

"Tell us what is to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods; do good, or do harm, that we may be dismayed and terrified! Behold, you are nothing, and your work is less than nothing; an abomination is he who chooses you! (Isaiah 41:23-24)

Four weeks ago we started our study on the final 27 chapters of the book of Isaiah, which has been referred to as "the book of salvation"--in contrast to the first 39 chapters, commonly referred to as a "book of judgment"! Reflecting the transition from the Old to the New Testament of Scripture!

In last week's lesson on Isaiah 41:1-20, we saw God, through His prophet Isaiah, extending the same message of hope and deliverance that He offered Israel to all the "peoples of the coastlands," including the Gentile nations surrounding Israel and the Mediterranean Sea! Challenging them to "listen to Him in silence"--and saying that He would "arouse one from the east" (later identified as Cyrus, king of Persia) who would serve His purpose, for His people, in "subduing kings and delivering up the nations before Him"! But rather than listening and submitting to the God of Israel, they joined with their neighbors in "manufacturing" their own god (or gods) who they naively thought could, and would, deliver them!

Then the Lord turned to His people, the children of Israel, and reminded them how He had "called them from the remotest part of the earth...and that they needed not fear...because He was their God and would uphold them with His right hand"!

He reminded them of "His servant, Jacob," the descendant of "His friend, Abraham," who He had chosen, but likened the men of Israel, in Isaiah's day, to "a worm" that was "weak and vulnerable," but who had a "next of kin"--a Redeemer(!)--Who would make them strong enough to "thresh the mountains" (figuratively speaking of defeating the warring enemy nations surrounding them)!

He also promised that--in a "eschatological day" to come--He would return the drought-like conditions of their land into a "paradisiacal garden," like the original Garden of Eden!

All this, so that His people might trust in Him alone, and that the nations of the world would see and recognize that it was "the hand of the Lord"--the Holy One of Israel--who had made all this happen!

In our lesson last night (on Isaiah 41:21-31), God, in a courtroom-like scene, challenges the idols directly to "present their case," and prove their legitimacy, by predicting things to come, as the Lord had done regarding former things (like the dispersion of the Assyrians from invading Jerusalem, e.g.)! "Do something! Anything! Either good, or bad! That we might be terrified!" But they were not able to provide any kind of response! Case closed!

"Behold, you (idols!) are of no account, and your work amounts to nothing! (And) he who chooses you is an abomination!" Says the Lord God! (The Amplified version puts it this way: "The worshiper who chooses you is an abomination--extremely disgusting and shamefully vile in God's sight!) Psalm 115 describes the idols as "the work of man's hands...with mouths that cannot speak...eyes that cannot see...feet that cannot walk... ears that cannot hear...noses that cannot smell, hands that cannot feel... and those who make them becoming like them"!

Then the God of Israel--Who knows the future, in contrast to the so-called "gods" who know nothing, announces (in verse 25) that He "has aroused one who will come from the north (who will originate "from the east")...who shall trample on rulers as on mortar, as the potter treads clay"! (An event that would take place a hundred years later, as recorded in Ezra 1:2-4, and elsewhere! Something only our sovereign God could foretell--and bring about!)

Proverbs 21:1 says, "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes!"

- Exodus 9:16 tells how God "allowed Pharaoh to remain to show His people His power and in order to proclaim His name throughout all the earth"!
- Daniel noted (in Daniel 2-4) how "the God of heaven" had given the kingdom of Babylon, "and the power and glory" to Nebuchadnezzar, then humbled him in his pride, "until he recognized that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes"!
- Peter and John (in their prayer, in Acts 4:27) proclaimed that "You (God!) anointed both Herod and Pontius Pilate...to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur"!

The noted Bible expositor A.T. Pierson once said that "history is all about His story"! And Steve Lawson wrote in his book, "Show Me Your Glory," that: "A high view of God will lead us to lofty worship of Him, and a growing understanding of His character will lead to holy and righteous living, while a low view of God will lead to diminished praise...and low and empty living"!

Last night, Rod Turk concluded his remarks to us with the probing question: How big is your God?

And the challenging words from Joshua 24:14: "Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods of which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord! And if it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourself today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!"

Isaiah would have us, "Behold our God!" A Mighty Fortress...

Lowell