

ISAIAH

ISAIAH 41:21-29, IDOLS TRIED AND FOUND WANTING

The first eight verses of the chapter reveal God's dispute with the nations ending with the fearful Gentiles turning to idols for reassurance, which is foolishness. That was interrupted by words of comfort for "Israel My servant." In this section, idols are again the focus of revelation as Yahweh calls for the idolaters to present themselves and their idols before Him and prove the worth of their manmade idols. The claims made for idols are called into question, those claims are evaluated, and a verdict is reached. Then God declares what He is going to do in the future which are things that only He can do and that idols cannot do. The inescapable conclusion is that God alone is omnipotent and omniscient; therefore, only Yahweh can reveal the future and bring it to pass. Idolaters rely on something worthless that cannot do a thing to help them. These verses are immediately preceded by the revelation of the miracle God is going to perform when He restores the physical nature of His creation by turning the desert waste areas into productive, watered ground capable of supporting trees that do not ordinarily grow in such areas. He can do that. Can the idols do the same? They are also preceded by the guarantee that Yahweh is going to deliver Israel from the hands of those who seek to destroy the nation and its people. Who is going to win that battle? Will Yahweh ultimately protect and deliver Israel, or will the pagans and their idols, representing Satan and his power, succeed in overcoming Yahweh to destroy His people? Remember, in comparison to all the other mighty nations of the world, Israel is but an insignificant, powerless worm. However, Yahweh is the ultimate equalizer, and He is Israel's strength.

The issue is who has divine powers such that the world bows to the will of the One who wields that power. Yahweh issues the challenge which is in the form of a call to declare the future if they can! This situation is acted out as though it is in a courtroom setting.

Isaiah 41:21 ²¹“Present [קָרַב] your case,” the LORD says. “Bring [בְּגִישׁ] forward your strong [עֲצוּמוֹת] arguments,” The King of Jacob says.

“Present” and “bring” are synonyms presented in the form of imperative verbs, which are commands. The Creator God of the universe is ordering idolaters to appear before Him and present their arguments to Him concerning the viability of their idols.

Present, קָרַב, means to approach, to come near referring to bringing forward and presenting to the mind. The verb form is one representing intensity. The idolaters are being commanded to approach God and present before Him the complete case concerning the effectiveness of their idols.

Bring, בְּגִישׁ, means to draw near, to approach, to bring near, or to be brought near referring to moving towards or near. Basically, it has to do with being close with the subject and the object being in close spatial proximity. This verb form is one representing causative action; therefore, the concept of being brought near is the primary meaning. The idolaters are going to have to bring their arguments forth, present them, and have them examined by Yahweh whether they actually want to do so or not.

Yahweh refers to Himself as “The King of Jacob.” The nations certainly do not regard Him as anything more than a local god who is attached to Israel, but He is, of course, much more than that. He is the Creator God of the universe, the King of all Kings. “*The LORD ... Jacob’s King*: this emphasis on a (merely) national God is deliberate. The Lord comes before the court as one God among many—because this is the point at issue: which of all the claimants to divinity is genuine?” [J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*, 257]. As the King of Jacob, or, as Isaiah frequently puts it, the Holy One of Israel, Yahweh is capable of delivering the nation from its enemies, who are satanically driven, and of fulfilling His covenant promises to them. In the eschatological sense, He is perfectly capable of thwarting the king of idolatry, Satan, and delivering on His promises to establish the King and His Kingdom not only in and over Israel, but over the entire world. Of course, Yahweh is no ordinary king; He is the divine King of the universe, and He is in control of world history.

Strong, עֲצֻמוֹת, means defense, a defensive argument, proofs, or evidence in a legal proceeding. It is a presentation of one’s strong reasons or arguments in the form of responding to an attack on one’s own assertions. Since the context here suggests a legal proceeding, it is best to view this word as the representation of an evidentiary argument presenting one’s case against an opposing set of ideas or charges. In keeping with the legal sense concerning what is happening in this verse, other translations read, “produce your evidence” (NET Bible), “bring your evidence” (LEB), and “bring your proofs” (ESV). “Strong arguments” is not an incorrect translation, but it is not as contextually accurate as the others. The evidence they need to present would be evidence that they possess any divine power.

