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Present Your Case says the LORD

41: 21-29

Present your case says the LORD DIG: These verses resume God's address to the nations. To what "competition" does Ha'Shem challenge the idols? Why do the idols fail when God succeeds? What will be the outcome for those who had placed their trust in the idols? Who is this one from the North and the one from the East? Although Cyrus credited his victories to many gods, what was the real truth about this period of history? How do the military conquests of Cyrus stand in contrast to those of Assyria (10:12-13)?

REFLECT: Anything you put between your soul and God is your idol- regardless of what it is (see the commentary on Exodus, **to see link click [Dl](#) - You Shall Not Make for Yourselves an Idol**). Is there anything that you are allowing to take the place of your relationship with the Lord? If so, He wants it out of the way. Where do you go to find the answers to problems in your own life? What new perspective have you gained from this chapter on God's wisdom? On His dependability?

The pagan understanding of existence rested on the concept of continuity. According to this concept, everything that exists is part of everything else. Thus humans, nature, and **God** are all inseparably bound together. The world is eternal. What is, always has been, and what has been, always will be. There is no beginning and no end, and nothing ever changes. Thus, the way to tell the future is to understand the past. For what happened under similar circumstances will happen again. The "**gods**" are not powerful enough to tell us how the world began, change the cycle of nature, or tell us something that has never happened before. Therefore, **Isaiah's** attacks here demonstrate an understanding of the pagan concept of continuity. **He** attacks it precisely at its weak point. **His** attack illustrates the difference between **his** (the Bible's) conception of **God** and that of **Judah's** neighbors. What kind of a **God** knows something that has never happened before? What kind of a **God** is **He** who can explain how the world began? **He** is **One** who has made everything operate according to **His** sovereign will. **He** is **One** who is **Himself the first and the last (41:4 and 22, 44:6, 48:12)**. But these **idols** could do nothing of the sort. Thus, **God's** challenge to **them**.

What happened to the **idols** that **God** called into court in the early verses of **Chapter 41** to prove that **they** were really viable **gods**? First, **ADONAI** gave a **near historical prophecy** regarding **Cyrus (41:1-7)**, then a **far eschatological prophecy** about **His Servant** and the final deliverance of **Isra'el (41:8-20)**. Now **Isaiah** returns to another **near historical prophecy (41:21-29)**, where **God** challenges **idols** to **present their strongest case** why **they** should be believed. This **near, far, near** pattern is not unusual for **Isaiah**.



In contrast with **idols** that are manmade and unable to help people, **God** can, and does, tell the future. The challenge comes from **ADONAI**. **Present your case**, says **the LORD**. **Set forth your arguments**, says **Jacob's King (41:21)**. This emphasis on a merely national **God** was intentional. **ADONAI** came before the court as one **God** among many because that was the issue - who was the one true **God**? In this courtroom scene **ADONAI** demanded that the **idols** prove **their case** by prophesying about the future. **The LORD** had just given a **near historical prophecy** about the coming of **Cyrus (41:1-7)**, and a **far eschatological prophecy** of **Israel's** ultimate restoration (**41:8-20**). So here, **He** challenges the **idols** to do the same. The challenge is in two statements. First, **bring in your idols to tell Us (the Trinity is in view here) what is going to happen**, or prophesy what is yet to come (**41:22a**). Secondly, **tell Us (again, the Trinity) what the former things were, so that we may consider them and know their final outcome (41:22b)**. In other words, declare the significance of what has already happened in history. That would separate the true **God** from **the imposters**. But there was only silence.

Or declare to us the things to come, tell us what the future holds, so we may know that you are gods. Do something, whether good or bad, so that we will be dismayed and filled with fear (41:22c-23). Here **the LORD**, through **His prophet**, attacked the very roots of their pagan religion. Those who lived in Babylon, Canaan or Egypt could undoubtedly point to things their **gods** had done. But opposed to their false concept of continuity, the **God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob** was not locked in an endless repetition

of the past. **ADONAI** is sovereign and can act independently of the past. Then, exasperated, **He** repeated the challenge; prove yourselves to be **gods**. It's as if **ADONAI** was saying, "I don't care if you do good or do evil, but do *something* to prove that you are **gods**." However, there was still no response from the **idols** of wood and stone.

Finally, **God** drew **His** own conclusion at the trial. Because **they** could neither explain the past nor tell the future, because **they** were unable to do anything independently, **they** had no claim to be called **gods**. **The idols are less than nothing and your works are utterly worthless; anyone who chooses you is detestable (41:24). The LORD** declared that the ones who chose to worship **idols** of stone and wood in place of the living **God of Isra'el** prove themselves to be **detestable**. An abomination really, and that is the key point here. In and of themselves, the **gods** meant little. But to **exchange the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles** is always tragic for the worshiper (**Romans 1:18-23**).

