

GOD'S POWER TO PROTECT AND PROVIDE FOR ISRAEL (HIS PEOPLE)

ISAIAH 41:08–20

Introduction

Freedom is one of the major cravings of the human heart. People want to be free to live, worship, work and move about as they wish. The human heart rebels against restraint, bondage and enslavement. Yet when the human heart and the experiences of day-to-day life are objectively and honestly evaluated, one tragic fact jumps to the forefront: we are enslaved to sin and death. No person can keep from committing sin, and no person can keep from dying. From the moment we are born, we are doomed to sin, to act selfishly and commit wicked deeds. And we are doomed to die. Fundamentally, to be human means to be a sinner doomed to die. As much as we may dislike this truth, we are all held in bondage to sin and death.

But there is wonderful news: God can free us from sin and from death. We can live righteously and godly in this present life, and we can inherit eternal life, but only by the power of God. This is the important message of this Scripture: *Set Free Through God's Power to Control Human History, the Very Deeds of People*, 41:1-29.

- I. God's power to execute judgment upon all who defy Him (vv. 1-7).
- II. God's power to protect and provide for Israel (His people) (vv. 8-20).
- III. God's power to prove that He is the only living and true God (vv. 21-29).

Isaiah 41:08–20 God's power to protect and provide for Israel (His people)

God has the power to protect and provide for Israel (His people). This is a wonderful assurance to all believers who sense that they fail the Lord often and fall so short of His glory. Israel too failed the Lord repeatedly and miserably disappointing God over and over again. Nevertheless, the Lord loved His people and never ceased to reach out to them. For generations the Israelites were oppressed, not only by the Assyrians and Babylonians but also by all the surrounding nations who preceded those two world empires. They suffered continual hardship and domination from a stream of tyrants down through history — all due to their sins. In Isaiah's day, few of the Jews genuinely trusted the Lord or lived righteous lives. Most were living in unbelief, rejecting God and engaging in sinful, unrighteous behaviour. Still the Lord loved His people and reached out in compassion to them. In the present Scripture, God stirred Isaiah to give strong encouragement and hope to His people. If they truly believed and followed Him, He would use His power to deliver them from their captivity and would protect and provide for them. Note the assurance and promises given by the Lord:

1. God assured His people that they were His *chosen* servants (vv. 8-9). Note that God Himself addressed the people as Israel, *my servant* and Jacob, *whom I have chosen*. He then called them the descendants of Abraham, *my friend* (v. 8). These are titles of great honour. Consider what a privilege it is to be a servant of God, chosen by Him, and to be a descendant of Abraham, the friend of God Himself. God had always pursued a close relationship with the Israelites, even those of Isaiah's day, and offered them the privilege of knowing Him intimately. In fact, God has usually offered the privilege of knowing Him personally to both Jew and Gentile. But the human race has always chosen to reject His offer. Even though God had chosen the Israelites to be His very special servants, they had often proved unfaithful. Consequently, God was forced to continually discipline and punish them.

Here, it is God's purpose to give His people great assurance. Though God used the Assyrians and Babylonians to punish them, the Lord would one day gather them from the ends of the earth. They were His servants, chosen by Him; therefore, He would not forget them in their hour of trial. He would not reject them (v. 9). He would set them free from the Babylonian captivity so they could return to the promised land.

2. God assured His people that He would protect them in the here and now, in the present distress they were experiencing (vv. 10-16). No doubt God's promise of freeing His people from the coming captivity was very encouraging especially to the true believers who were to endure the Babylonian captivity. But they needed far more than just a distant future hope of deliverance. Righteous believers needed to know that God was with them day by day in their present painful circumstances. So God met their need and gave them a most wonderful promise: whether in the present or in the future and in whatever circumstances, God's people were not to fear. Three reasons are given why righteous believers should not be anxious, afraid.

First God's people were not to fear because He Himself would be with them. He would strengthen and help them and uphold them with His right hand — His righteous, victorious hand. God's promise to be with His people applies to all righteous believers of all generations. Even in the very worst times believers are not to be dismayed or frightened by the oppression of any enemy. Even if the enemy seems much stronger and the believers feel extremely weak the Lord promises to strengthen His people. Even when believers fall and collapse before the enemy, the Lord will uphold them with His right hand, a hand of righteousness and justice (2 Tim. 4:18).

- => The Lord will shame and confuse all who oppose His people; their enemies will perish by the Lord's victorious, righteous hand (v. 11).
- => The Lord will totally eliminate all the enemies who contend with or wage war against His people (v. 12).

Second God's people were not to fear because He would hold their right hands and help them as they faced their enemies (v. 13). Note the close relationship being stressed here: the Lord tells righteous believers that He is "your God" and that He will "hold your right hand." He will "help you." Meditating upon this promise should give enormous encouragement to believers who are facing oppression and hardships.

