

QUESTIONS GOD ASKS

6. "Why do you complain, Jacob?"

This study is taken from the book of the same name by Dale & Sandy Larsen.

BIBLE PASSAGES:

Isaiah chapter 40 verses 27-31

²⁷ Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, Israel, 'My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God'?

²⁸ Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.

²⁹ He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

³⁰ Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;

³¹ but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Isaiah chapter 41 verses 8 - 10

⁸ 'But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend,

⁹ I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, "You are my servant"; I have chosen you and have not rejected you.

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.

Why don't people respond to messages any more? That may be an exaggeration, but not much. Do an internet search for "Why don't people call you back?" or "Why don't people reply to emails?" and you will get hundreds of hits from frustrated message senders. A writer for "Psychology Today" theorises 3 reasons people fail to get back to us:

1. There are too many different kinds of messages out there
2. People are too busy, and
3. People are lazy and would rather avoid the hard stuff.¹

If it is disappointing to have a business associate / work colleague or a friend ignore your messages, it is devastating to feel that God ignores your prayers. The people of God in exile in a hostile nation must have felt that God had disregarded or even forgotten them, The prophet Isaiah countered such discouragement with words of hope.

- *What could make people feel that God is ignoring them?*
- *Why do we expect the Lord to play attention to your troubles and care about what happens to them?*

After Solomon's death his kingdom was split in two: Israel in the north with its capital in Samaria, and Judah in the south with its capital in Jerusalem. Assyria conquered the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC and later looked south to threaten Judah. Although some outlying areas fell, the Lord miraculously spared Jerusalem in the time of King Hezekiah (**Isaiah chapters 36 and 37**).

Some time after that deliverance, Hezekiah welcomed envoys from the kingdom of Babylon. The prophet Isaiah warned that Babylon would someday invade and conquer Judah (**Isaiah chapter 39**). This happened in 586 BC after a long series of Babylonian sieges against Jerusalem. The city wall was broken down, the temple was destroyed, the temple furnishings were looted, and thousands of Jews were deported to Babylon with only the poorest left behind (**2 Kings chapter 25 verses 11-12**). The book of Lamentations expresses the desolate state of Jerusalem. The Bible is clear that the Babylonian conquest happened because the Jews had consistently rebelled against the Lord (**2 Chronicles chapter 36 verses 5-21**).

Beginning in *Isaiah chapter 40*, the prophet looks ahead to the time when the Babylonian exile will end and the Jews will return to their homeland. Look through *Isaiah 40*, paying special attention to the contrast between the Lord's strength and the weakness of other powers. Many passages in *Isaiah chapter 40 verses 1 – 11* are quoted in "Handel's Messiah" and are taken as prophecies of Christ's coming. They also point to an intermediate fulfilment in the Jew's return from exile, which began with the decree of Cyrus of Persia in 583 BC.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. (*chapter 40 verse 27*) – In this passage, the Lord himself speaks through Isaiah. In your own words, what did the Lord ask Jacob and Israel – that is, the Jewish people?
2. Why would living in exile lead the Jews to think this way?
3. (*2 Chronicles 36 verses 15-19*) – Remembering that the exile happened because Judah disregarded the Lord. How does that fact affect how you see their complaints?
4. Think of a time when you complained that the Lord did not seem to be paying attention to your troubles. To what extent was it your own fault?
5. The Lord did not say, "O Jacob, O Israel, you shouldn't complain this way." Instead, He asked them why they complained in such a way. How does the question strengthen what the Lord wanted to communicate to them?
6. (*chapter 40 verse 28*) – This verse begins with 2 more brief questions, or 1 question asked in 2 different ways. What difference would it make for the exiled Jews to be reassured that God is the everlasting Creator?
7. (*chapter 40 verses 29-31*) – Identify all the references to strength or power in these verses. What is the relationship between the Lord's strength and the "hope" of *verse 31*?
8. (*chapter 41 verses 8 – 10*) – The Lord again addressed Israel and Jacob – the Jewish people. What words or phrases did He use to remind the Jewish people of their history with Him?
9. What parts of this passage would be likely to turn the exiles' despair into faith?
10. Which parts of this passage most inspire your faith right now?
11. What is the one thing you will do this week to doubt less and trust more in the Lord?

Pray that when you feel the Lord isn't paying attention to your prayers, you will remember that He does hear, He does care, and He is powerful to come to your aid.

FOR LATER

Choose something to serve as a reminder that God hears your prayers and wants to help you, for example, a physical object, or a Bible verse on a card, perhaps *Isaiah 41 verse 10*. Place the reminder where you will see it often. Each time you see it, consciously thank God for His concern for you.

Look at *Psalms 42, 43* and *44*, in which the writer honestly expresses frustration at God's silence, yet also expresses faith that God will come to the rescue.

FOR NEXT TIME: Thursday 8th October 2020

"CAN THESE BONES LIVE?"

Ezekiel chapter 37 verses 1 - 14

[It might be useful to refer to the message for Sunday 30th August.]

ⁱ Victor Pilman, "3 Reasons that no one responds to your messages anymore," *Psychology Today: August 21, 2015*.
www.psychologytoday.com/blog/mind-the-manager/201508/3-reasons-no-one-replies-your-messages-anymore