

# The Lord God of All Nations

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**Bible Text:** Isaiah 41:1-14

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## Shreveport Grace Church

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Silence before me. Think of a courtroom. Whenever it's announced that the judge is about to enter and you hear, "All rise," I don't know if you've ever been in a courtroom situation but other than the shuffling of the feet, there is absolute silence. No one speaking. If this is the way it is in the court of men, how much more so in the court of the highest Judge of all the earth, God himself?

Keep silence is not an option. Over in one of the other prophets says that "the king is in his holy temple, let all the earth keep silent before him." Do you realize that's the number one thing that keeps people from hearing. If you're a teacher, you know that. Kids aren't learning when they're talking. There has to be silence. Two of us can't be speaking at the same time and especially in things pertaining to God.

And this is the whole earth. You see, this is the very first point that we're considering here: how God is the Lord God over all nations. When it says here, "O islands." When you think of islands, you're thinking of some remote places. It doesn't matter, wherever you are found, islands and regions bordering on the sea, far from the knowledge of other nations perhaps, let the people gather and notice when it says here, "let the people renew their strength." This is not a call to comfort. What the Lord is saying here is, "Go ahead and build your best arguments." This is the Judge of the earth calling upon man who is wise in his own conceit. "And perhaps because you don't truly know me," the Lord says, "go ahead and build your strength. Renew it. Get some rest. Come in to face me with your best day," because that's what people think. "Well, you know, I'll stand before God. I'll be able to answer him based upon my best day." That's the way people reason. That's what the Lord is saying, "Renew your strength. Let them offer their strongest arguments." This is talking about man who is altogether vanity is what the Lord calls them. As we saw in the last chapter that all the nations of the earth are as a drop in the bucket before him.

"Let them come near; then let them speak," as he gives order to speak, "and let's decide this matter concerning your state before me." Now, on what basis does God give as far as arguments concerning his right to rule over men and decide their destinies? You know, today we've got business leaders meeting on three continents trying to figure out how to handle some tyrant that the Lord has had in power for over 40 years to get rid of him. This isn't the first time this has happened. I remember growing up as a child over in Africa. He was stirring up trouble in that part of the world back then and I'm 56 years old

so this man is there where he is because God has determined he'd be there and he'll stay there until God determines to get him out. That's my worldview. When people ask me, "Well, what's your worldview about what all is going on in the world?" Well, there is a sovereign God and there is not a person in this world that lifts his finger but what he ordains it. That I know.

So that's how he presents his argument. "Bring your best argument." Now, we have to understand when we come to verse 2, again, showing how the Lord God is God over all the earth, when he says here in verse 2, "Who raised up the righteous man from the east, and called him to his foot, and gave the nations before him, and made him rule over kings? he gave them as the dust to his sword." Think about dust on the sword. None could withstand his hand. All of these with their armies were but dust on his sword, "and as driven stubble to his bow." Well, we know ultimately that pertains to the Lord Jesus Christ in whose hand God has given all judgment and when we read the book of Revelation, we're reminded that that's where he is right now. He came, lived, died and rose again and ascended on high and there he is seated and nothing happens upon this earth but what comes through his sovereign hand.

He is that righteous man raised up from the east. He is that one who came and earned a righteousness, established it and God the Father upon completion of his work imputed it to a people that he purposed to save. They are described over there in verse 8. Regardless of what the world does, there is a people that is the apple of God's eye and that is sinners for whom Christ came, lived, died and rose again. He didn't come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance and he reminds them of that in his description of them in verse 8 where he says, "But thou, Israel." God is the God of all nations and he does what he will do among the nations freely. None can stay his hand or say to him, "What doest thou?"

But he has that particular people here called Israel which means "a prince with God." Not speaking here of natural Israel but a spiritual Israel that God has chosen. But what are they by nature? Jacob. They were made to be a prince with God, that's what "Israel" means but in nature, they are a Jacob. They are a transplanter, a supplanter, a liar. That's what we all are. Let God be God and every man a liar. You say, "Well, why are they anything?" Because God has chosen and they are called the seed of Abraham, God's friend. We'll get to that in a little bit.

