

Pentwater Bible Church

Isaiah Message 93

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Pentwater Bible Church

The Book of Isaiah

Message Ninety-Three

BELIEVERS SEE THE WONDERS OF GOD

November 29, 2020

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Isaiah 41:17–29

¹⁷The 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. ¹⁸I 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. ¹⁹I 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: ²⁰that 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.

²¹Produce your cause, saith Jehovah; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob. ²²Let them bring 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. ²³Declare 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. ²⁴Behold, ye are of nothing, and your work is of nought; an abomination is he that chooseth you.

²⁵I 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. ²⁶Who 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 sheweth, yea, there is none that heareth your words. ²⁷I am the first that saith unto Zion, Behold, behold them; and I will give to Jerusalem one that bringeth good tidings. ²⁸And when I look, there is no man: even among them there is no counsellor, that, when I ask of them, can answer a word. ²⁹Behold, all of them, their works are vanity and nought; their molten images are wind and confusion (ASV, 1901).

GOD WILL RESCUE

Isaiah 41:17

¹⁷The 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 (ASV, 1901).

This is to be understood not literally, but spiritually; not of their outward circumstances, though the people of God are for the most part the wise and mighty of the world, and in need of the good things of it. In fact, the apostle Paul says, “*that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty,*

not many noble, are called" (I Corinthians 1:26b). Here God describes the sufferings of the captives in Babylon as a representation of the sufferings of the Tribulation people before the second coming of Christ. This will lead to the wonderful life that God will provide in the Messianic Kingdom.

Thirst is a natural metaphor for suffering (Revelation 12:13; 13:18). Speaking to Israel God says that it will be He who will alleviate their suffering when the nation is redeemed and they partake of the waters of life and the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39), who will be poured upon restored Israel (Joel 2:28-29 Isaiah 35:10; Ezekiel 37:24). This is none other than the national regeneration of Israel at the end of the campaign of Armageddon.

I the Lord will answer them; says He that is, who answers their cries and prayers, and supplies their wants. It is only the Lord God Almighty, who has the ability to help them. He is the Lord that does not change, and always fulfills His promises. Therefore, they shall not be consumed. God then says, "*I the God of Israel will not forsake them,*" but will support them, and provide for them, and carry on His work in them; of which they may be assured, because He is the God of Israel, their covenant God and Father.

BLESSINGS WILL FLOW

Isaiah 41:18–20

¹⁸I 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. ¹⁹I 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: ²⁰that 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 (ASV, 1901).

The Lord now begins to show how He will answer the cry of the people. In figurative language He shows that He will introduce a complete reversal of conditions. Under the figure of *dry hills, valleys, desert* and *dry land* He characterizes the present spiritual and physical condition of God's people. All these things are to be changed by God Himself. Wherever there are bare places, God will open streams. Which means that He will cause water to flow where there has not been any. This will result in fruitful, fertile land. In the midst of dry river beds, and wadis where there was no water, there will be springs of water. Even the desert will become pools of water, and the dry land will send forth water (Isaiah 43:2). Everywhere in the wilderness (desert), there will be a radical environmental and Spiritual change. The desert will no longer be dry; it will be as a well-watered garden. The figure of water again symbolizes life, for in a dry land the people were in a land of death. This imagery calls attention to the supernatural character and the complete radicalness of the salvation the Lord will provide for His people at the point the entire nation Israel is regenerated (Romans 11:26). The change would be such that those who experienced it would realize that "*Jehovah hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it,*" did this for them. People will *see* that the desert has to become a well-watered land. They will *know*, in that they will possess the knowledge that what has occurred is the work of only God's power. Such knowledge will not be temporary, but people will actually *place* in their hearts that is, will give themselves

over to serious reflection and meditation upon, the fact that God has provided according to His promises. Lastly, they will *understand* the meaning of what they have seen. Their consideration of these miraculous events will be based upon genuine understanding.

THE LORD CHALLENGES THE IDOLATERS TO PRODUCE

Isaiah 41:21–24

²¹Produce your cause, saith Jehovah; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob. ²²Let them bring 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. ²³Declare 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. ²⁴Behold, ye are of nothing, and your work is of nought; an abomination is he that chooseth you.

