

sooner or later exhausts his human resources. But the man who waits upon the Lord is strong and unmovable even when the physical body begins to deteriorate. Of course, the Lord is calling upon the people of Judah to trust Him presently in the midst of the circumstances which have caused them to doubt. They must believe now that He will fulfill what He has promised. Although they cannot understand His ways He is cognizant of their way and will supply spiritual and moral strength to them if they will participate by faith. He will not take away their circumstances, necessarily, but will supply them the spiritual strength to conquer their difficulties.

QUIZ

1. Why did the people think Jehovah was unconcerned with their problems?
2. Did they have a right to such an attitude?
3. What was really their problem?
4. When was the promise of renewed strength to be ultimately fulfilled?
5. What is another meaning of "wait for Jehovah"?

2. CONQUEST, CHAPTER 41

a. GENTILES SILENCED

TEXT: 41:1-7

1. Keep silence before me, O islands; and let the peoples renew their strength; let them come near; then let them speak; let us come near together to judgment.
2. Who hath raised up one from the east, whom he calleth in righteousness to his foot? he giveth nations before him, and maketh him rule over kings; he giveth them as the dust to his sword, as the driven stubble to his bow.

- 3 He pursueth them, and passeth on safely, even by a way that he had not gone with his feet.
- 4 Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I Jehovah, the first, and with the last, I am he.
- 5 The isles have seen, and fear; the ends of the earth tremble; they draw near, and come.
- 6 They help every one his neighbor; and every one saith to his brother, Be of good courage.
- 7 So the carpenter encourageth the goldsmith, and he that smootheth with the hammer him that smiteth the anvil, saying of the soldering, It is good; and he fasteneth it with nails, that it should not be moved.

QUERIES

- a. Who is the one from "the east" raised up by God?
- b. Which "isles" fear, tremble and encourage one another?

PARAPHRASE

Shut up and listen to Me, all you heathen enemies of Mine. I challenge all My enemies to clothe themselves in all the power they can muster and present themselves before Me. Then, when they have all the strength they can muster, let them speak and we will enter into contest together. I want to ask you ahead of time, Who do you think is raising up from the east your conqueror and My executioner of justice? It is I, Jehovah, whose sovereign providence gives you into My servant's hand. I give all your kings to be ruled over by him and I give your people to be ground into dust and smashed into pieces like stubble by the sword and bow of his warfare. He chases all My enemies away and goes wherever he wishes in safety—even through territory unfamiliar and hostile to him. Who is capable of such omnipotence? It is He who, ever since there has been a human history, has called into existence the generations of

men—even Jehovah, the Eternal, Uncaused First Cause. He is, I AM! The pagan peoples see and fear. My servant will strike trembling terror into the hearts of all people. Still they will draw together with one another and unite in their opposition to him to help and encourage one another insisting he is not capable of overcoming them all. They will feverishly engage themselves in the production of new and more ornate idols. The craftsmen will urge one another saying, We are doing a good job on these idols—these will surely be great enough and permanent enough to keep us safe from him.

COMMENTS

v. 1-4 JEHOVAH REIGNS: Just as the predicted *Comfort* of chapter 40 was to come to the Jews after their exile but realized ultimately in the Messiah, so the *Conquest* of chapter 41 is to come to the Jews (through Cyrus) but will be realized ultimately in the Messiah. Both *comfort* and *conquest* are to come to God's people through a *servant*. The *Servant* section (ch. 40-53) portrays three servants of Jehovah engaged in fulfilling His redemptive plan for mankind. *Cyrus*, *Israel* and the *Suffering Servant*, are the three servants of Isaiah's message. Cyrus and Israel are apparently types of the Suffering Servant—Cyrus typifying the conquering, judging aspect of the Messiah's work and Israel typifying the atoning, sanctifying aspect of the Messiah's work. Isaiah intertwines or meshes the work of all these closely together in this Servant section until it is difficult to distinguish which one he is describing. At times it appears he is describing both the type and the Antitype (e.g., Cyrus and the Messiah) in the same passage—as in our present passage.

The word *hkeriyshu* is translated *keep silence* and means literally, "to be blunted, dull, dumb, silent," or "to hold the peace." Jehovah *commands* silence. He is going to issue an omnipotent, omniscient edict. He is going to predict providential events which will alter the destinies of all men and all

nations. He is about to tell the world how He is going to "run things." Mankind insists it is going to tell God how it is going to "run the world." But God, through His prophet, commands, "Shut up, I'm going to tell you how I am going to run things."