But you can see in verse 14, the last verse I read lest any be lifted up in pride and thinking themselves something to be one of God's chosen, he reminds who we are. "Fear not," what? "Thou worm Jacob." That's why I often mention that if we get our heads, our backs up against one another and lifted up in pride, just remember it's nothing but one worm lifting up its back against another worm, crawling over another worm. They are still worms regardless. Anything we are is only by God's grace and mercy. But that's prophetic that we're reading there in verse 2. The work that the Lord Jesus Christ would come and accomplish and none would be able to resist him or stay his hand. He came as the conquering King. He came as that one to deliver his own. He came as that one of whom he said, "I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." He is the Captain of their salvation. He came for their deliverance.

Now, as you know, in the Old Testament you have your types, your pictures, your prophecies and then in the New Testament you have the fulfillment and that's where I want us to consider who was the type of the Lord Jesus Christ here when Isaiah was speaking when he says, "Who raised up the righteous man from the east, called him to his foot, gave the nations before him, and made him rule over kings? he gave them as the dust to his sword, and as driven stubble to his bow." Historically this was referring to a man by the name of Cyrus and I don't know if you remember but after Israel had been in captivity for 70 years, Babylon was a very strong nation at the time and there wasn't anybody that thought that any could deliver Israel from the hand of Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. But this is the judgment to which God is calling these nations, "You think that you can retain my people? Do you think that you are stronger than I? Well, come together in judgment. Give your best arguments, if you will, and let us see what the end result will be."

If you'll go back in 2 Chronicles 36, these chapters that we're reading here in Isaiah 41 historically had to do with how God would take Israel back out of captivity. He's the one that brought them into captivity but now the time was come for him to take them back out of captivity just as, again, prophetically we lay in darkness and sin the law against us, Babylon representing that law, that darkness, which held us captive until Christ should come and fulfill it and lead captivity captive; take captivity out of captivity; the captive out of captivity. Here in 2 Chronicles 36, we have that history. If you want to note that in your Bibles what we're reading over here in Isaiah 41 is what is described as actually having happened in 2 Chronicles 36. I know that confuses some people. They say, "Well, Isaiah is after Chronicles so how does that work?" Well, we have to remember that these books are not in chronological order. Much of what we read happening in Isaiah was prophetic because Isaiah lived during this time. He lived before it took place but the book of Kings and Chronicles describes actually what happened and I don't know if you've got little titles and sections here, we're not going to read the entire thing, but it describes how Nebuchadnezzar came, the king of Babylon, and won the battles, won the victory, took the children of Israel into captivity and any that rebelled against him he put down. He put down and then destroyed the temple. It was during Nebuchadnezzar's reign.

He came down into Israel 3 different times and the last time he came to make his mark, God ordained that he would actually physically destroy that temple in Jerusalem and that's what we read about in 2 Chronicles 36 and we'll start in verse 17, "Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees," the Chaldees were the Babylonians, "who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he gave them all into his hand." Who did? God did. You see, just like he raised up Pharaoh to manifest his power in Pharaoh, so he raised up Nebuchadnezzar to manifest his glory and power through Nebuchadnezzar.

And it says, "And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king, and of his princes; all these he brought to Babylon." You see, Israel was all the while saying, "No way God would do

that. We've got the temple." This was during Isaiah's time. This was during Jeremiah's and here, again, the Lord said, "Gather your best arguments. What I have decreed, I have decreed and what I do I do." None can stay his hand. Such a God he is.

"And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof. And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon," this would have been your Daniel, your Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They were taken, preserved. You say, "Why did God take one and leave them? Were they any better?" No, but he was fulfilling his purpose. And it says, "where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia." It was the Persian king that the Lord raised up to take over Babylon. The Medes and the Persians, remember that? Of which one was Cyrus that we're going to read about in a little bit.

But it says here, "To fulfil," verse 21, "the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths." You see, back then they had forgotten all about the Sabbath day, the sacrifices, so the Lord said, "I'll show you what rest is, I'll just take everybody out of there. It's my land and it will rest." "For as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years." Seventy years in captivity.

Now, here's the part that links up with Isaiah 41 where the Lord says that he would raise up what he calls a righteous man. He is called the Lord's servant just like Nebuchadnezzar was the Lord's servant to do his will. Pharaoh was the Lord's servant to do his will. The devil is the Lord's servant to do his will. Satan could not touch Job but what God ordained him to do so. We forget that. This world is not in a tug-of-war between God and Satan and here we are in the middle praying that God's side will win. Like one preacher said: God cast his vote, Satan cast his vote and now it's up to you to cast your vote. You cast the deciding vote. Can you imagine a world like that?

