

## Upheld by My Right Hand – Isaiah 41:1-20

**Introduction** – The message of comfort and One who will deliver (Isaiah 40:1, 10) continues. We are Christians, and so we are instructed to see Jesus in these sections (i.e. 40:3-5). And when we do, we see a far more glorious work of His redemption over the world than we often believe could possibly happen. There were particular applications of these prophecies sovereignly brought forth in the Babylonian exile; but there was far more being pictured. As we will see, Christ is that Redeemer and in Christ, we are the chosen one, the new Jacob, sitting at the right hand of God in Christ for the sake of the world and the glory of God.

**God's Exclusive Sovereign Rule** (vv1-7) – Having spoken of His sovereign rule and goodness to Israel (40:27-31), God now summons the Gentile nations to hear as well. If a ruler is raised up from the east and he takes nations, puts down kings, and rides roughshod over kingdoms, it is only because God has done this (vv1-3). God's sovereignty is over all nations and over all generations (v4). The nations summoned to God turn instead to their idols, fastening them with pegs so that they don't totter and fall (vv5-7). G.K. Chesterton once said, *"When people stop believing in God, they don't believe in nothing; they believe in anything."*

**Cyrus** – Verse 2 is the first hint of Cyrus, the Persian king, who came from the east, conquering Babylon in 539BC. He was known for his fast and furious victories over many nations, so that they trembled when they heard he was on the move. This Cyrus is named in 44:28, and we see how God moved his heart to allow the Israelite exiles to return in Ezra 1:1-4.

**I Am the First and the Last** – This and similar phrases (v4) will be used throughout Isaiah to describe God's sovereign hand over time and generations. Of course, this is the title of our ascended, reigning Christ in Rev 1:8, 22:12-13.

**Idol Makers and False Creations** – When the idol-makers say of their work, *"...it is good"* (v7, ESV), this is a parody of God's Creation account. When people are afraid and refuse to turn to God, they join together, create their own myth-creation-stories, meanings and definitions of life, and build their own saviors or salvation systems.

**My Chosen Servant** (vv8-20) – Israel, however, is God's servant, chosen one, and friend of God (v8) and when He delivers them from the farthest regions, this will be manifestly clear (v9). God never was away from them. He always was their helper; He held them with His righteous right hand (v10, Psalm 126). The time will come when Israel will not even be able to find these present enemies (vv11-12). Assyria would be gone, then Babylon, Persia, the Greeks, Romans. World history is this faint remembrance of what was once empires appearing to be greater than Israel and her God. God would always hold Israel by her right hand (v13). Israel might appear to be nothing more than a little worm, but her Redeemer would transform her and she would thresh the mightiest mountains, rejoicing in the Lord (vv14-16, remember 40:4-5). The dry, barren world will be transformed with water (vv17-18), which then waters the desert-wilderness and turns it into a garden of trees (v19). This is what the coastlands, the nations afar, are to see: the hand of the Lord bringing forth a New Creation (v20).

**My Servant** – Verse 8 has the first of many references to the *"servant of the LORD,"* a major character in the chapters ahead. The identity of the Servant will develop; here it is Israel as a people.

**The Descendants of Abraham, My Friend** (v8) – Abraham was God's friend because God chose him and Abraham believed (Gen 15:6, James 2:23). We know that the descendants of Abraham are those with the faith of Abraham (Gal 3:6-9) through whom all nations would be blessed.

**Upheld By My Right Hand** (v10) – Jesus Christ ascended to God's right hand, where He rules over these nations (Psalm 110:1-2).

**Jacob the Worm** (v14) – This little nation is not much on the scale of things. David used this same phrase to speak of how despised he was (Psalm 22:6) and we know this is a Messianic Psalm of Christ's crucifixion and victorious resurrection. The cross proves that the world does suppress the truth and oppress righteousness. But the suffering of the cross also proves that God is deconstructing worldly power. It is not how weak we are that is ever the issue, but how powerful God is (2 Cor 4:7).

**Redeemer** (v14) – This is the first of many times this term will be used by Isaiah. This is the "kinsman redeemer," the close relative, who comes and avenges or ransoms or delivers. The Redeemer is "the Holy of Israel," as though "Holy" is His name. Redeeming us is something "Holy" does. He is taking His redemptions to the nations and nothing is going to stop Him or the work of His servant.

**Living Waters and New Creation Language** (vv17-20) – Hopefully, these layers of images are coming together to reveal how much God is declaring here – far more than the return from exile 2600 years ago. We know Who is the Living Water and what will come out of those who believe on Him (John 4:13). The church is this temple of living water flowing out to the nations, with healing trees on this river of life (Rev 22:1-2).

**Fearful Nations** – This was true for individuals and it was true for Israel (40:27-31); God will renew those who trust in His faithfulness. But it is true for all nations, all peoples. And we are not simply being offered this deliverance. A Deliverer has come; a Redeemer ransomed; a King sits at God's right hand; a Worm-Man has become Lord of all; a Friend of God has made many friends for God; a Conqueror marches forth over all nations; a Creator has made all things New. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him. If you hear His voice, *"Fear not, for I am with you...I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."*