

The Trial of the Gods

Isaiah 41 (vs. 2, 4, 21, 26)

God continues to comfort His people by proving He is the true God and the gods of the nations are vanity. God proves He is the true God by doing things idols cannot do.

I. God's CALL to judgment (vs. 1-7). God calls the heathen to “*come near together to judgment*” [to reach a verdict] (v 1). The scene is that of a courtroom.

A. CALL to readiness (v. 1—“*Keep SILENCE before me... THEN let them speak.*”). God is telling the nations (“*O islands*”) to be quiet and prepare your arguments before you come before Him to present your case for judgment (to reach a verdict—cf. v. 29).

No lawyer wants to go into a courtroom without having his case ready to be argued. It is always wise to be silent and engage your mind before you engage your mouth, especially when speaking to reason with God! (See Prov. 23:1—“*When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee.*” cf. Prov. 29:11; Eccl 5:2; Job 29:9-10).

B. CHALLENGE to respond (v. 2—“**WHO** raised up the righteous man from the east?)

➡ Is “*the righteous man from the east*” Abraham¹, Cyrus², or someone else? **The real issue** is not the identity of “*the righteous man,*” but **WHO** raised him up?

➡ God asks “**WHO**” three times (vs. 2, 4, 26). God HIMSELF answers—“*I the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he*” (v. 4).

➡ v. 4—God calls generations before they are born (Jer. 1:4-5).

¹ Some believe “*the righteous man from the east*” may be Abraham. God called Abraham “*to his foot, gave nations before him, and made [Abraham] to rule over kings*” (cf. Gen. 14:14-17; 17:6; 18:17-19). Others teach this is a reference to Jesus Christ.

² The “*righteous man from the east*” may be a reference to the coming of Cyrus” God called Cyrus “*righteous*” because he would do what God called him to do—Punish Israel’s enemies and allow the Jews to return to their own land (Isaiah 44:28–45:4, 13; Ezra 1:14).

- Called Cyrus over 150 years before he was born (44:28).³
 - Called Josiah over 300 years before he was born (1 Kings 13:1–3 cf. 1 Kings 22:1–2; 23:15–16).
 - Called Hiel to rebuild Jericho (Josh. 6:26 cf. 1 Kings 16:34).
1. Their **fearful encouragement** (vs. 5–6). Panic stricken, the heathen nations (“*isles...the ends of the earth*”) determine to get together to help and encourage each other. They thought their union of fearfulness would produce fearlessness! What do you have when you join two cowards together? You have twofold cowardice. Two cowards does not equal courage! How vain for one who is afraid to cheer on another who is afraid.
 2. Their **foolish endeavor** (vs. 7). The heathen determine make an image thinking it will help them (v. 7 cf. 40:19–20).
 - How foolish to seek help from a “god” that cannot even stand up by itself without being secured with nails (cf. 44:9–20).

II. God’s CHOICE of Israel (vs. 8–16). After contrasting the gods of the heathen, God now contrasts His choice Israel against the heathen nations.

- A. God’s CHOOSING of Israel (vs. 8–10). God took Abraham out of the idolatrous nations to make of him a great nation (vs. 8–9). He will preserve them (v. 9b).
 - v. 8—Abraham is the only individual in the Bible that is specifically called God’s friend.
- B. God’s CARE of Israel (vs. 10–12).
 - The determination/resolve/intention of God—Twelve “I will’s” of God (vs. 10, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19).

³ Isaiah writes in the past tense as if this prophesy was already fulfilled. He regards these future events as good as done, as if they had already taken place. Cyrus is named in Isaiah 44:28–45:6. Cyrus is also alluded to in Isaiah 45:1; 46:11; 2 Chron. 36:22–23; Ezra 1:1–8; 3:7; 4:3,5; 5:13–17; 6:3,14; Dan. 1:21; 6:28; 10:1.

- Seven times in the next four chapters the Lord exhorts His people, "*Fear not*" (41:10, 13, 14; 43:1, 5; 44:2, 8). They need not be afraid because:
 1. He promises His **presence** (v. 10).
 2. He promises His **power** (v. 10).
 3. He promises His **proficiency. Help** them (vs. 10, 13, 14). v. 13—God holds Israel's right hand—Hand in hand. It encourages a person when you hold their hand. When someone needs some help, he'll say, "Give me a hand."
 4. He promises His **preserve—Uphold** them (v. 10).
 - The promise of verse 10 may be applied to Christians today!
 5. He promises His **provision** (vs. 15–19).
- C. God's CONVERSION of Israel (vs. 14–16). God turns a worm into a warrior. transformation
 1. Without God, Israel is like a WORM (v. 14). You cannot get much lower than a worm.

