

# WHY DO YOU COMPLAIN, JACOB?

*Isaiah 40:27-31; 41:8-10*

**W**hy don't people respond to messages anymore? 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* theorizes three 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.\*

If it is disappointing to have a business associate or a friend ignore our messages, it is devastating to feel that God ignores our 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.

**Group Discussion.** What could make people feel that God is ignoring them?

**Personal Reflection.** Why do we expect the Lord to pay attention to our troubles and care about what happens to us?

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

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\*Victor Lipman, "3 Reasons That No One Replies 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](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/mind-the-manager/201508/3-reasons-no-one-replies-your-messages-anymore).

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 36–37).

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 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 25:11–12). The book of Lamentations expresses the desolate state of Jerusalem. Scripture is clear that the Babylonian conquest happened because the Jews had consistently rebelled against the Lord (2 Chronicles 36:5–21).

Beginning in Isaiah 40, the prophet looks ahead to the time when the Babylonian exile will end and the Jews will return to their homeland. Scan Isaiah 40, paying special attention to the contrast between the Lord's strength and the weakness of other powers. Many passages in Isaiah 40:1–11 are quoted in Handel's *Messiah* and are taken as prophecies of Christ's coming. They also point to an intermediate fulfillment in the Jews' return from exile, which began with the decree of Cyrus of Persia in 538 BC. *Read Isaiah 40:27–31.*

1. 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 (v. 27)?

2. Why would living in exile lead the Jews to think this way?

3. Recall that the exile happened because Judah disregarded the Lord (2 Chronicles 36:15-19). 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 had you gotten yourself into your difficulties?

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. Verse 28 begins with two more brief questions, or one question asked in two different ways. What difference would it make for the exiled Jews to be reassured that God is the everlasting Creator?

7. Identify all the references to strength or power in verses 29-31. What is the relationship between the Lord's strength and the "hope" of verse 31?

8. Read *Isaiah 41:8-10*. The Lord again addressed Israel and Jacob—

the Jewish people. What words and phrases did he use to remind the Jewish people of their history with him?

9. What parts of this passage would be most likely to turn the exiles' despair into faith?

10. What parts of this passage most inspire your faith right now?

11. What is 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.*

#### NOW OR 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 Scripture verse on a card, perhaps Isaiah 41:10. Place the reminder where you will see it often. Each time you see it, consciously thank God for his concern for you.

Study 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.