let's make an idol.

Let's make a God who can deliver us. This is basically the mockery that God is giving to these pagans. So you're in trouble.

So you go and you do a lot of work. You need a craftsman. You need someone to cut down the wood.

You need someone to do the soldering. Sounds like you're doing all the work here. And what you end up with is a God.

What kind of work does your God do? Your God just expends energy, doesn't provide any energy. He sucks up your efforts. He has no power.

The very existence of the God depends on your power to create him. So this is what you're going to trust in. But you, Israel, are my servant.

The first reference to the servant of Yahweh, and we know there are many in this section. Jacob, whom I've chosen, the descendants of Abraham, my friend, you whom I've taken from the ends of the earth and called from the farthest regions, and said to you, you are my servant. I have chosen you and have not cast you away.

It may seem like it since you've spent 70 years cooling your heels in Babylon, but I haven't cast you away. I'm restoring you now. Fear not, for I am with you.

Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. Yes, I will help you.

I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. That's one of my favorite verses, just taken out of context and applied. And I believe that these promises are not illegitimate to take out of context because, in a sense, they are in context.

These promises made to the returning exiles are promises to God's remnant, which the New Testament tends to apply to us. So I see no fault in that. Behold, all those who were incensed against you shall be ashamed and disgraced.

They shall be as nothing, and those who strive with you shall perish. You shall seek them and not find them. Those who contended with you, those who wore against you, shall be as nothing, as nonexistent things.

For I, the Lord your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, Fear not, I will help you. Like a child holding the parent's hand. The father holds the child, says, Don't worry, I've got your hand.

Don't be afraid. We'll get through this. I'll help you.

Fear not, you worm, Jacob. A worm is a fairly defenseless creature. It has no natural defenses.

And therefore, Jacob is in need of God's help and his defense and his rescue. You men of Israel, I will help you, says the Lord, and your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. Behold, I will make you into a new threshing sledge with sharp teeth.

And you shall thresh the mountains and beat them small and make the hills like chaff. You shall winnow them. The wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them.

You shall rejoice in the Lord and glory in the Holy One of Israel. It's hard to know how this would be in any sense fulfilled by the returning exiles threshing the nations. It may be that, in a sense, the wheat is the remnant that are going back to Jerusalem and the chaff, which are separated from it, are those who stay behind.

But this is threshing the nations, not the nation of Israel. And therefore, it may have its fulfillment in the career of the church. The church definitely goes out to the nations and draws the wheat out from among the chaff through evangelism.

And that may be the ultimate intention of this passage, looking to the Messianic age and the conquests, as it were, of the church through the gospel. When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongues fail for thirst, I, Yahweh, will hear them. I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them.

I will open rivers in desolate heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. We can see that Isaiah is the same man who is writing the first 39 chapters.

This is one of his favorite images in the earlier part. It still prevails in this part. I will plant in the wilderness the cedar and the acacia tree, the myrtle and the oil tree.

I will set in the desert the cypress tree and the pine and the box tree together. That they may see and know and consider and understand together that the hand of the Lord has done this, and the Holy One of Israel has created it. Present your case, says the Lord.

Bring forth your strong reasons, says the King of Jacob. This is a challenge being set to the idols and the idolatrous people who worship them. Let them bring forth and show us what will happen.

Let them show the former things what they were, that we may consider them and know the latter end of them, or declare to us things to come. Show us things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods. Yes, do good or evil, anything, do anything.

Just don't sit there like a dumb statue. Tell us something. If you can't tell us the future, at least tell us the past.

That shouldn't be too big a challenge. Oh, you can't do that either. Well, do good or bad.

You can't do good or bad. You can't do anything. The idol is helpless to do anything.

And he says, particularly, if you can tell us the future, we'll know you're really a god. Because God can do that. And God, by implication, is saying, you can know I'm a god because I'm doing that.

I'm telling the future. But you false gods, not only can you not do the things that a god can do, you can't do the things that a living creature can do. You can't move.

You can't make sounds. You can't do anything. You're a worthless piece of wood.

And yet people put their trust in you instead of in Yahweh. That is what is indicated. Indeed, you are nothing, and your work is nothing.

He who chooses you is an abomination. That is, a person who chooses to worship the idol instead of God is himself an abomination, a term that's usually reserved for the idols themselves in the Scripture. The abomination is most often, in the Old Testament, a term used for an idol itself.

It's an abomination. But the man who chooses an idol is an abomination, too. I have raised up one from the north.

Now this is no doubt Cyrus II. Why was he from the east before and the north now? Because he's really from the east from the standpoint of Israel. But he does attack from the north.

He is north of Israel, too. They're northeast, Persia. And so he's from the north or he's from the east, depending on how precise you want to be.

Usually the enemies that invaded Israel were said to be from the north, even if they were from the east, because they had to go around the top of the Jordan River and come down. It was easier than going across the Jordan River. So invaders, even from the east when they came to Israel, usually came down from the north and were called invaders.

Babylon was said to be from the north, though in many respects it's more to the east. But in any case, this is a reference to Cyrus, who was also earlier said to be from the east. From the rising of the sun.

Well, that's east. So he's north and east. I have raised up one from the north, and he shall come.

From the rising of the sun, which means from the east, he shall call on my name. So it's obviously not contradictory, but he seems to be coming from the northeast. And he shall come against princes as though mortar, as the potter treads clay.

I guess it's saying that the princes will be no more strong against him than mortar is. Now stone is strong, and mortar is used to hold stones together, but mortar is itself not strong. And therefore the princes will be defeated as if they were mortar.

Almost like the whole wall resisting him is made of mortar and no stone at all. And he's going to tread them as potter treads clay. Who is declared from the beginning that we may know? And former times that we may say he is righteous.

Surely there is no one who shows. Surely there is no one who declares. Surely there is no one who hears your words.

In other words, where is the man who's been speaking righteously for God all this time? There don't seem to be any around. The first time I said to Zion, look, there they are, and I will give you Jerusalem. I will give to Jerusalem one who brings good tidings.

For I looked, and there was no man. I looked among them, but there was no counselor. Who, when I asked of them, could answer a word? Indeed, they are all worthless, and their works are nothing.

Their molded images are wind and confusion. Now, I think this is more rhetorical, and it's still speaking of the idols. Is there any man, a prophet, who speaks for these other gods who can tell us anything? Is there any god that can speak? Now, I'm looking for some answers here.

No one can give me any answers. What's up with that? He's saying they're worthless. He's talking about the false gods and those prophets who speak for them.

They don't have any answers. They can't give counsel. They certainly can't tell the future.

And God is sort of saying that in a way to mock them for that because he and his prophets can do all those things, and he has demonstrated that. Now, here we have run out of time, and so we will take chapter 42 next time.