

Pentwater Bible Church

Isaiah Message 92
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Pentwater Bible Church

The Book of Isaiah

Message Ninety-Two

LIFELESS IDOLS ARE NOT GOD

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Isaiah 41:1–16

¹Keep 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. ²Who 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. ³He pursueth them, and passeth on safely, even by a way that he had not gone with his feet. ⁴Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I, Jehovah, the first, and with the last, I am he. ⁵The isles have seen, and fear; the ends of the earth tremble; they draw near, and come. ⁶They help every one his neighbor; and every one saith to his brother, Be of good courage. ⁷So 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.

⁸But thou, Israel, my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend, ⁹thou 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; ¹⁰fear 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. ¹¹Behold, all they that are incensed against thee shall be put to shame and confounded: they that strive with thee shall be as nothing, and shall perish. ¹²Thou 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. ¹³For I, Jehovah thy God, will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee. ¹⁴Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith Jehovah, and thy Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel. ¹⁵Behold, 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. ¹⁶Thou 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 (ASV, 1901).

CYRUS IS GOD'S SERVANT

Isaiah 41:1–3

¹Keep 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. ²Who 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. ³He pursueth them, and passeth on safely, even by a way that he had not gone with his feet (ASV, 1901).

After comforting and assuring Israel that its future will be bright, The Lord prophesies a message to the nations of the world condemning them for their evil. He addresses all Gentile nations, and He speaks to them as He calls upon them to defend themselves. This verse is an introduction to this whole section which is in Hebrew poetic form, presenting it as a legal contest between the Lord and the pagan gods of Israel's enemies, the Gentile nations. First the Lord presents His case at length and then He challenges the gods of the nations to reply as Elijah did with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (I Kings 18:20–40).

The coastland countries and the islands of the Mediterranean Sea are singled out, and their citizens as examples who, in synecdoche represent the Gentile nations of the world. The Lord says "listen to Me in silence." To the idolatrous peoples He tells them to renew their strength as best as they can, for they will need it to stand trial before Him as all must at one judgment or another. God reminds them that using an idol they have no means of connecting with Him, in comparison to the Lord's people who know Him (Isaiah 40:3). Let them come forward and speak He says. Let us come together for judgment. The judgment of the idolatrous peoples will be the condemnation of their false gods and idols.

Who hath raised up one from the east, whom he calleth in righteousness to his foot, is a reference to the Persian Cyrus who conquered Babylon for the Lord and restored the Israelites to their country after being in Babylon for 70 years. He came from the land which is everywhere in the Scriptures called the East so in Isaiah 46:11, it is said of Cyrus, "*Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my commandments from a far country.*" Cyrus was a prince eminently distinguished for justice and equity, and for a mild and kind administration over his own subjects. The imagery here is, that God had influenced him to follow Him as one follows a guide at his feet, or close to him.

Gave the nations before him. That is, subdued nations before him. This is quite descriptive of the military career of Cyrus. Among the nations whom he subdued, were the Armenians, the Cappadocians, the Lydians, the Phrygians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, all comprising a very large portion of the Mesopotamian world. Cyrus subdued all the nations lying between the Black and Caspian seas on the north, to the Red Sea in the south, and Egypt, so that his own proclamation was accurate: '*JEHOVAH, God of heaven, hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth*' (Ezra 1:2).

FEAR GOD NOT LIFELESS IDOLS

Isaiah 41:4–7

⁴Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I, Jehovah, the first, and with the last, I am he. ⁵The isles have seen, and fear; the ends of the earth tremble; they draw near, and come. ⁶They help every one his neighbor; and every one saith to his brother, Be of good courage. ⁷So 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 (ASV, 1901).

God has not only begun this work, but has also decisively completed it according to the Hebrew verbs used here of completed tense. He is its Author and He is its Finisher. In the expression, *the first, and with the last* The Lord means that He prophecies the nations, declaring that He calls the nations into existence. So just as He will rise up Cyrus from the east to do His righteous purposes, so also, He from the beginning calls the nations into existence. No nation exists apart from God. He was here before anything or anyone else and He will be here after all is said and done on earth. The isles fear God who prophecied and placed Cyrus upon this time in history. Here is a God unlike the idols of the heathen, a God who can truly move the course of nations.