Perhaps **Joshua** said it most succinctly. Speaking to **the Israelites** at Shechem at the end of **his** life **he** declared: **Now fear ADONAI and serve Him with all your faithfulness. Throw away the false gods that your forefathers worshiped beyond the River** (see the commentary on **Genesis Dt - I Will Bless Those Who Bless You, and Whoever Curses You I Will Curse**), **and in Egypt** (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Gj - Jeremiah's Final Words of Judgment in Egypt**), **and serve ADONAI. But if serving Him seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD (Joshua 24:14-15).** What is your choice?

Since the challenge failed to be taken up, **God** passes the sentence upon the **idols**. This is the sentence of the court. First, **God** summarizes **His** prophecies. Notice how specific the prophecy gets. This is something that the oracles of the ancient Middle East could never accomplish. In **41:25a ADONAI** declared: **I have stirred up one (Cyrus) from the North, and he comes - one (Cyrus) from the rising sun (east).** How could both be true? They could both be true for one reason. One of **Cyrus'** parents was a Mede, and the Medes were from the north. The other one of **Cyrus'** parents was **Persian**, and **Persia** is in the east. That is how specific the prophecy is: **Cyrus** and the Medo-Persian Empire ended the Babylonian Empire. **He treads on rulers as if they were mortar, as if he were a potter treading the clay (41:25c).**

Furthermore, **God** describes **Cyrus** as one **who calls on My name (41:25b).** But **Cyrus**

was not a true believer in the **God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob**. Yet, **God** says through **Isaiah** that **Cyrus** would call upon the name of **God**. Did **he**? Yes, **he** did. **The books of First and Second Chronicles** gives us **God's** viewpoint of Jewish history. There, **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh** points out that **in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of ADONAI spoken through Jeremiah, ADONAI moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing. This is what Cyrus the king of Persia says: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a Temple for Him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you - may the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up (Second Chronicles 36:22-23).** And in **Ezra 1:1-4** we have the decree of **Cyrus** permitting **the Jews** to return to **Jerusalem**. In both passages **Cyrus** calls upon **the God of heaven** when giving **Judah** permission to return to the Land. As a result, **God** proceeded to summarize the prophets.

Who told of this from the beginning, so we could know, or beforehand, so we could say, "He was right?" No one told of this, no one foretold it, no one heard any words from you (41:26). Once again **Isaiah** points out that **ADONAI** was the only **One** who prophesied about it. Not one whisper of **Cyrus'** coming had been made by the **idols** of Babylon, of Assyria, of the Medes, or of **the Persians**. Hence, **God** was the one **who told of this from the beginning, so we could know, or beforehand, so anyone could say: He was right (41:26).**

What **the false gods** could not do, **the LORD** claims to have done. But of the **idols, no one foretold it, no one heard any words from you. God** said through **His prophet, "I was the first to tell Zion, 'Look, here they are! I gave to Jerusalem a messenger of good news' (41:27)."** The pronoun **they** refers to the prophecies. **He** is saying: **Look, here** are the prophecies that **I** have **told** you about.

Finally, then, we have the conclusion of the case against idolatry. **The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob** declared: **I look but there is no one - no one among them to give counsel, no one to give answer when I ask them (41:28).** **ADONAI** had prepared a **Savior**. Earlier **He** had declared through **His prophet, "For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it. With justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD of heaven's angelic armies (CJB) will accomplish this" (9:6-7).** But the false **gods** had neither said

nor done anything. This is the first occurrence of a theme that we will see several more times in the book: **ADONAI** is the only source of salvation (**43:12, 50:2, 59:16, 63:3**). Even “the wisest” of the supposed **gods** have no clue. When **the LORD** asks **them, they** cannot speak. Only **God** has the answers in this life.

They are utterly silent because **they** are merely wood and stone. Therefore, **God** declared: **See, they are all false! Their deeds amount to nothing; their images are but wind and confusion (41:29). God** uses four words to sum up the **idols. They are false, nothing, wind, and confusion. Confusion** is the end result of idolatry, religion, or philosophy that is anti-**God** or atheistic. **They** do not have the answers to the problems of life. These man-made systems cannot touch the human heart. Where one places created things above **the Creator**, there is nothing that humans can do to fill that spiritual void. The only answer is found in **the One** who brings **good news of great joy that will be for all the people (Luke 2:10).**