We sing "*At The Cross*"—

*Alas! and did my Savior bleed? And did my Sov'reign die?
Would He devote that sacred head, For such a worm as I?*

- a) Worms are DEFENSELESS—Weak and helpless.
 - b) Worms live in the DIRT (Job 21:26). To a worm, the earth is everything (earthworms). That is where man came from and that is where he is going.
 - c) Worms are creatures of DECAY (Ex. 16:20; Job 17:16).
 - d) Worms feed on DEAD matter (Job 19:26; 24:20).
 - e) Worms are creatures of DARKNESS (nightcrawlers).
2. **The good news**—
 - a) God CARES about worms—"*Fear not, thou worm... I will help thee...*"
 - b) God CONVERSES with worms—"*...saith the LORD...*"

- c) God CHANGES worms—“...*thou worm, Jacob, and ye men of Israel*” (cf. Gen. 32:24–30). God gives this worm some sharp teeth (v. 15).
- v. 14—God is “*the Lord... thy redeemer... the Holy One of Israel.*” God is called “*the Holy One of Israel*” three times in this chapter (vs. 14, 16, 20).
 - v. 16— Victory leads to worship! There will be no boasting—All the glory will go to the Lord who gave the victory!

III. God’s CONFIRMATION that He is God (vs. 17–20).

- A. He hears and provides when idols cannot (vs. 17–19).
1. Anyone can plant in a garden, but only God can plant something in a wilderness or a desert and have it to grow (v. 19)!
 2. Most of the trees mentioned in verse 19 are not indigenous to Israel—“*cedar*” (native to Lebanon); “*shittah*” (Sinaitic peninsula and Egypt); “*fir*” (chief trees of Lebanon); “*pine*” (rare in Palestine and Lebanon, though it is found today); “*box tree*” [Albert Barnes: “...by this word is denoted some tall tree—a species of cedar growing on mount Lebanon”]. Since these trees do not grow naturally in Palestine, their presence in Israel shows God must have planted them there (v. 20).
- B. v. 20—When all is said and done, there will be no doubt that it was the Lord who sustained Israel.

IV. God’s CHALLENGE to the heathen (vs. 21–29).

- ➡ “*PRODUCE YOUR CAUSE...*” Speak up! “*Bring forth your strong reasons.*” Why do you worship an idol? What can your idol do that God cannot do?
 - ➡ Jesus answered every question men asked of Him. But every time Jesus asked men a question, they could not answer.
- A. God’s SENSIBILITY (“*Bring forth your strong reasons.*”). God is reasonable. He will reason with you (Isa. 1:18; Rom. 12:1). But His reasons will always be better than yours.

B. God's SUPREMACY. God calls to the heathen lands to come and present their case to God and determine who is the true God. The test is very simple—Who is able to predict the future! The Lord proves He is the true God.

➔ Because God transcends time, He accurately predicts the future:

- Predicted the exact day Jesus would present Himself as Messiah.
- Regathering of Israel as a nation (May 14, 1948).
- Rebuilding of Babylon.
- Russia's rise to a world power.
- European federated union.
- Technology to implement the mark of the beast (Rev. 13:16-17).
- Ability to telecast a scene around the world (Rev. 11:9).
- The rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem (Mt. 24:15; 2 Thess. 2:4).

C. God's SARCASM (vs. 22–24).

1. v. 23—God sarcastically bids the gods of the heathen to predict what is coming and do something good or evil (it doesn't matter to Him) so He may be dismayed. Of course, the gods of the heathen cannot answer or do anything (v. 28). Therefore God concludes they are nothing (v. 24).

- v. 24—Which is worse: An idolater or one who follows an idolater? A false god is nothing and anyone who follows it is even dumber!

2. v. 25—*"I have raised up one from the north..."* This is either a reference to the coming of Cyrus, or Jesus, the conquering Messiah.

- He is *"from the NORTH"* (Ps. 48:1–2; Isa. 14:13; Ezek. 1:4). Cyrus was raised up in the north (Babylon).
- He comes *"from the rising of the sun"*— east to west (Mt. 24:27). Cyrus will come from the east (Persia).

- He will crush the world's leaders (second coming).
3. v. 26—A god that cannot predict the future is not righteous! Why should anyone listen to a “god” that cannot show you what's to come (Rev. 19:10)?
 4. v. 27—In contrast to the gods of the heathen, God will send a messenger with good tidings—Probably a prophecy of John the Baptist.
 5. vs. 27-28—No one can argue his case before God. Apart from God, man doesn't know where he came from nor where things are going! Education doesn't have an answer!
 - God may not answer every question you ask, but it is assuring to know He has all the answers. If He wants you to know, He'll tell you.

SUMMATION (v. 29). **The verdict:** The gods of the heathen are vain. They do not predict... do not hear... do not care... do not stand on their own. Apart from the God of Jacob, nothing makes sense.