Here the idols and idolaters are called to give evidence as if in an adversarial trial to give any evidence that they can tell the future, or that they have ever done so. Can they explain how the world began or how it will end? Is there any place where an idol's interpretation of the future has been recorded so that its accuracy can be checked? The Lord answers all these with a strong *no* and a scathing denunciation of the people who worship this foolishness. Jehovah and his worshippers are on the one side of this issue and the idol-gods and their false religious leaders on the other side. *Produce your cause saith Jehovah.* The nations had been told to "draw near"—to "keep silence" while God spoke—and "then to speak" (Isaiah 41:1). Now the time for them to speak is come, and they are challenged to "produce" and plead "their cause." This is another instance reflecting on the challenge of Elijah the prophet of God to the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. The Lord God is the absolute King of Israel. The "kingly" character of the idol-gods was given with names as Moloch (equivalent to "king"), Melkart (equivalent to "king of the city"), Adrammelech (equivalent to "glorious king"), Baal (equivalent to "lord"), Adonis (equivalent to "my lord"), as well as many others.

God claims that the power of predicting the future belongs only to Him. He challenges the idol-gods and their prophets to give Him any clear prediction of future events. The idolatrous pagan nations, all practised divination, and possessed oracles (prophecies) they believed to be true. But they were false and fraudulent. They deceived so the people would depend upon these false prophecies and the so-called prophets who gave them. These liars only provided misfortune. Nobody except God can foretell things to come with certainty. Everything other than what comes from God, by his prophets, is all conjecture, ambiguous, uncertain, mere trick, and deception. This is what the oracles of the Heathens provided. All clear prophecies and definite outcomes which is a proof of Deity, which here He is challenging the idolaters. When He says, "*let them shew the former things what they be;*" He wants them to discuss the creation of the world, that were purposed, decreed, and determined. or let them show what things before predicted by them have ever come to pass. Tell Him any of their predictions; or rather *the first things, which may be, show;* what will first or presently come to pass, that show unto us if you can: *that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or, and we will set our hearts upon them; to consider them well in our minds, and diligently and attentively consider them, about how and in what manner it is*

prophecied that they shall come to pass. He wants them to tell us not only what shall be done in the present age, but onward to the end of the world. The sense of what God as said in verse 23 to the idolaters seems to provide a pause as if waiting for an answer in defense of His accusations. Here in this pause is seems that during it the Lord is waiting for these idol-gods, which are given the opportunity of bringing forth their reasoning and evidence, that, in one way or other, could prove their Divinity. But they are stricken dumb; they say nothing. Accordingly, “judgment goes against them by default” and Jehovah brings condemnation upon them with words of contempt saying, *Behold, ye are of nothing, and your work is of nought; an abomination is he that chooseth you.* This references their false assertions of Divinity and those who follow such practices and depend upon them are *an abomination*.

CYRUS THE CHOSEN OF GOD

Isaiah 41:25

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 (ASV, 1901).*

As an example of what He has done He begins to cite the rising up of Cyrus. It was He who raised up Cyrus and none of the idols ever predicted or even knew of Cyrus's coming. *He one from the north*, which alludes to the union under Cyrus of Media and Persia, the former of which was northward, the latter eastward, *from the rising of the sun* of Babylonia. Cyrus is surely one who *that calleth upon my name*. This is a prophecy of a spiritual change that God brought about in Cyrus in consequence of his wonderful career. Additional insight will be provided in a later prophecy that is in, Isaiah 45:3–7, and by the historical statement in II Chronicles 36:23 which parallels Cyrus' own words recorded in Ezra 1:2. It therefore, appears that the change in Cyrus, evidenced with such profound conviction, was his conversion to the belief that Jehovah was the cause of his success, and the only true God. Such a change was a necessary link in the chain of providential events working out Jehovah's purposes; for, until Cyrus was in some sense a brother of the Jews in faith, he had no interest in caring about their national interests. What the Lord here says is, that Cyrus did not have a sudden and violent conversion like the apostle Paul, but simply that Cyrus became conscious of his religious tie to the Jews God, and then carried out God's Will upon that consciousness. It is always God who leads the rulers of the world to achieve His goals. He was the one who overcame the rulers of the nations like a potter treading on the clay.

Proverbs 21:1

¹*The king's heart is in the hand of Jehovah as the watercourses: He turneth it whithersoever he will (KJV).*

WHO ONLY CAN ACCURATELY PROPHECY?

