



# Preaching Through The Bible, Michael Eaton

## Isaiah

### Part 56 Useless Idols; Powerful God (41:21-29)

• God will fulfil His promise

• God will send a Saviour for Israel and the gentiles

1. The idols cannot predict a way for the nations to be rescued

• They cannot predict the future

God has given a great promise<sup>1</sup> and Isaiah is showing us that God is capable of fulfilling it. He is the Creator<sup>2</sup>. He rules history<sup>3</sup>, and history is shaped and controlled in the interests of God's 'Israel'<sup>4</sup>.

1 40:1-11  
2 40:12-31  
3 41:1-7  
4 41:8-20

In Isaiah 41:21 the prophet takes up another great theme. God plans not only to send salvation to Israel. At one and the same time he plans to be the Saviour of the gentiles.

**1. The idols cannot predict a way for the nations to be rescued.** Again the idols and idolaters are invited to a court where they may present their case<sup>1</sup>.

1 41:21-24

*21'Present your case,' says Yahweh.  
'Set forth your strongest arguments,' says Jacob's King.  
22'Bring in your idols to tell us  
what is going to happen.  
Tell us what the former things were,  
so that we may consider them  
and know their outcome.  
Or declare to us the things to come,  
23tell us what the future holds,  
so we may know that you are gods.'*

The one thing idols cannot do is predict the future. Yahweh is the only God. The God of the Bible, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the only One who knows centuries ahead of time what is to happen.

• They cannot act with power

Just as the idols cannot tell the future, equally they cannot act with power. Isaiah says:

*'Do something, whether good or bad,  
so that we will suddenly gaze in bewilderment  
and be filled with fear.  
24But you are less than nothing  
and your works are nothing at all;  
he who chooses you is detestable.'*

• They can do nothing of any value

The language is sarcastic. What can the idols do? Nothing of any value. They cannot tell the future. They cannot act in history in a way that causes amazement.

• Modern, intellectual idols are equally useless

The modern idols are no better than the ancient idols. In Isaiah's day the gods were generally the creations of human hands. Perhaps today our idols are more the creation of human minds: scientism (the admiring of science as if it were a god); pantheism (the admiring of the earth and of everything around us as if it were all divine in itself); psychological theories; excessive faith in the power of democracy to cure the world's ills. But intellectual idols are the same in their weakness as the carvings of the ancient world. They cannot tell the future and all their predictions turn out wrong,

2. Again: God can do what the idols cannot do

**2. Again: God can do what the idols cannot do.** Isaiah 41:25–29 puts to us a picture of One who is altogether different. He can foresee the future. He can act decisively in the history of the world. He has a saviour who comes from the east<sup>1</sup> and from the north<sup>2</sup>. Actually Cyrus came from the east, but armies generally marched into Israel from the north.

1 41:2  
2 41:25

• God can foresee the future and act decisively

*25'I have stirred up one from the north, and he comes –  
one from the rising sun who proclaims my name.  
He treads on governors as if they were mortar,  
as if he were a potter treading the clay.'*

• He can control history and bring a deliverer

The Lord can do what the idols cannot do – control history and bring a deliverer.

*26 'Who told of this from the beginning, so we could know, or prior to the event so that we could say, "He was right"? Indeed, no one told of this.  
Yes, it is true – no one foretold it.  
Oh yes indeed! No one heard any words from you.  
27 The first thing that happened was that I told Zion, "Look, here they are!"  
I gave to Jerusalem a messenger of good tidings.'*

### 3. The modern idolater and the modern idols do no better

• Attempted wisdom – science, economic theories, democracy

• Pleasure

• Religious theories

• They needed someone to fulfil the promises made to Abraham and bring life and light to the gentiles

• There is no help for idolaters

**3. The modern idolater and the modern idols do no better.** What do men and women put their trust in today?

**There are idols of attempted wisdom.** We think of the trust that people put in science, in technology, in economic theories, in liberalized economies, in democracy. But where are the results? We can put a man on the moon or fly an astronaut to Mars, but we cannot halt the violence that floods our planet or get men and women to even look after their own environment.

**There are the idols of pleasure.** Thousands pour their time and their energies into football or sport or pleasure-seeking crazes of one kind or another. The most extreme sexual pleasures are pursued.

**There are the idols of religious theories.** One does not like to attack the beliefs of anyone, yet the question has to be asked, have the world religions achieved anything? 'Religion' of every kind – even popular semi-Christian religiosity – is entirely useless.

We need a God who knows the future. We need a God who can act with power. We need One who can atone for sin, cleanse the conscience. Israel in the days of the Babylonian exile needed someone who could preserve the nation, purify it from all idolatry, take it back to its own land, and then send a Saviour. They needed someone who would fulfil all of the promises given to Abraham and bring life and light to the gentiles.

The Lord can do what the idols cannot do – announce the event in advance. So Isaiah addresses the idolaters. There is no help to be found for Israel in anyone who worships an idol. They cannot find any wisdom for the situation.

*28 'I look but there is no one –  
no one among them to give counsel,  
no one to give answer when I ask them.'*

• They and their idols amount to nothing

• We can see that Isaiah's predictions came true

The idols and their worshippers amount to nothing.

*29 'See, they are all a delusion!  
Their deeds amount to nothing;  
their molten images are but wind and meaninglessness.'*

More than two thousand years later, we can see how Isaiah's predictions proved true. Cyrus did come. The nation of Israel was purified of idolatry. They were taken back to their land. The Saviour did come.