The "islands" are the islands of the Mediterranean and Aegean. The isthmus of Greece and the islands of the Aegean (known as Javan to the Hebrews) represented the remotest regions of heathendom to the Hebrews of Isaiah's day. The Lord God is challenging the world that stands in opposition to His redemptive program to come before Him having clothed (*hkeliyphu*, Heb.) themselves in renewed strength and vigor and meet Him in a contest. The outcome of this contest will determine who "runs the world." Similar challenges are made by Jehovah in Joel 3:1-15 (see our comments in *Minor Prophets*, College Press, pgs. 193-196) and Ezekiel 38-39. Joel and Ezekiel are predicting the battle of God and the world through Jesus Christ at the cross and the resurrection. We suspect that Cyrus' conquest of the world (bringing God's judgment upon it) and Cyrus' release of the Jews to return to their homeland (bringing God's redemption to them) was *typical* of the same battle at Calvary and the empty tomb.

The present passage speaks of Cyrus, emperor of Persia ("one from the east."). There can be little doubt about this when one sees the extended context of Isaiah (cf. Isa. 44:28; 45:1; 45:13; 46:11; 48:14-16). It predicts events and persons at least 100 years or more before they happened. Isaiah died about 700-690 B.C. Cyrus conquered Astyages in 550 B.C. and became sole ruler of Elam (Persia). Cyrus was probably born about 590-580 B.C.

Isaiah uses a word, *leumiym* (root is *loam*), peculiar to his writings, which is translated *peoples*. It is less definite than either *goiym* or *'ammiym*, two other Hebrew words translated *peoples*. *Goiym* stands for *Gentiles*; *'ammiym* refers to a people as viewed by themselves, or, *we people*; *loamiym* stands for *all races* of people in general. God's announcement that He is going to take another omnipotent, providential step

in His program of redemption through Cyrus (bringing the world under the magisterial rule of Cyrus and return of the covenant people to their land) is not a provincial announcement—it is worldwide! Cyrus will be God's servant for all *races*!

Persia (today's Iran) was directly *east* of Palestine. In Isaiah's day it was known as Elam. The Persian empire flourished for approximately 200 years (549-332 B.C.) until Alexander the Greek conquered the world and turned it into a semi-Greek culture. "One from the east" definitely means Cyrus but probably includes all succeeding Persian emperors since the restoration of the Jewish people proceeded under Cyrus' successors (see our comments *Daniel*, College Press, pages 347-349). *Tsedeq* (translated *righteousness*) would be better translated *justice*. It may refer to the justice of God upon His enemies accomplished through Cyrus as a secondary agent, or, it may refer to the personal character of Cyrus. Both would be appropriate since God uses secondary agents to govern the world and administer justice and Cyrus (as well as most of his successors) was known for fair, honest and just treatment of his subjects. The Jews, especially, held the Persians in high esteem for the treatment they received at their hand.

God's challenge to the races is: Which god of the races is able to withstand the one from the east whom I will send to execute My justice? Jehovah, the God of Israel, gives temporary rule of His world to whomever He pleases (cf. Isa. 10:5-19; Jer. 27:1-11; Dan. 7:6; 9:24, etc.). When God's providence is decreed and predicted, nothing can thwart it! Cyrus shall, as God's servant, pound those who resist into dust and stubble with his weapons of war (sword and bow). Cyrus and his successors will conquer Asia Minor, Egypt, into India, and cross the Aegean and, for a time, occupy European soil in Greece. This is Cyrus II, or Cyrus The Great and few world conquerors have been regarded as highly as Cyrus. The Persians called him father. The Greeks regarded him as a master and lawgiver. When Alexander the Great found that Cyrus' tomb had been rifled (by Greek soldiers and grave robbers), he ordered that the body be replaced and the contents of the tomb

be restored as far as possible. To the Jews he was the Lord's anointed who ended the Babylonian exile and opened a new era in the history of Israel. Cyrus did not force Persian ideas on his subjects, but rather formed a synthesis of the ancient cultures of Mesopotamia, Syria, Asia Minor, the Greek cities, and parts of India. It is reported by some historians that he was a monotheist, which would have exalted his image in the eyes of the Jews.