In the next two verses, Yahweh challenges the idols to prove their divinity by accurately proclaiming the future. He also challenges them to do something, anything, to prove they actually exist and can perform tasks and bring things to pass.

Isaiah 41:22–23 ²²Let them bring [בְּגִישׁ] forth and declare [בְּגִד] to us what is going to take place; As for the former events, declare what they were, That we may consider them and know their outcome. Or announce to us what is coming; ²³Declare the things that are going to come afterward, That we may know that you are gods; Indeed, do good or evil, that we may anxiously look about us and fear together.

The idolaters are commanded to bring their idols before Yahweh and cause them to declare the future. Idols cannot move of their own accord; they must be brought forth by those who worship before them. Bring forth, בְּגִישׁ, is the same word used in verse 21 and again used in a causative verb form calling for the idols to be brought near to the presence of Yahweh for the purposes of answering His questions and proving themselves to be real gods.

Declare, בְּגִד, means to be in front or to be in sight therefore being made manifest by proposing, announcing, informing, giving evidence, providing an explanation, and thereby becoming known. The idolaters are to cause the idols to make known the future—if they can. But that is the question, isn’t it? Can these idols actually predict the future which implies that they are able to ensure that what they predict will certainly come to pass?

Simply reciting facts about the past is not the issue. Can the idols explain the past events and their significance for the future? How did past events unfold such that they explain things in the present? What will the outcome be when the effects of those past events are moving forward through time and history? How are past events connected with one another and with the future? Can the future be known by understanding the past? If all of these things can be known, then any god worth his salt as a god ought to be able to answer these questions.

The idols seem to be given a choice. They can declare the former things or the future things. The choice is theirs to make, but they must declare something in terms of prediction so their status as gods will be made manifest. They will either prove they are gods or not. If they cannot establish their identity as true, divine beings, then they are obviously not gods at all.

"These abilities, says Isaiah, would prove that *you are gods*. *Do something*: better, 'Indeed, do anything!' Isaiah gives them *carte blanche*. His contention, sensibly, is that deity will show itself in two ways: by actions demonstrating life, and by predictions demonstrating sovereign rule over the world in all its complexity. A real god will show himself by speaking his word and then watching over his word to bring it to pass" [J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*, 257].

The call to do good or to do evil is a call to show some activity, some signs of life. Good and evil may represent the gamut of possible activities across the broad spectrum from good to evil. If so, the charge is to do something, anything, to prove that they can operate as gods. All they have been is lifeless, mute objects that sit and do nothing. They are called to prove they can do something, anything, and thereby prove they have life.

Smith had a humorous evaluation of the command to do good or to do evil. "God ridicules these gods ... 'Do something, whether good or bad.' Do something out of the ordinary to cause people to fear your power. Scare us, cast a curse, say boo, do something!" [Gary W. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scriptures: Isaiah 40-66*, 146].

Young made an interesting observation here concerning these two verses and the subject of apologetics. "This verse illustrates the true method of Christian apologetics. Falsehood is here placed upon the defensive; it is commanded in the name of the God of Israel to defend its cause and to point out its justification for existence. There are difficulties in the acceptance of Christianity, but the Christian need not be expected to answer every difficulty. Rather, he must challenge the very right of unbelief to a hearing. The cause of God is best defended by means of a challenging offensive such as is here offered" [Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, vol. 3, 3:40-66].

Christianity is not in view in this verse, but the apologetics principle he asserts here is valid. Young's position sounds like presuppositional apologetics wherein the believer's approach is to begin with the presupposition that God exists and that the Scriptures are the authoritative Word of God. Those things are not open for debate; they are presumed to be true from the beginning of the argument. God's reasoning is the basis for our

apologetic, not man's reasoning which is the only way that unbelievers can think and argue which is only futility. Obviously, unbelievers do not have the same starting point which leads some Christian apologetics experts to criticize presuppositional apologetics because they think you have to prove God and the truth of the Scriptures in order to get anyone to listen to your apologetic in the first place.