But it says in verse 22, "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished," and here we could say "by the word of Isaiah," "the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah." This is an unconverted king who was serving the purpose and will of God and he says, "Who is there among you of all his people? The LORD his God be with him, and let him go up."

Then when you look at the very next book, it's Ezra, which continues the same thing. "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah," you see, Jeremiah and Isaiah said the same thing as do all of God's prophets. The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and put it also in writing saying, "Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem."

So in between God taking the children of Israel into captivity and the Lord raising up this Cyrus who is described here coming back to Isaiah 41, one who in order to conquer Babylon and overtake Babylon and rule in Nebuchadnezzar's place, it was none other than the Lord in his time. And isn't it interesting that the exact time that God said that the children of Israel would be in captivity, 70 years, is exactly the time they spent there? When Cyrus was raised up and the Persians came in and found a way into that city of Babylon to conquer it, everybody was taken by surprise. They had their high walls. They had the best, strongest army in the world but what they hadn't figured in the formula was the Lord God of all the nations and that's what men forget today. There are no accidents with God. You can call it an accident, it's not an accident. Call it a wreck or a crash but it's not an accident. Even that term ought to be eliminated completely from the dictionary. There are no accidents.

The Lord raised up this one and gave him his strength. It wasn't in Cyrus. It was in the strength of the Lord to where it says in verse 3, "He pursued them, and passed safely; even by the way that he had not gone with his feet." When Cyrus came in to conquer, he was going a path he had never been before and from the standpoint of strategies of war, people try to sit down and figure out exactly what he did and how he did it and how he was able to bring Babylon down. Have they not read? Has it not been told already in the Scriptures?

It was the Lord who had done this and that's the answer that the Lord gives there in verse 4 when God himself asks the question, again, remember, we're in a court session here. This is the Judge speaking. This is the Judge rendering his judgment. "Who hath wrought and done it?" Don't give Cyrus the glory. Don't go back and study the generals of that day and try to figure out what they did or didn't do that might have changed the course of history. He says, "I the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he."

Remember, as Bob stood up here and read in Revelation 1 and we'll just go back there briefly and look at verse 17, when it says here, "I the LORD," capital L-O-R-D, that's the word for Jehovah, actually, in the original it's a verb. It means "I AM," and that's how our Lord Jesus Christ is described. You know, how is it that salvation has been wrought? Again, thinking of Cyrus as a type and picture of our Lord Jesus Christ, Cyrus being an evil king and yet serving God's purpose. If God is pleased to use an evil king to such a good end, the point is how about a truly righteous man, one that the Lord himself set apart, God the Father set apart and established to be the Savior of his people? Will he not do it? Will he not do it? There is no reason to despair of the Lord saving those sinners for whom Christ came, lived, died and rose again. He will have every one of them no matter how difficult the bondage may seem. Think of Babylon. Who would have thought and yet the Lord strengthening Cyrus, an evil king, to accomplish his purpose, would he be any less successful in strengthening the hand of his own Son to come and not war against flesh but to do his work against the very law that condemns all of us to hell and yet so

fully satisfying God's law in justice that none can stay his hand or keep God from saving those for whom Christ died. So great is his work and this is the one whom John saw. We're talking about the John that walked with Christ, leaned upon his bosom, and yet was in need of a fresh revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ as he was ostracized and exiled to the Isle of Patmos for the testimony of Christ and the Lord met him and strengthened him.

And it says here in verse 17, John says, "when I saw him," now Christ was ascended on high and seated at the right hand of the majesty of the Father, he says, "I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand," that's the hand of his strength, "upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last; I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." There is no difference between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New. This is the Lord God of all the nations.

Now, coming back to Isaiah 41, he is the Lord God over all nations, secondly, he is the Lord God in spite of the idolatry and ignorance of men's hearts. If you ever get looking around you too long and considering just how idolatrous men are, we think of idolatry as being over in some Third World country but look at the idolatry that's around us. But then, don't stop there, look at the idolatry that's within us. Who is our number 1 idol? You're looking at him. If you look in the mirror, you're looking at him. We still keep trying to fix this thing up just like idolaters. They'll take, it describes there, they work together, the carpenter and the goldsmith. One smooths with a hammer and the other makes ready to solder. They fasten these things. "We're all in alliance. We're to get something done." Such is the idolatry of men's hearts.

