

ISAIAH 41

Lesson 31: Only God Can Tell Us What Will Happen

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I. MAIN IDEA

The worship of idols is futile, forbidden, and foolish since they are so inferior to God. Idols cannot predict future events like God, or control history like God, or save like God, or defeat God's enemies like God, or transform nature like God.

THE LIVING GOD	IDOLS
Predicts and fulfills future events	Cannot predict or fulfill future events
Controls history	Cannot control history
Saves	Cannot save
Defeats enemies of God's people	Cannot defeat enemies of God's people
Transforms nature	Cannot transform nature

II. KEY VERSE

"Tell us, you idols, what is going to happen. Tell us what the former things were, so that we may consider them and know their final outcome. Or declare to us the things to come," (Isa. 41:22 NIV).

III. IDOLATRY

A. Idolatry: The worship of, or devotion to, something or someone other than God.

B. Five types of idolatry

1. Idol worship: the worship of man-made images (statues, figurines, objects) that represent certain imaginary gods.
2. False gods worship: the worship of false or imaginary gods such as Allah, Zeus, Asherah, Baal, Bel, Molech, Artemis, etc.
3. Nature worship: the worship of created things (sun, moon, stars, trees, etc.).
4. Hero worship: the worship of deceased ancestors, or prominent humans (government leaders, musicians, cult leaders, actors, writers, TV personalities, etc.).
5. Self-worship: the worship of one's self, or one's accomplishments. Making one's self the most important thing in life.

C. Idolatry in the OT

1. Clearly forbidden by first two commandments (Exodus 20:3-5).
2. Abraham's father served idols (Gen. 31:34)
3. Solomon worshipped idols (1 Kings 11:4, 10).
4. Idolatry became rampant among kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

IV. CHAPTER 41 SUMMARY

A. The Lord stirs up a conqueror to do his bidding (41:1-7)

God demonstrated his power to orchestrate the events of history. Example: God raised up "one from the east" (Cyrus the Great)¹ and gave him victory over the Babylonians in 539 BC.² Idols cannot do this.

B. The Lord defeats Israel's enemies (41:8-16)

This is possibly referring to Cyrus's defeat of the Babylonians who were enemies of the Jews, but most likely this is describing the total defeat of all God's enemies at the 2nd Coming of Jesus Christ (Revelation Chapters 19 & 20). Idols could never defeat Israel's enemies.

C. The Lord transforms nature and refreshes his people (41:17-20)

God demonstrated his power to transform nature when he took the promised land which was flowing with milk and honey and turned it into dry land where its inhabitants could not find water. (41:17) when they violated the Mosaic Covenant. This is possibly also describing the future liberation of creation from its bondage to decay (1 Kings 18:38; Rom. 8:20-21). Idols have no such power over creation.

D. The Lord alone determines and declares the future (41:21-29)

God not only raised up Cyrus the Great to defeat the Babylonians (enemies of Israel) but he also decreed the future in the smallest of details, like declaring Cyrus' name. See Isaiah 44:28; 45:1, 13. Idols cannot do this.

V. APPLICATION

As Christians today we are to be cautious about practicing any one of the five types of idolatry (see III-B). God is not only to have our exclusive worship and devotion, our relationship with him is to be the most important aspect of our lives.

¹ Isaiah 44:28; 45:1, 13.

² Though written in past tense it is actually describing Cyrus' future reign as king of Persia.