An important note to all this is the recognition that all pagan gods represent some aspect of the created order whether it is animals, the heavenly bodies, plant life, etc. This means that idols are not transcendent, that is, apart from the created order; only Yahweh is outside the bounds of His creation. What God is doing here is mounting "a highly sophisticated attack at the very roots of the pagan understanding of existence. What separates God from the gods is this concept of absolute transcendence that allows him to act independently of the system and to predict what the system will do in new and as yet unexperienced situations" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 100].

The response of the idols is, of course, one of silence. They cannot even speak much less perform any act whether good or evil. They cannot explain the past and its significance in the present, nor can they accurately foretell the future. In other words, they are absolutely worthless. God's verdict begins to be announced.

Isaiah 41:24 ²⁴Behold [הִנֵּן], you are of no [אֵינְךָ] account, And your work amounts to nothing [אֵפֶסֶת]; He who chooses [בְּחָר] you is an abomination [תּוֹעֵבָה].

Just because idols are worthless, does not mean they have no impact on mankind. Many people believe they are real gods, despite all the evidence to the contrary that they are nothing, and therefore worship them, but all that does is keep the majority of mankind from believing in the one true God. That's true whether we are talking about the Israelites or about mankind in general. Two opposing God systems, for lack of a better way to say it, cannot both be true; one must always be false.

The verse begins with the word behold, הִנֵּן, which is an interjection that calls the listener or the reader to pay attention to what follows and to emphasize it. It may be translated "behold!" "look!" or "see!" In the context of discussing idols, what follows is important and the speaker, who is God, wants people to really pay attention to what He is about to say. What He is about to say is that idols are worthless; they can do nothing.

No, אֵין, means non-existence, no, none, nothing, emptiness, or vacuity [having or showing a lack of thought or intelligence; mindless]. The text literally reads, "Behold, you are from nothing ..." This word certainly describes idols; they are nothing, empty, mindless, and without existence in terms of possessing any form of life. The sense is that they are either a part of nothing or less than nothing ["from nothing" may be interpreted either way] and worth no more than anything else that does not exist. They possess, in and of themselves, no reality. They are powerless and can do no good for anyone at any time. In fact, they represent evil and not good. They cannot be God in any sense.

When it is said that idols are non-existent, it does not mean there is not a real idol set before people that is worshiped and made of wood, stone, and metal, but it does mean that idols are nothing in terms of their ability to do anything. They are blind, deaf, mute,

and unable to perform any activity whatsoever. However, we need to remember that while idols themselves can do nothing, they do represent and are covers for real, powerful, demonic forces that are malevolent purveyors of evil. They may be worthless, but they are not harmless! Anyone who gets involved with pagan systems of religious practice, including dalliances with otherwise lifeless idols, are playing in the devil's playground which is very dangerous territory indeed. In fact, we will see in a moment, that God refers to those who enter into idol worship as engaging in detestable things.

Nothing, אָפֶסֶת, means something worthless or a quantity of no importance or of no account. The sense is one of being useless in terms of functionality. Idols, who are thought to be gods, can do nothing at all. They are powerless and produce nothing.

Choose, בָּחַר, means to choose by examination, by taking a keen look at, or by proving in order to determine what is best, finest, or choice referring to that which is the best of a class or kind. It denotes a choice which is based on a thorough examination of the situation and not on an arbitrary whim. It can simply mean to choose something, but it generally has theological overtones to its use referring to ultimate and eternal significance. The word implies that a careful, well thought out choice is being made. People who choose to participate in idolatry are engaging in a very foolish endeavor. Choosing to worship idols is inherently a decision to worship the satanic forces that are the power behind the idols. It is not merely a foolish mistake; it is a decision born of a rebellious, perverted, and degraded human spirit. People choose to believe in who and what they want to believe in—that was true then, and it is still true today. The Israelites were free to choose to worship idols, and they did so, but they also paid the price by means of temporal disciplinary action imposed by God for their rebellion. It didn't have to be that way, it still doesn't, and Yahweh is providing them with reasons why they never should have considered that course of action in the first place, and, based on this revelation, they certainly should not continue to do it. They should choose truth over untruth.