Cyrus marched on and on in *shalom* (safety), into the far reaches of civilization unfamiliar and hostile to him, until he met his death in battle about 530 B.C. His body was carried back to Pasargadae, one of his capital cities. There his body was covered with wax, according to Persian custom, and placed in a stately, dignified tomb which was guarded by faithful priests for 200 years. The tomb is still standing, but its contents have long since been removed.

Who has wrought this? Are the passing events of history, the births of nations and their deaths, merely the results of chance arrangements of atoms? Is the governing of the world left to the whims of tyrants and anarchists? Is history cyclical and doomed to repeat itself forever—doomed never to reach the perfection it longs for? No! No nation exists apart from God. He calls the generations into existence. He makes rulers His servants. All of history, in one way or another, serves God's purpose. His purpose is to create out of mankind a kingdom of His own, trusting in His sovereignty, depending upon His grace, sanctifying itself in His holiness. The majority of men and women are in rebellion against God's purposes. The establishment of the kingdom of God (Christ as King, the church as the kingdom) began in a family (Seth, Noah and Abraham), expanded to a nation (the Israelites), then encompassed the world (the church). The very fact of the establishment of the kingdom program on earth, through men, pronounced the *judgment* of God upon all human governments and efforts to usurp God's sovereignty over man. Our text is simply another announcement by God that He is going to act through Cyrus to preserve His covenant people and His work

of establishing His kingdom. Thus, *all races* are called together for a demonstration of His sovereignty by the very fact that God is able, through His prophet, to predict the conquest of Cyrus one hundred years before Cyrus was born!

Delitzsch says of verse four, "It is the full meaning of the name Jehovah (*Yaweh*) which is unfolded here; for God is called Jehovah as the absolute I, the absolutely free Being, pervading all history, and yet above all history, as He who is Lord of His own absolute being, in revealing which He is purely self-determined; in a word, as the unconditionally free and unchangeably eternal personality."

v. 5-7 JAVAN REELS: One has only to read the history of Persian conquests to see the fulfillment of these verses. The isles of the Mediterranean and the Aegean reeled and trembled under the warfare of Persian armies. They formed alliances and coalitions against the Persians. By the summer of 539 B.C. the Persian armies were ready to attack Babylon. Nabonidus, sensing the situation, brought the gods of the outlying regions into his capital, trusting that they would aid him in his time of need. This antagonized the people whose gods were displaced and brought further resentment to the priests of Babylon. This appears to be a direct fulfillment of verses 5-7.

All during the Persian rule there were those segments of the empire resisting Persian friendship to the Hebrews (cf. Ezra 4:3-16). After the Persian empire, the Syrians (under the Seleucids) and the Egyptians (under the Ptolemies) opposed the work of God by persecuting the Hebrew people. Daniel predicts all these "times of trouble."

What Isaiah is predicting in verses 5-7 is that although Cyrus and the Persians shall be raised up by God to execute His judgment upon the heathen opposition to God's kingdom work, the heathen will tremble but they will not repent. They will unite, encourage one another, and continue to trust in gods of gold and wood. They will make newer and more gods, complimenting themselves that they have done a good job and that they have made gods that will survive the Servant of Jehovah.

Of course, new and better gods did not stop Cyrus. The Lord used him to fulfill that portion of the plan of divine redemption for which Cyrus was needed. Then, when the Lord needed Alexander the Great and all that his hellenization of the world could contribute to that redemptive plan, He permitted the Greeks to serve Him. Jehovah "runs the world" and there are not any gods of any race to usurp His sovereignty. Jehovah has silenced them all! Ultimately God silenced all His opposition at the cross and the empty tomb. Perhaps, in type, His work through Cyrus points to that ultimate moment!

QUIZ

1. Who are the three Servants of this section?
2. Why does God command the peoples to be silent?
3. Where else does God challenge the world to meet Him in contest?
4. How does God call Cyrus "in righteousness"?
5. How "great" was Cyrus?
6. What is the point in God predicting through Isaiah, 100 years before, these events concerning Cyrus?
7. Did the people of the "isles" actually try to make new and better gods to stop Cyrus? When?

b. GOD'S PEOPLE SAVED

TEXT: 41:8-13

- 8 But thou, Israel, my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen,
the seed of Abraham my friend,
9 thou whom I have taken hold of from the ends of the earth,
and called from the corners thereof, and said unto thee,
Thou art my servant, I have chosen thee and not cast thee
away;
10 fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for

- I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.
- 11 Behold, all they that are incensed against thee shall not be put to shame and confounded: they that strive with thee shall be as nothing, and shall perish.
- 12 Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, even them that contend with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought.
- 13 For I Jehovah thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee.