Although the judgment of the nations through Cyrus was approaching quickly, and the nations have seen it, they still do not turn unto God but remain committed to their idolatry. They continue to depend on the idols they have made. To show the folly of idolatry, the prophet points out that the idols are dependent upon the nation's ordinary workmen and upon the smallest details of construction. Even the nails are necessary to prevent the idol from moving. Its strength lies not in itself, but in the nails that hold it together. What a weak god this must be that needs a common laborer to pass inspection and declare that god is in good condition. Finally, the man who smites the anvil makes the idol firm by means of nails. These he apparently uses to fasten the idol firmly into a wall or table so that it will not fall over. When all is completed, the idol stands firm, ready for use. These were the absurd notions that the nations were practicing when God moved Cyrus His servant to attack from the east.

ISRAEL GOD'S SERVANT

Isaiah 41:8–10

⁸But thou, Israel, my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend, ⁹thou 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; ¹⁰fear 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 (ASV, 1901).

This is an explanation of the term “servant,” as applied to Israel, which the Lord uses frequently in this book (Isaiah 42:19; 43:10; 45:4; 48:21). The prophet refers to the nation as a whole as a servant which is a designation used elsewhere for specific individuals (Abraham Genesis 26:24; Moses Deuteronomy 34:5; and David Psalm 89:4). The other prophets are also called “servants” of God (Jeremiah 7:25). So this term is here applied to the faithful remnant of Israel (Isaiah 65:13–15). In this context, the title “My servant” has a strong covenantal aspect. This refers to the “chosen” “servants” who are not “despised” which also occurs in the restoration prophecy found in Jeremiah 33:24–25. In other words, God chose them to bring the Bible to the world and also the Messiah the Lord Jesus. He will never forsake them even in their sinful apostate state. There will be a national regeneration of Israel at the end of the Tribulation. Even though Israel was exiled because of sin and unbelief, she still was not rejected by God. Since the covenant the Lord made with Abraham was unconditional (Genesis 15), his descendants need not fear. The Lord remains their God (Isaiah 43:3) so He will continue to be with them (Isaiah 43:5) and strengthen (Isaiah

40:31), help (Isaiah 41:13–14), and uphold them. As the apostle Paul provides us with additional assurance that the Lord has not forgotten Israel during the Church Age.

Romans 11:25–32

²⁵For I would not, brethren, have you ignorant of this mystery, lest ye be wise in your own conceits, that a hardening in part hath befallen Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in; ²⁶and so all Israel shall be saved: even as it is written,

*There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer;
He shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:*

*²⁷And this is my covenant unto them,
When I shall take away their sins.*

²⁸As touching the gospel, they are enemies for your sake: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sake. ²⁹For the gifts and the calling of God are not repented of. ³⁰For as ye in time past were disobedient to God, but now have obtained mercy by their disobedience, ³¹even so have these also now been disobedient, that by the mercy shown to you they also may now obtain mercy. ³²For God hath shut up all unto disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all (ASV, 1901).

ISRAEL'S ENEMIES WILL NOT DESTROY THEM

Isaiah 41:11–13

¹¹Behold, all they that are incensed against thee shall be put to shame and confounded: they that strive with thee shall be as nothing, and shall perish. ¹²Thou 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. ¹³For I, Jehovah thy God, will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee (ASV, 1901).

Many nations have come against Israel and have been defeated so that they no longer have the same prowess as they once had. Some of those in the last 150 years are described here.

1. Russia
2. Soviet Union
3. Germany
4. Muslim Nation

Russia:

From 1721 on the official doctrine of Imperial Russia was openly anti-Jewish. For example, when the Russians captured part of the Ukraine in 1727 it was cleared of Jews. As a result of the official doctrine being anti-Jewish, Russia has never been a healthy country with economic freedom and safety for all its citizens. The Czar established a Pale of Settlement that included Poland and Crimea. Jews were supposed to remain in the Pale and required special permission to move to Russia proper.

Soviet Union:

Early in his career Stalin engaged in terrible persecutions in the Ukraine. Because of the Czars, this region, including the Pale, was highly populated with Jews. Beginning in 1929, more than 5,000 Ukrainian scholars, scientists, cultural and religious leaders were falsely accused of plotting an armed revolt and arrested. They were either shot without a trial, or deported to prison camps. This included many Jewish people.

Germany:

Within the militantly intolerant and violent Nazi Third Reich, Jews were considered to be foul, have shameful lives, and were subjected to horrible treatment. The Nazis wanted to first expel them from Germany and then later to subject them to cruel treatment as well as painful death simply because they were Jews. The Nazis used the same despicable kind of language found in Martin Luther's *The Jews and Their Lies* when describing them publicly. It also appeared in Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. Nazi Germany did not invent anything new regarding the treatment of Jews. They simply amplified the anti-Jewish attitude inherent in European Christianity and its history. The constant "question" which rose in Hitler's party and later in his administration was, what do we do with the Jews? The issue became known as the "Jewish Question." They attributed the Jews as the source of all economic and social problems. Their answer was found in 1941 which became known as the "Final Solution."