The context here certainly has ultimate and eternal significance. People who reject God and instead worship idols are facing eternal consequences for their choices.

In terms of the Israelites, they should not fear the gods of their enemies. Having said that, however, the god of this world, who is the power behind these worthless idols, is to be feared, but Yahweh will never allow Israel to be completely destroyed. He will allow Satan and his minions in the world system to be His instruments of divine temporal discipline on Israel, but He will not allow Israel's complete destruction. In this context, God is reassuring the Israelites that the pagan gods are no match for Him, the one true Creator God of the universe.

Abomination, תּוֹעֵבָה, means an abomination, a detestable thing, repulsion, or abhorrence referring to something that is an abomination which causes horror and disgust in others. It refers to things that are aesthetically and morally repulsive. Idols themselves are also identified by this Hebrew word, but in this grammatical construction, it is a reference to those people who choose to worship idols. They are a detestable thing in God's sight at least, and they should be a detestable thing in the sight of all who worship Yahweh. The Israelites, who should have known better than to worship idols, were an abomination for

their idol worship. They are being told here that there is no reason for an Israelite to make the choice to participate in idolatry. Idols cannot help them. "To be sure he is foolish, for he is doing something that is itself foolish; but his action is more than foolish; it is wicked and despicable, and for that reason the one who does it is an abomination" [Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, vol. 3, 3:100].

The next verse involves a prophecy that will validate Yahweh's ability to predict the future and see to it that His prediction comes to pass which is in contrast to the idols' inability to do the same. The identity of the person whom God will arouse is not named in this verse, it is beside the point at this time, but he will be named later in Isaiah's book (Is. 44:24-45:7). The point being made here is that Yahweh can predict the future and ensure that it comes to pass.

Isaiah 41:25 ²⁵"I have aroused [עורר] one from the north, and he has come; From the rising of the sun he will call on My name; And he will come upon rulers as upon mortar [הֶחֱמַר], Even as the potter treads clay."

Aroused, עורר, means, in this context, to stir, to awaken, and to rouse resulting in causing someone to be agitated, excited, and roused. It is used to raise something or someone to action, of agitating someone, and of motivating the person so aroused. That is exactly what is going to take place. This person who will be used to accomplish God's will at some point in the future is pictured as one who is asleep, but who will be roused from his slumber to fulfill the purpose set before him. The concept of sleep is suggesting that the man in view is dormant, his nation and his army have yet to ascend to prominence, and he will need to be aroused from that state before he can perform that which he will be assigned to do.

We know from the later revelation in Isaiah that this is a reference to the Persian King Cyrus who, while his nation is in the east, attacked Babylon from the north and conquered the Babylonian Empire. Some theologians deny that this king is Cyrus because they equate calling on the name of the Lord with justification salvation, which, in most cases is correct. Calling on the name of the Lord here does not indicate that Cyrus is, or ever became, a believer. Cyrus was going to proclaim the name of the Lord by fulfilling this prophecy which would then prove that Yahweh is the one true omnipotent, true God and prove His ability to foretell the future and bring it to pass. Furthermore, Cyrus did acknowledge Yahweh as the God of heaven, but that too does not mean he was saved. Cyrus had a habit of acknowledging and worshipping the gods of all the nations he was involved with as a means of pacifying the local population groups and inducing cooperation from them.