QUERIES

- a. Why is Israel reminded of her servanthood?
- b. When did God bring to nothing those who made war against Israel?

PARAPHRASE

But you, Israel, you are my chosen servant. You have a special heritage to fulfill because you are the descendants of Abraham whom I knew as My friend. Through him I fashioned you as a nation to serve me from out of the midst of heathendom. If I have done all this especially for you I certainly will not desert you if you will carry out your mission of service to Me. Therefore do not fear any of your enemies because I am with you. There is no reason for you to despair. I, Jehovah, am your God and I will give you divine strength and help. Yes, indeed, I will cause you to stand with My righteous and powerful right hand. Wait and see—all those who hate you will be confounded, humiliated and destroyed. Those who oppose you will be annihilated. Even if you go around looking for your enemies you will not be able to find any. I repeat, those who make war against you will be utterly obliterated.

It is I, the Lord your Great God, holding on to your right hand. And I say to you I will not let you go so do not be afraid.

COMMENTS

v. 8-10 **SERVANTHOOD OF ISRAEL:** God chose the Hebrews for special servanthood. They were to serve Him as a consecrated, holy priesthood. (cf. Ex. 19:5-6; Lev. 25:55; Deut. 4:5-7; 7:6-8; 14:2; 26:18-19) By their consecration to His commandments they would be the human agency through which God could send the Redeemer in human flesh. They would also serve as witnesses to the glory of Jehovah to the nations round about them. The Lord did not choose Israel according to human standards, i.e., Israel was not large in population or wealth (Deut. 7:7). He chose Israel by His sovereign grace—because He loved her (Deut. 7:8; 10:12-22).

The point of this passage, however, is to allay the fears of the people of Isaiah's day. Isaiah's contemporaries were filled with terror at the threats of Assyria and Babylon. They began to despair that God would ever be able to fulfill His covenant to them. So Isaiah reminds them that if God could take a man like Abraham from a background of heathen idolatry, make him a friend of God and protect, sustain and multiply him into a nation, God can protect His people in Isaiah's day! If God can take that nation, from Abraham's loins, and deliver them from the power and temptations of Egypt, He can certainly deliver Isaiah's Judah from the threats of Assyria and Babylon. And if Isaiah's people will serve God and trust Him, He will fulfill His covenant with them. He is the same God who was with them in Egypt, in the wilderness, in the day of the Judges and in David's day.

v. 11-13 **SUBJUGATION OF ISRAEL'S ENEMIES:** Now the process by which God fulfills His covenant involves the preparation of a people to make them capable of receiving its fulness! This preparation involves discipline, repentance and holiness. The Lord did not take Moses and his people directly from

Egypt to Canaan. They demonstrated they were not mature enough for that, so they were disciplined forty years in the wilderness. In Isaiah's day it was apparent God's covenant people needed some severe discipline and serious penitence. Isaiah is attempting to prepare his people spiritually for the coming captivity. He is trying to reorient their thinking about who God is and what He does that they may have faith in Him in spite of the circumstances of the imminent exile.

The troubles of the Jews (called "indignation" by Daniel) did not cease with the Babylonian exile. Great and powerful enemies opposed the Jews ever after (Babylon, Persia, Greece, Syria, Egypt, Rome, etc.). So, this passage has its fulfillment, not in genetic, national, Israel, but in the children of Abraham according to faith (Rom. 4:1-25; Gal. 3:6-9; 3:15-29). It is readily apparent from the New Testament that God's deliverance of His covenant people from their enemies was not intended to be fulfilled physically, but spiritually (which is more important) (cf. Lk. 1:46-55; 1:68-79; Eph. 6:10-18; Col. 2:12-15, etc.). It is true, God preserved a physical nation, the Jews, until about 70 A.D. when they were scattered all over the world by the Romans. They are still a dispersed and dispossessed people today (in spite of the fact that a very small percentage of Jews maintain a very tenuous occupation of a portion of Palestine). But even this preservation of a physical nation until 70 A.D. was possible only because a small minority (remnant) of that nation trusted God and hoped in the messianic promises. Now that the Messiah's kingdom has been established physical, national relationship is no longer efficacious with God. Within the Messiah's kingdom there is neither Jew nor Gentile. God has always been interested in the spiritual man (Rom. 2:28-29), not just his nationality. The true Israel of God walks by the rule that neither circumcision (Jew) nor uncircumcision (Gentile) counts for anything, but a new creation (Gal. 6:15-16).