MUSLIM/ARAB PERSECUTIONS:

As a direct result of the Nazi persecutions, on November 29, 1947, the United Nations created the State of Israel. On May 14, 1948 Israel's Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, declared the independence and creation of the sovereign State of Israel. Arab League members Egypt, Transjordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq declared war and announced their rejection of the United Nations partition decision. Saudi-Arabia and Yemen also sent forces to participate in the invasion.

On May 15, 1967 President Nasser of Egypt ordered a blockade of the Strait of Tiran. This blockade cut off Israel's southern access to the Red Sea and beyond. By May 31, 1967 Egypt had moved 100,000 troops, one thousand tanks, and five hundred heavy guns into the Sinai. By June 4, Arab forces outnumbered Israel three to one as they poised on Israel's borders. This was Israel's Six Day War and it was fought on three fronts, against three countries, in three overlapping stages. In the south, Israel engaged and defeated the Egyptians. In the central region, Israel engaged and defeated the Jordanians. In the north, Israel engaged and defeated the Syrians. In each of these theaters, Israel gained significant territory that would serve as its own buffers in future years.

On the morning of June 5, 1967, the Israeli Air Force destroyed almost the entire Egyptian Air Force (more than three hundred planes) in less than three hours. Israel's armored divisions, under the leadership of General Ariel Sharon, also launched a lightning attack on the same day. More than eight hundred Egyptian tanks had been destroyed, and thousands of soldiers were taken as prisoners of war. Nasser later acknowledged that eighty percent of Egypt's Russian-supplied military equipment had been lost in the Sinai debacle. Finally, at 8:00 p.m. on June 8, Nasser accepted a cease-fire.

In an effort to force Israel to surrender captured lands, Egypt and Syria jointly attacked Israel on October 6, 1973, on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish calendar. Other Muslim states contributed troops and financial support. Caught by surprise, Israel suffered severe losses in human life and equipment. Following an Egyptian refusal to accept a cease-fire and a Soviet airlift to the Muslim states, the United States sent an airlift to Israel enabling a recovery from earlier setbacks. Saudi Arabia then led the Arab world in an oil embargo imposed on the United States and other western nations.

In the years following the 1973 war, Israel's enemies realized that they could not defeat Israel on the battlefield. So, they turned to diplomatic warfare and sought to weaken Israel's international diplomatic position through negative media propaganda. Each time Israel wins against all odds.

GOD STRENGTHENS ISRAEL FOR HIS GLORY

Isaiah 41:14–16

¹⁴Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith Jehovah, and thy Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel ¹⁵Behold, 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. ¹⁶Thou 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 (ASV, 1901).

Being like a worm, exposed to danger, and liable to be trampled upon and crushed, is the reference to Israel here. The strength of a worm lies in its mouth, which, though tender, can bore into the strongest cedar, and penetrate into it. The strength of Israel lies in their prayers, as Jacob's did, when, wrestling with the angel, and when making supplication, he had power with God, and prevailed. Now, though the saints are such poor, weak, and contemptible things, yet the Lord bids them not to fear any of their enemies, He will take their part, and protect them. *God says to Israel, "I have made thee to be a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth."* Israel is to be more than sustained. Strength is to be given her to make her aggressive in order to subdue her enemies. She is to "thresh them" and "beat them small," as with a threshing-instrument (II Kings 13:7; Amos 1:3; Micah 4:13). In the literal sense, no earlier accomplishment of this prophecy can be pointed out than the time of the Maccabean war. In addition to all the nations mentioned earlier they conquered the Greeks and Antiochus Epihanes. Then the Roman empire succumbed to the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. Threshing-instruments referenced here were used to process corn. It is spread out on the ground, and the machine, which is sometimes armed with sharp stones, sometimes with saws, is dragged over it.

The ancient Jews, who had their threshing-floors on the tops of hills and mountains, where they took the opportunity and advantage of the wind in winnowing their corn, which fanned it, and carried away the chaff, and scattered it abroad. In like manner, it is the enemies of the church and people of God that should be similarly dealt with, which are like the chaff the wind driveth away, and is found no more, (Psalm. 1:5 Therefore, the Holy One of Israel is exulted.

Next message: THE GLORY OF GOD CONTINUED

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