We also know that Cyrus gave his pagan god Marduk credit for his successful empire building excursions which argues against any proclamation of faith in Yahweh on his part. "Marduk ... sought a righteous prince, after his own heart, whom he took by the hand, Cyrus, king of Anshan, he called by name, to lordship over the whole world he appointed him ... to his city Babylon he caused him to go ... his numerous troops in number unknown, like the water of a river, marched armed at his side. Without battle and conflict he permitted him to enter Babylon. He spared his city Babylon a calamity. Nabunaid, the

king, who did not fear him, he delivered into his hand" [quoted in Merrill F. Unger, s.v. "Cyrus," *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, 269-270].

I have concluded that Cyrus gave Yahweh His due, but it seems likely to me that he considered Yahweh to be another god alongside his god, Marduk. I don't think that based on this Scripture in Isaiah that he was a righteous king in terms of what the Bible would consider to be a righteous king, nor was he saved in terms of justification salvation.

Ezra recorded the fulfillment of this prophecy.

Ezra 1:2-3 ²"Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. ³'Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with him! Let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel; He is the God who is in Jerusalem.

The fulfillment recorded by Ezra certainly exalted the God of heaven who can foretell the future and bring it to pass by using an unbelieving, pagan king to do His will. As I mentioned in the discussion on whether or not Cyrus was in view in verses 2-3, I supported the concept that if Cyrus was in view there, he was also a type of Messiah. That is the situation here as well. Later, in Isaiah 45:1, we will note that Cyrus was called Yahweh's anointed which is messianic language. Anointed is מָשִׁיחַ, which we translate "Messiah."

In Ezra 1:3, in his references to God, the king switches from the first-person personal pronouns he used in verse 2 to third-person personal pronouns by referring to "His people," meaning God's people, and to "his God" referring to the God of the believing Israelites. Cyrus never says that Yahweh is his God, and he distances himself from the Israelite believers by means of the change in pronoun tenses from first to third.

Two metaphors are used to indicate the power of this king who comes out of the north. He will come upon the kings he intends to conquer as mortar. I don't think anyone quite knows the exact meaning of this metaphor. Mortar is a cement that binds masonry together as building materials. Perhaps, the metaphor suggests that this king will be able to bind his enemies up as though cementing them in place with mortar. The potter treading clay is a little easier to understand. A potter mashing clay underfoot is an apt metaphor for a king who conquers his foes at will as though smashing them underfoot with overwhelming, invincible power that cannot be resisted.

There is an alternate interpretation that combines these two metaphors as one and renders them a bit more understandable. Mortar, הוֹקֵר, means cement, mortar, or clay. It refers to a very fine-grained sand that is malleable when moist, but hard when fired. If mortar were translated "clay," then this could be translated: "He steps on rulers as if they were clay, like a potter treading the clay" [NET Bible], or "And he has trampled rulers like mud, like a potter treading clay" [TANAKH]. Interpretations such as these tie the two together making them one and making them more understandable.

The next verse is an emphatic declaration from Yahweh that He alone can declare things from the beginning so that people may know what is going to happen in the future long

before it occurs. This verse emphasizes the omniscience of God; He alone is the one who knows the end from the beginning.

Isaiah 41:26 ²⁶Who has declared *this* from the beginning, that we might know? Or from former times, that we may say, "He is right [צַדִּיק!]"? Surely [אָי] there was no one who declared, Surely there was no one who proclaimed, Surely there was no one who heard your words.

Because Yahweh is the only One who can predict the future, He is unique. Pagans believed they received messages from the gods; however, the messages were never specific, but instead they were only unclear, nonspecific, and inaccurate except by chance; therefore, Yahweh alone is capable of revealing specific knowledge of the future. Even if pagans were able to receive messages from their gods, they were messages from the realm of darkness.

The challenge here goes forth to the idols to find out which of them predicted this king's appearance on the world stage, but none of them declared the prophecy and no one heard any such declaration. When it comes to predictive prophecy, only a real God can successfully do it and therefore prove His power and His identity.