Isaiah 41:26–27

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, ²⁷I am the first that saith unto Zion, Behold, behold them; and I will give to Jerusalem one that bringeth good tidings (ASV, 1901).

Going back to the imagery of the cross-examination of witnesses, the Prophet Isaiah asks: Who predicted this (41:26 parallels the similar question in 41:4, 22b)? God is desiring to ensure fairness and comparable questioning of all witnesses, finds it necessary to ask: *Who hath declared it from the beginning, that we may know?* Did the idols do this or did the God of Jerusalem? It would be essential to establish this fact of history “so we could know” for certain who has this kind of Divine power. Then people would confess, “He was right.” This conclusion would decide this controversy either in the favor of the idolater’s gods or The Lord God of Israel. The question is answered both negatively here (26b) and positively in the next verse (27). The negative response is contained in three emphatic “that we may” clauses. In light of the next verse that identifies God’s positive role, these clauses refer to the failures of the idolater’s gods. Surely, none of them announced these things ahead of time. The strong negative emphasis is that none, nobody, not one of these gods knew the words that The Lord God was able to pronounce about these events.

The challenge given to the idolaters is to predict the future. It is not enough that false religion promulgate its vague prophecies, which are not prophecies at all. 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 prophecies. The cause of God is best defended by means of a challenging statement on the offence such as is seen here. The Hebrew word *ri’shon*, at the beginning of the verse, should be rendered *As a first one*, the thought being that God is the first to have spoken to Zion. The verb can then be understood *I have spoken* as following. The section may be better rendered: *As a first one to Zion, Behold! behold them! and to Jerusalem a messenger I give.*

The idols have not been able to speak a word of prediction; they know nothing of future events. On the other hand, The Lord is the first to have spoken of what would come to pass. His words are before all, and so the prophet commands his hearers to look at them. This interpretation fits in well with the second half of the verse, which asserts that God gives to Jerusalem an announcer. There are many and announcers are the prophets, which includes Isaiah himself by whom God speaks forth here the things that are to occur.

DEAD IDOLS CANNOT ANSWER

Isaiah 41:28–29

²⁸And when I look, there is no man: even among them there is no counsellor, that, when I ask of them, can answer a word. ²⁹Behold, all of them, their works are vanity and nought; their molten images are wind and confusion (ASV, 1901).

The result of God’s investigating is that there is no man whatsoever who could or who had announced anything similar to what God Himself had declared. Furthermore, from among these (the idols), there was none giving an answer. He allows them another opportunity of proving their divinity. In the first two clauses, the expectation and the disappointment are described together.

But in the third, the expectation only is expressed, and the result being given in the following verse. First, he looks, but finds nothing. Then again, but with the same result. Once more He interrogates them and awaits an answer, but discovers them to be impostors. *I will look* (once more to see whether any of these idols or their prophet can predict the future), *but there is no one* (who attempts it). *From among (all) these (I ask of them, can answer a word)*. Yet once more *I will ask them, and (perhaps) they will return an answer.*

He closes this section of Scripture by saying the outcome of His inquest, “*Behold, all of them, their works are vanity and nought; their molten images are wind and confusion.*” This is, at once, the summary conclusion of the whole preceding controversy as to the divinity of any gods except Jehovah. To the usual expressions of nonentity, the Prophet adds two other strong descriptive terms, that is wind and emptiness.

In fact, their works are also said to be nothingness. The Hebrew word *ephes* (*nothingness or zero*) is used to make reference to the idol’s status to God. The works of the idols refer to the things the idols are supposed to do and speak. Since they do and say nothing, their work is nothingness.

Likewise, the molten images belong to the idols in the sense that they are the visible representation of the idol. Wind is an effective term for expressing emptiness of thought, and *tohu* (desolation), used in Genesis 1:2 to designate the uninhabitable condition of the earth before the creation was complete. So here it stresses the fact that the idols cannot accomplish anything hence *ephes* is the outcome of their work. Their work results in emptiness or desolation, so that it is to no purpose. No god can stand under the withering challenge of the one living and true God, the God of Israel. He alone directs the course of history, and what He does cannot be duplicated by any gods made by human hands or the idolater liars who promote them.

Next message: THE GLORY OF GOD CONTINUED
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