Third, God's people were not to fear because He was their Redeemer (v. 14). *Redeemer* here refers to the kinsman redeemer (*goel*) who in ancient history was the family protector. The redeemer was a person who saved or rescued a family member who was suffering or distressed due to financial trouble, the death of a spouse, loss of property or some other heavy burden (see Ruth, 2:20). In the present Scripture, the Lord calls Himself the Redeemer, the family protector of His people. As their Redeemer, He promises to help them. The implication for the Israelites was that He would deliver them from their captivity. Note also the other title the LORD claims for Himself: the Holy One of Israel (His people). As the Holy One He is distinct, completely set apart from all other creatures by His power, knowledge and understanding. Thus He is able to completely fulfil His purpose in the lives of His people despite their hardships or difficult circumstances. Note that He refers to His people as *worms*, which simply means that they are weak and helpless. Though they are too weak to help themselves, they are not to fear the enemies who oppress them for God is their Redeemer. And as their Redeemer, God will do two things for His people:

- => The LORD will empower them to defeat their enemies (v. 15). He will make them like a threshing sledge with sharp teeth. They will thresh their enemies and reduce them to chaff, and the enemies will be blown away as if by a strong wind (vv. 15-16).
- => The Lord will give them hearts that rejoice and glory in Him (v. 16).
- 3. God assured His people that He would provide for them (vv. 17-20). This specific promise of God refers to God's provision for His people during the Babylonian exile and their return from captivity. However the promise is applicable to every generation of believers. Whenever God's people are poor and needy or parched with thirst the Lord will hear their cry for help (vv. 17-19). He will provide water and a fruitful land for them. He will even turn the desert into fertile soil so that it will be productive and fruitful. Note the Lord's *purpose* in providing for the needs of His people: it is to demonstrate His power and to show that He alone can free them and meet their needs (v. 20). The world needs to witness God's miraculous provision for His people when they are suffering and facing difficult circumstances. When unbelievers see the miraculous power of God in action, some will turn to the Lord and become genuine followers of Him.

Thought 1. Two of the great promises of God are that of His protection and provision. If we are believers who truly follow the Lord, He promises to protect and deliver us when any enemy attacks or oppresses us. Although God does not always deliver us *from* difficult circumstances, He will always deliver us *through* them. No matter what trial, hardship, temptation or adversary confronts us, the LORD will protect us and give us whatever provision we need to overcome the difficult circumstance.

If we genuinely trust the LORD, obey His commandments, and live righteously, the Lord promises to deliver us through...

- financial difficulties
- business problems
- disease
- unemployment
- emotional difficulties
- hunger
- broken relationships
- sorrow
- thirst
- family divisions

The Lord will even deliver us from ever having to taste or experience death. When the moment of our departure comes, quicker than the eye can blink, the LORD will transfer us from this world into heaven. One moment we will be in this world, and the next we will be in the very presence of God.

- 1) The LORD promises to protect us through all the trials of life and from all the enemies who oppress us.

Luke 10:19 *"I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you."*

Luke 21:18 *"But not a hair of your head will perish."*

Rom 8:35, 37-39 *Who shall separate us from the love [compassion] of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

1 Cor 10:13 *No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*

2 Tim 4:18 *The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

1 John 5:4-5 *For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*

Exo 14:14 *"The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still."*

Deu 33:27 *The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. He will drive out your enemy before you, saying, 'Destroy him!'*

2 Chr 16:9 *For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war.*

Psa 34:7 *The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.*

Psa 44:5 *Through you we push back our enemies; through your name we trample our foes.*

Psa 91:4 *He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.*

2) The LORD will provide for us and meet every need we have.

Mat 6:33 *"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things [housing, food, clothing] will be given to you as well.*

Phil 4:19 *And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*

Heb 13:5-6 *Keep your lives [conduct, behaviour] free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"*

Deu 4:29 *But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you look for him with all our heart and with all our soul.*

Deu 30:8-9 *You will again obey the LORD, and follow all his commands I am giving you today. Then the LORD your God will make you most prosperous in all the work of your hands and in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your land. The Lord will again delight in you and make you prosperous, just as he delighted in your ancestors.*

Psa 12:5 *"Because of the oppression of the weak and the groaning of the needy, I will now arise," says the LORD. "I will protect them from those who malign them."*

Psa 18:35 *You make your saving help my shield; and your right hand sustains me; your help has made me great.*

Psa 28:7 *The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song.*

Psa 31:19 How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you, which you bestow in the sight of men on those who take refuge in you.

Psa 40:17 Yet I am poor and needy; may the Lord think of me. You are my help and my deliverer: O my God, do not delay.

Psa 65:9 You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly. The streams of God are filled with water to provide the people with grain, for so you have ordained it.

Psa 68:19 Praise be to the Lord, to God our Saviour, who daily bears our burdens.

Psa 132:15 I will bless her with abundant provisions; her poor I will satisfy with food.

Isa 25:4 You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat. For the breath of the ruthless is like a storm driving against a wall.

Isa 41:10 So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Isa 43:1 But now, this is what the LORD says he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

Isa 46:4 Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you. ■