"From the beginning" and "from former times," are references to the time when the predicted events began unfolding in history. Who was the One who declared these things so that people would know what was going to take place? When they do take place, He can be declared right. Right, צַדִּיק, means just and righteous, which is something that only applies to Yahweh. The reference here is not just about the One who declares the future being correct, which is true, but it is also about the character of the One who can accurately predict the future. The only character that idols represent is dark and evil; it is not righteous and just.

The answer to the question is that no idol made any predictions about anything that has or will come to pass. The Lord emphasizes the fact that no one declared, no one proclaimed, and no one heard any words uttered by the idols which so many people think to be gods. Surely, אָי, is an interjection that means also, even, or indeed. This word conveys a meaning that is more forceful in English than "surely," although that word is better than the words most other translations use. "Indeed, none of them decreed it! Indeed, none of them announced it! Indeed, no one heard you say anything!" [NET Bible]. This word is used to convey the certainty and truthfulness of that which is being revealed, and this interjection is meant to forcefully get the reader's attention concerning the truth being revealed.

Even though the idols have not spoken, Yahweh has spoken to Israel.

Isaiah 41:27 ²⁷"Formerly *I* said to Zion, 'Behold, here they are.' And to Jerusalem, 'I will give a messenger of good news.'

This verse is difficult to interpret. It does not say that God spoke these words to Zion, the NASB translators added "I said" for clarification, although He did do that through the

prophet and the context certainly implies it. A more literal rendering is, "First to Zion. Behold! Behold them! And to Jerusalem, I will give one proclaiming good news."

The first thing to Zion, translated "formerly" in the NASB, refers not to an event, but to the prophetic Word of God. For those who listen to it and believe it, it is good news, and they are to watch for it to be fulfilled. God reveals these things to those in Zion, and Cyrus will be good news for the Jews and for Jerusalem. Generally, the news of a pagan king on the rampage in the vicinity was not cause for good news, but, in this case, it is good news. First, and to the point of this pericope, his coming would validate the efficacy of Yahweh's prophecy of the coming of Cyrus. No one else, particularly an idol made such a prediction. Second, it would be good news because Cyrus was going to allow the Jews held captive in Babylon to return to Jerusalem.

There is another way to view this verse. This view claims that the messenger of good news is Isaiah predicting the return of the Jews to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity. However, this depends on interpreting prior prophetic verses as short-term prophecies rather than as the end times prophecies they are. For example, Buksbazen claims that Isaiah 13 is a prediction of the defeat of the Babylonian empire by the Medes. That's true but only to a point; Isaiah 13 also refers to the Day of the Lord (Is. 13:6, 9). Either way, it is good news for Jerusalem even though Buksbazen is mistaken when he says it only relates to the repatriation out of the Babylonian captivity. Given the context, I favor the first view.

This pericope ends with God's pronouncement that reveals the results of His inquisition into the matter of idols—idols are utterly worthless. In verse 24, God pronounced the idols of no account and nothing. In conclusion, He follows up by proclaiming them to be false, worthless, wind, and emptiness.

Isaiah 41:28–29 ²⁸"But when I look, there is no one, And there is no counselor [יֹדֵעַן] among them Who, if I ask, can give an answer. ²⁹"Behold, all of them are false [אָנָן]; Their works [מַעֲשֵׂהָ] are worthless [אָפֶסֶס], Their molten images are wind [רוּחַ] and emptiness [תְּהוֹם].

I do not think there could be a stronger denunciation in a more humiliating fashion from the Creator God of the universe concerning idols than this.

Idols have no one in their ranks who can answer God's questions on their behalf concerning their viability. Counselor, יֹדֵעַן, means to advise, to consult, or to counsel, referring to a person who gives advice about problems. In this context, it refers to someone, anyone, who could possibly represent these idols and provide answers on their behalf, answers that would indicate they can actually explain how past prophecy impacts current history, and that they can accurately predict the future. God has provided them with ample opportunity to provide Him with proof they can do these things, but no one has responded to Him with an answer to His inquiry.