But that's what's being described here beginning with verse 6 when it says, knowing what the Lord would do, this is a prophecy, knowing that the Lord was going to raise up this man to come and deliver his people and none could stay his hand, they still decided, "We're going to make a go at it." It's like these guys you see over there with their little old, outdated, World War II carbines firing in the air against a massive army that's about to descend on them and destroy them. But you get enough people together all yelling and you can get goosebumps, you know, we're in this crowd until the bomb hits. And that's basically what the Lord is saying here, "They helped every one his neighbour; and every one said to his brother, Be of good courage." Now again, this is not Scripture encouraging us to one another'sness. What he's saying there is that even as God had determined to begin to set in order his purpose to come in and deliver his people out of that captivity, these others encouraged themselves in their false religion. Kind of the touchy feely. It's a false hope. It's a false profession but, "Hang in there, brother. Keep the faith, brother." That's kind of the idea that is being described here.

"So the carpenter encourages the goldsmith." I will tell you that in Christendom today, this is what goes on in meetings. I hate to even call them times of worship. It is, it's false worship where Christ is not exalted and his death alone taught and the sinners pointed to Christ as needy. They encourage one another in their idolatry. Carpenters encourage the goldsmith, "he that smootheth with the hammer him that smote the anvil, saying, It is

ready for the soldering: and he fastened it with nails, that it should not be moved." That's what men do in their profession. "I've made my decision. There is no one who is going to talk me out of it. I'm as sure of heaven as my own name."

When I was on an Aflac cruise last year, Bobby Bowden, who was a very successful coach with Florida State wrote a book called "Called to Coach," and he was there on the ship. Every one of us got a book and my first impression, we went and heard him for one session. My first impression was to go and get him to sign the book. I thought, "This is cool. I've got a book by Bobby Bowden. We're out here floating around on the sea and here he is with us and I'm going to go up and get his autograph." But I started reading the book and I will tell you that it is a book that I need to burn because all throughout it his one hope of heaven that he himself believes in and he used to teach his players when they would gather before games, his whole goal was that, "We don't know what's going to happen. You're going to need to make yourself right with God so right here before we go out, right here before we do anything, you need to bow your head and accept Jesus." And so strong is his persuasion, you can't talk him out of it.

When he lost his grandson in a car wreck and his son-in-law, this was just a few years ago, it so affected him regardless of his championships and everything that he had won. In a hotel room before a big game, I think it was the Orange Bowl, he said he couldn't do anything but sit down and write a letter to his family members and he wrote, "I know that Bobby and John," his grandson and son-in-law that perished, "I know they are in heaven because they made their decision for Jesus but my concern is for you." He took the time to write an individual letter to every one of his family members and he said, "Worse than losing a championship is for me to think that one day I will be in heaven," and he boldly wrote this in the letter, "and I know I'll be in heaven because I have turned my life over to Jesus," at some particular age but he said, "My concern is that you might not be there and what I want you to do when you get this letter is to bow your head and accept Jesus."

This is what I consider the carpenter encouraging the goldsmith and the one that smooths with the hammer, getting the thing ready for soldering, is pieced together. That's what idols are. They are pieced together by men. But fix it, fasten it with nails, that it not move. That's what men do in idolatry. I literally heard of some in Africa, I know one particular family that their house caught on fire and when I got to the village later and checked on everybody to make sure they were all right, the one thing the guy was happy about that in spite of the fire he was able to get his idol out. I asked him at the time, I said, "Well, if the idol is anything, why did you have to run in and rescue it to keep it from being destroyed by the fire? Wouldn't that tell you something right there that it's nothing?" But men hold fast to these things.

Men hold fast to their professions. I did. I was deluded for years because I was told that if I just prayed the prayer and hold God to it. Can you imagine? Hold God to it, name it, claim it, that he would have to honor it. I remember writing the date in my Bible. I still have it in my mind, June 9, 1969. But I'll tell you what, when the Lord was pleased to reveal Christ in me, that idol was the first to go. I realized that it was nothing but a profession. It could not stand before a holy God and that's why when you come back here

to Isaiah 41, you see a clear distinction between what men do in the face of a holy and sovereign God and what God does to save sinners.

Here in Isaiah 41, you see how verse 8 begins, "But." "But thou, Israel, art my servant." He's in essence saying, "I'll deal with the nations as I deal with them." Even as it says there in Romans 9, "Whom he will, he hardens." Do what they may, they are still lost sinners.