If Israel of Isaiah's day will serve the Lord by believing and obeying, He will deliver them from those who would oppose the redemptive work of God in the world. God will deliver

the Jews from Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Syria, Egypt and, in the days of the Roman empire He will fulfill His covenant through the Messiah. The Messiah will defeat once and for all the power of the devil. The Messiah will demonstrate historically that God is able to defeat even death. All the promises of God find their Yea! in Christ (II Cor. 1:20).

QUIZ

1. What service was Israel to render as God's servant?
2. What was the basis upon which God chose Israel as His servant?
3. What is the point of emphasizing Israel's servanthood?
4. What enemies will God destroy?
5. What is the long-range fulfillment of this passage?

c. GLORY TO GOD

TEXT: 41:14-20

- 14 Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith Jehovah, and thy Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.
- 15 Behold, I have made thee to be a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth; thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff.
- 16 Thou shalt winnow them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them; and thou shalt rejoice in Jehovah, thou shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel.
- 17 The poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst; I Jehovah will answer them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them.
- 18 I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the

midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.

- 19 I will put in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia, and the myrtle, and the oil-tree; I will set in the desert the fir-tree, the pine, and the box-tree together:
- 20 that they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of Jehovah hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it.

QUERIES

- a. Why is Jacob called a "worm"?
- b. Did God ever make such physical changes to Palestine as are described in verses 18 and 19?

PARAPHRASE

Do not be afraid Israel. Although you are as despised as a worm, I will help you, says Jehovah. Your Savior is the Eternal Holy One of Israel. I am going to make you grind your enemies into pieces like a new threshing sledge grinds wheat into chaff. Even though those who oppose you may be as formidable as great mountains, you will grind them down and blow them away into nothingness. Then you will give praise and glory to Jehovah and be filled with joy because the Holy One of Israel has delivered you. Right now you are spiritually destitute and in need of the living water and there is none. But I, Jehovah, will answer those who recognize their need and call upon Me. I will not forsake any of My faithful ones. In the midst of the thirst of My people for life I will open a river. I will completely reverse these conditions of spiritual aridness. The change will be miraculous. Those who remain faithful to Me will partake of life-giving water everywhere and will grow and produce fruit and will be like an oasis of trees and pools in a desert wilderness. The objective is that man may see, know, consider,

and understand together that the Lord, not man, created this miraculous change.

COMMENTS

v. 14-16 **WORM WINS:** The Hebrew word *tola'ath* is translated worm and is the name of the *coccus worm* which was the worm used in making scarlet dye. It is the same word used in Psa. 22:6 in reference to the scorn and despite men will show the Messiah. Jacob (Israel) is called a worm by Isaiah to describe the scorn with which the nation is looked upon by its enemies. Assyria considers Judah with contempt (see comments Isaiah 36:8-9). It is interesting that God's covenant people are called "worm" and the Messiah calls Himself "worm" (Psa. 22:6). God is going to give the covenant people victory over their adversaries. They may go into captivity but eventually they will return, by the Spirit of God, to resume their service of messianic destiny. Their enemies will, one by one (Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome) be ground to chaff (cf. Dan. 2:31-45, esp. 2:35), and blown away. A threshing sledge was a flat plank or planks of wood with rollers underneath studded with metal spikes for thrashing wheat. They were sometimes put to use by armies to torture and execute prisoners of war. This prediction of covenant victory over enemies ultimately was fulfilled in the Messiah. The Messiah's victory will usher in a universal kingdom of God (the church) and men of all nations will rejoice and give glory to the Holy One of Israel who accomplished it all (cf. Isa. 2:1-5; 19:16-25; Zech. 14:16-21, etc.).