Behold is a word used to direct attention to what follows, and what follows is a serious condemnation of idols as false, worthless, and nothing more than wind and emptiness.

False, אָנָן, means emptiness, vanity, deception, evil, calamity, trouble, sorrow, and wickedness. In this context, it refers to being a deception, a misleading falsehood. I don't think we can discount the fact that idolaters suffer terribly—temporally in this life and

certainly eternally—for following after false gods who can do nothing for them. In fact, idolaters are actually following after the dark spirits their idols represent, beings who mean to do them harm both materially in the temporal realm and spiritually in the spiritual realm.

Worthless, **בָּטָל**, means cessation or ceasing, naught, and non-existence referring to nothing, that is, it represents a quantity of no importance. Idols really have no existence in and of themselves, and they can accomplish nothing at all. Not only are their works worthless, they cannot accomplish anything considered to be work. Work, **מְעֵשָׂה**, means a deed, work, labor, accomplishment referring to a product produced or accomplished through the effort or activity or agency of a person or thing.

I've mentioned before that we have to be careful about assuming that idols are harmless. Great spiritual harm comes from entanglements with idols. Not because the material form of the idol is anything or has any power, but because of the dark forces that idol fronts and represents. Entering into a relationship with an idol is entering into a relationship with the demonic forces it represents.

We need to be very careful about how we think about idols. Oswalt has a well-meaning but I think very dangerous view of this situation. "The gods are not false because they are represented by idols. Rather, the beautiful idols are worthless because the gods behind them are nothing" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 105]. First of all, I don't like calling the demonic forces behind idols "gods;" they are not gods, they are dark, demonic forces subservient to Satan. It also seems to be very dangerous to call the gods, or demonic forces, behind the idols "nothing" as Oswalt did here. They are not nothing; they are very real, they are very evil, they have real power, and they can cause tremendous harm. While it is true that these demonic forces can only operate in this world according to the limits God has set for them, it is equally true that those limits seem to be quite broad at this time with the result that they can and do exercise a great deal of power and influence in the operating of this satanic world system that is in control of the world at this time. The point is, idols are not anything in and of themselves—they are manmade things out of various physical materials—but they cover for real satanic forces that are very dangerous and are certainly not "nothing." I just don't want people to get the idea that because the physical representations of what we call idols are worthless and nothing in and of themselves, as the Scriptures we are studying today reveal, that they don't represent real evil, malevolent forces that are anything but harmless, particularly in regards to the spiritual realm.

Our discussion here centers around the fact that the physical representations of demonic forces called idols are, in fact, powerless in and of themselves. They cannot do anything; they cannot hear or speak or move. These physical representations of spiritual realities are nothing more than wind and emptiness; the spiritual realities they cover are real and quite harmful, but the physical representations themselves are worthless and powerless. Wind, **רוּחַ**, means spirit, wind, or breath. In this context, the word is a reference to nothingness. Emptiness, **תְּהוֹמוֹת**, means formlessness, confusion, unreality, wasteness, and emptiness.

The discussion here is really about theology. The theology of idolatry is as empty and worthless as the physical, manmade representations of it are empty and worthless. That does not mean it is not harmful, but it is false, it is delusional—it puts man in the role of making man decide who and what the god is that he is going to worship in place of the one true Creator God— it is evil, it leads away from God rather than to God, and it is worthless in terms of representing anything that is godly and good.

The true emptiness and worthlessness of idols is discoverable only when we know the true fullness and worth of the Creator God. Nothing good flows from idolatry; only good flows from God. God is the opposite of all that idolatry represents. One is only righteous and good; the other is only unrighteous and evil.

The point being made by the prophet is that the Israelites need not fear those who worship these idols because they serve the one true Creator God who created man in His image. Idolaters worship what they have themselves created which is simply a worthless extension of their own faulty view of themselves as their own god. In terms of application, these truths are applicable to the whole world then and now; idolatry is just as evil and destructive now as it was then. That will never change.