"But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend." Here we see the Lord God, sovereign, yes, over all the nations but loving and kind in saving those that he has purposed to save. You can think back to Noah for example, what was it that caused Noah to be saved when the whole world perished? God's grace toward him. Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Distinctive grace. That's it. Noah could not claim to have been any smarter than the rest of the world. If he was set apart, it was because of God's grace. Think of Abraham. Here he's called "my friend." You know, this is an argument that Paul used in writing to those Jews of his days that confided in having Abraham as their father. He reminds them, he says, "Where was Abraham when God called him? He wasn't a Jew. He hadn't yet been circumcised. He was a Syrian. He was flat on his face in front of idols when the Lord called him and drew him out."

Why was he God's friend? For Christ's sake. Abraham said that. The Lord said that of Abraham, "He saw my day and rejoiced." How did he see? People say, "Well, just look." It's not your looking. A lot of blind people can look and not see. Seeing is something that the Lord gives eyes to see and he causes to see every one that he has chosen and Christ has redeemed. That's really what we see here.

The Lord God of all nations, shall he not save his people? You say, how does one become his? Well, you can underscore these in your Bible, that word "chosen" in verse 8. "Jacob whom I have chosen." It's by God's electing grace. Do you realize the word "chosen" or "elect" appears hundreds of times in Scripture and the new birth is mentioned but a few? You say, "Why do you say that?" Because everybody is talking about being born-again that deny that it is by God's choosing that one is born again. You can't have one and not the other. Who are those that are called? It is those he has chosen and that order is clear right here.

You see in verse 8 is the choosing. Verse 9 is the calling, "Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth," I have taken, "and called thee from the chief men thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away." And if it is here that is the Lord's, that's the only reason we can say that we are his because he chose us. He has called us by name and he will not cast away any one of those that he has chosen.

But you look down, trying to sum this up, you know, every enemy that stands against us whether it's our sin, whether it's the law, whether it's our conscience or whether it's other people that see our failings and our sin and are quick to point them out, you see what the



Lord says in verse 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," what? "My righteousness." If we don't stand in his righteousness which he purchased by his blood and God imputed upon completion of his death, we have no stand. You see, typically when we get dismayed and we get discouraged, it's because we're looking to the arm of the flesh. We're looking to ourselves. We're looking to things that we know are wrong and yes, they are, but if the Lord uses it to bring us to bow as needy sinners at Christ's feet and to see that still his right hand of his righteousness, that's Christ. He upholds us and what a refuge. What a solace.

He says, "Behold, all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded." I'm thankful that's true of my sin. It can raise its ugly head. It can accuse my conscious and mind. Whether anybody else hears it or not. I know it. I know it. And when people point out your sin, my thought is, "I'm thankful they don't know the half because if they did, they'd probably take me out and hang me." That's what men do but not the Lord. As the Lord brings these things to mind and turns our hearts to him, we bow in awe that even for that sin the Lord paid the debt and because he paid the debt, I stand in him.

Look for it, it says, and you'll not find it. Verse 12, "Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them." Isn't that interesting how we pursue after our sins rather than look to Christ? He has buried them in the deepest sea. "Even them that contended with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought." That was true of Israel's enemies but it's even more so of our greatest enemy, ourselves. There is nothing if Christ has paid the debt and God has chosen us and he counts us as his friend for Christ's sake, there is nothing that is ever going to cause God to cast us away. Again, I think of Mephibosheth. I can't help but think of Mephibosheth, how David fetched him. He was still lame. It didn't heal his lameness, he was lame until his death just like we are lame in our flesh until the Lord takes us. But do you know what? Those lame feet were hidden under the table as he sat there with the rest of David's family. No distinction made between him and David's own kin for Jonathan's sake. That's why David fetched him, for Jonathan's sake. That's why God fetches any one of us for Christ's sake.

And I'll tell you, if God be for us, who can be against us? Doesn't it sound like Romans 8:13. "For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee." Where you can't find help with men, the Lord helps his own and strengthens them for Christ's sake. Are we worthy of it? No, verse 14 is clear, "thou worm Jacob." I hope you never get offended by that or the word "wretch." They try to take it out of the song "Amazing Grace," but it's still there. "Such a wretch as I."

"Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the LORD," what? "Thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel." Because he is the Redeemer, he has satisfied God's law and justice, taken it all away and they are all taken away, they are all taken away. My sins are all taken away. What a blessed comfort. May the Lord enable us as needy sinners to look to him.