v. 17-20 **WATER IN THE WILDERNESS:** Isaiah describes the destitution of the covenant people under another figure. They are "poor and needy" seeking water and there is none. They appear to be helpless and hopeless. We think this applies to their spiritual destitution. At no time has God ever physically watered all the wastelands of Palestine. This passage undoubtedly refers to the spiritual water of life to be supplied

by the Messiah (cf. John 4 and John 7). This passage is parallel to Isaiah, chapter 35 (see our comments there). The point is that God is going to completely reverse their spiritual situation from destitution to abundance. Edward J. Young comments: "The emphasis upon water and trees had also been found in the account of Eden in Genesis 3. Through the entrance of sin into the world, however, the garden was forfeited, and man entered a world where thorns and thistles would grow and he would labor by the sweat of his brow. In picturing the future age of blessing, the eschatological period when the restoration will occur, Isaiah uses the combined figures of water and trees. It is as though a bit of heaven had come down to earth; and indeed, those who one day will be blessed of these rivers and these trees are in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus." And the objective for all this spiritual regeneration is to bring glory to the Holy One of Israel who shall do it. Israel, the worm, the poor and needy, is incapable of changing its despicable condition. God will, by His grace, send His Servant the Messiah to create the new order. Isaiah's contemporaries are called upon to believe the Lord's promise and wait upon Him in faith.

QUIZ

1. What connection does "worm" have with the Messiah?
2. Who will rejoice in the victory of God's people over their enemies?
3. Why call Israel "poor and needy"?
4. What parallel passage in Isaiah helps understand the figures of water and trees?
5. What is the object of this great reversal of Israel's circumstances?

d. GOOD TIDINGS

TEXT: 41:21-29

- 21 Produce your cause, saith Jehovah; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob.
- 22 Let them bring them forth, and declare unto us what shall happen: declare ye the former things, what they are, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or show us things to come.
- 23 Declare the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods: yea, do good, or do evil, that we may be dismayed, and behold it together.
- 24 Behold, ye are of nothing, and your work is of nought; an abomination is he that chooseth you.
- 25 I have raised up one from the north, and he is come; from the rising of the sun one that calleth upon my name: and he shall come upon rulers as upon mortar, and as the potter treadeth clay.
- 26 Who hath declared it from the beginning, that we may know? and beforetime, that we may say, He is right? yea, there is none that declareth, yea, there is none that showeth, yea, there is none that heareth your words.
- 27 I am the first that saith unto Zion, Behold, behold them; and I will give to Jerusalem one that bringeth good tidings.
- 28 And when I look, there is no man; even among them there is no counsellor, that, when I ask of them, can answer a word.
- 29 Behold, all of them, their works are vanity and nought; their molten images are wind and confusion.

QUERIES

- a. Who is Jehovah challenging to “produce cause”?
- b. Who is being “raised up from the north”?
- c. Who is the “one that bringeth good tidings”?

PARAPHRASE

All you who have put your trust in idols, I, Jehovah challenge you to demonstrate causes and reasons for such trust. Bring forth your idols and let them declare what is going to happen. I challenge them to tell what has occurred in years gone by and what it all means; and I challenge them to tell what is yet to come—predict the future. Indeed, your idols may prove they are deities if they are able to predict the future and do supernatural works of deliverance and judgment which will astound us. As a matter of fact, your idols are less than nothing and they can do nothing at all. Men and women who choose to worship idols are disgusting and detestable. I, the Lord, am going to raise up one (Cyrus) to deliver My people from their enemies. He will come from the east by way of the north and he will do My will. He will tear down rulers and kingdoms as easily as he does mortared walls. As the potter is able to trample upon the clay with which he works, so will this deliverer trample under foot his opposition. Which of the pagan deities have predicted this so that when it comes to pass we may know they are gods? Not a one! No other god known has said anything at all about it! I, Jehovah, was the first and only One to tell My covenant people, Look! Look! Your deliverers. Furthermore, I will give to Jerusalem a prophet to announce this good news of deliverance. But when I look among all the pagan deities there is not a single one who can give any kind of counsel—not a one of them answers My challenge. You see? they are all foolish, worthless things; these idols are all as empty as the wind.

COMMENTS

v. 21-24 CHALLENGE: Now Jehovah is going to prove His previous claims that His covenant people need not fear the threats of their enemies (Assyria and Babylon). There were many in Israel and Judah listening to the alleged prophecies

of false prophets and the oracles of pagan gods. These false prophecies predicted the obliteration of the Jews and the downfall of the Jewish God, Jehovah. It seems astonishing that the Jews, with all their history of miraculous deliverances from the Egyptians, Canaanites, Philistines, etc., could ever doubt Jehovah's power. They had become so engrossed in politics, economics, pagan philosophies and just plain sensuality, they had no time for God and His Word. As a result when it became apparent they were going to be invaded by the awesome, terrifying hordes of Assyria and Babylon, they could not turn to Jehovah. They did not know Him! Most of the Jews turned to pagan soothsayers and idol-priests (cf. Isa. 8:16-22, etc.). But God, through the prophet Isaiah, is revealing that He will deliver His people from these terrible enemies. Positive, empirical, proof that Jehovah is their only Deliverer is demonstrated once and for all in fulfillment of prophecy. When history is predicted before it happens it is a claim to omniscience and omnipotence. When that prediction comes to pass it demonstrates deity. The authority of a prophet was proved by the fulfillment of his predictions (Deut. 18:21-22). Jehovah challenges all the pagan gods to give proof of their divine power by divulging the future. Jehovah challenges the idols and their priests to "declare the former things" which is a call to interpret past history. They cannot even do this! Then He calls them to "show us things to come." God does not want credulous worshipers. Preaching without proof and evidence is scarcely preaching at all. It encourages naked credulity and shallow conviction. So, when God sent Isaiah to produce faith in His deliverance, He gave proof and evidence of His power. That proof was that Jehovah could foretell, through His prophet, the future. Pagan deities could not. This same confrontation (between God's prophets and pagan idols) recurs over and over again in history (Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Paul). God does not shrink from the demand of authenticating credentials for His Word. What Jehovah predicts has already been recorded in 41:2ff in the "one from the east." The prediction is repeated in 41:25ff. But for now, Jehovah's challenge

goes unanswered and the conclusion is inevitable—idols are not gods! As a matter of fact, idols are less than nothing. The verdict is: idols are a totally minus-quantity and so is their work. They cannot do good nor can they do evil. Missionaries have found in modern pagan tribes demonstrations of the power the mind has over the body when the mind is “psyched” or hypnotized by superstition and fear. But they have also found that once the idol-worshipper sees a demonstration that their idol is “nothing” he is at once healed of his physical malady. Abomination is from the Hebrew word *tuaivah* which means abhorrent, disgusting, detestable, repugnant. Those who deliberately choose to worship idols soon become like the thing they worship (cf. Hosea 9:10; Psa. 115:3-8).

v. 25-29 CONFUTATION: The “one from the north . . . from the rising of the sun” is the same one from “the east” in 41:2, Cyrus, king of Persia (cf. comments 41:2ff). The massive armies of the great Mesopotamian empires (Assyria, Babylon, Persia) all swooped down on Palestine from “the north.” One only has to look at a map of the Near East to see that ancient armies could not march west over the Arabian desert since they had to sustain themselves by daily forage for food and water. So they marched north and came across the “fertile crescent” and entered Palestine from the north. Cyrus will be irresistible. He will do with the enemies of God’s people what a potter does with his clay. Now, says Jehovah, which pagan idol or pagan prophet foreknew any events to show they knew Israel’s destiny or the future history of Mesopotamian empires? Have any of their words ever been fulfilled so that men were obliged to say, “That idol was right”? Not a one! Not one word about Israel’s deliverance through the “one from the east” ever came from the heathen oracles. Jehovah, through His prophets, was first and only to make such a declaration. He announced that the Deliverer would come to Zion. Even in the midst of all His announcements of the future captivity He announces deliverance from it by the “one from the east.” This would be good news to Jerusalem. Of course, it would be good news only to those who believed. That was always a minority.

The majority of the people never even recognized the promises of deliverance because they refused to believe the predictions of judgment in the first place. And when one looked toward the pagan gods and prophets one could find no intimation whatsoever of this great deliverance. There is only stupid silence. They do not know the future. So they are nothing. They are powerless. They are just wind. Finis! The contest is over—God is victor. Jehovah conquers all for His people.

QUIZ

1. Why did the Jews listen to pagan prophets?
2. Why does God give proof and evidence for His omniscience?
3. Why are those who choose idols an "abomination"?
4. Why did the Mesopotamian armies come from the north?
5. How much did the pagan oracles say about Israel's deliverance?
6. What is the conclusion of the contest between God and idols?

3. COVENANT, CHAPTER 42

a. SEE MY SERVANT

TEXT: 42:1-9

- 1 Behold, my servant, whom I uphold; my chosen, in whom my soul delighteth: I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.
- 2 He will not cry, nor lift up his voice, nor cause it to be heard in the street.
- 3 A bruised reed will he not break, and a dimly burning wick will he not quench: he will bring forth justice in truth.
- 4 He will not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set justice in the earth; and the isles shall wait for his law.