

them are nothing. The bankruptcy of the theology has been demonstrated in the preceding disputation, and has meant that all the care lavished on the idols is mere foolishness. It is only a God who is totally Other than this world that he can never be imaged in any of this world's forms who can explain to us why he created the world and who can be free enough from it to direct and redirect its progress so as to deliver it from itself" (Oswalt 1998: 105).

"A bigger problem for most Westerners is the validity of each person's mental construction of God—the image of God that they have created in their minds. Some view him as a loving father, others find a strong sovereign king, while many imagine a cruel judge who wants "to get them." C. Plantinga explains this as a human desire to make God in our image: "Why else does God emerge as a racist, sexist, chauvinist, politically correct, legalist, socialist, capitalist? If we are intellectuals, God is a cosmic Phi Beta Kappa; if we are laborers, God is a union organizer (remember his son was a carpenter); if we are entrepreneurs, God is for free enterprise." It is important to ask, do these mental formulations of theological beliefs match the God of Scripture, or have some people actually reconstructed an image of God that is "from nothing" but their own imagination, much like the ancient idolaters? Every person needs to examine their perception of God to make sure that it is not just an illusion that arises from one's own philosophical presuppositions, modern cultural impressions, religious tradition, or personal desires. In this portion of Scripture the prophet reminds the reader about the true identity of God" (Smith 151-52)

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

How does your understanding of God's plans for the future affect your life?

What items in your life are "gods"? How do they compare to the true God?

In what way do you fail to trust God completely? How can you address this failure?

ISAIAH 41: GOD'S SUPREMACY OVER NATIONS AND THEIR IDOLS

OUTLINE OF ISAIAH 41

- I. Israel must not fear the nations because God controls them (41:1-7)
 - A. God is raising up a conqueror from the nations (41:1-4)
 - B. The nations that worship idols have no strength (41:5-7)
- II. Israel must trust God to accomplish his purposes through them (41:8-20)
 - A. God has established a special relationship with Israel that enables trust (41:8-10)
 - B. God will destroy Israel's enemies (41:11-16)
 - C. God will restore Israel's land as a testimony of his greatness (41:17-20)
- III. Israel must trust God because the idols are "less than nothing" (41:21-29)
 - A. The idols are challenged and fail (41:21-24)
 - B. God demonstrates his glory by predicting the future (41:25-29)

SOURCES CITED

John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, NICOT, 1998.
Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, New American Commentary, 2009.
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NOTES

“The exiles from Judah were in a position to see for themselves the correspondence between Isaiah’s inspired predictions and the events unfolding before them, and to know for certain that their God, the God of Israel, was in total command of their world” (Webb 1996: 168).

“The language illustrates that one can logically test the validity of the claims made by God and the claims of the distant peoples and their gods” (Smith 2009: 124).

vv5-6 “Unfortunately, their terror moves them to turn not to God but to the gods. But before the gods can help them they have to be made! What a tragedy! To respond to the activity of the Creator in history, these humans must create gods in history to protect them” (Oswalt 1998: 85).

vv5-7 “In these few words are all the differences between a world where the truth of our existence comes from beyond us and one in which we create our own values, indeed, our gods, out of our own needs and desires” (Oswalt 1998: 86).

vv5-7 “One worker “strengthens” (*wayēḥazzēq*) the other and they “strengthened” (*wayēḥazzēqhû*, NIV “nails down”) the idol with pegs so that it does not fall over. They look for help from the wrong place, for true strength comes only from God” (Smith 2009: 131).

vv8-9 “It is important to keep two points in balance here. On the one hand nothing could prevent God’s promises to Abraham, Moses, and David from being realized: the nation was elect and would be ruled over by a descendant of David. But those promises guarantee nothing to the individuals of any generation. If they sin, they will be punished; if they are righteous, they will be rewarded (Ezek. 18:1–24). Election promises made to the nation will not be participated in automatically by individuals” (Oswalt 1998: 91n65).

vv8-9 “Being chosen to be ‘my servant’ (*‘abdî*) indicates both a close possessive relationship as well as a purposeful desire to employ the servant in the fulfillment of God’s plans” (Smith 2009: 133).

vv14-16 “Not only will God defend his people against those who trouble them, but he will make them the very tool in his hand to tear down any obstacle that would thwart his plans for them” (Oswalt 1998: 92).

vv17-20 “These future promises should prove to everyone that God would not forsake or ever forget his promises to his people (41:17 and 40:27). Present circumstances may not be the best, and it may seem like God will not establish his glorious newly created kingdom for his chosen people, but it is absolutely certain that it will happen some day. In faith, his people can confidently act now, based on divine assurances about what God will do in the future” (Smith 2009: 139).

v20 “Why will God do this? The conclusion to this oracle provides God’s motivation for accomplishing this miraculous transformation of nature. It will happen not just to have a pretty park to enjoy or have fresh cool water to drink, but “so that” people may finally perceive the presence of the hand of God at work in their midst.... If the hand of God can do these miracles, if the creative power of the Holy Lord of Israel can produce these transformations in the distant future, is he not to be trusted by people for their present problems?” (Smith 2009: 141).

vv21-24 “To be sure, many biblical critics discount such predictions, arguing that they must have occurred after the fact. Nevertheless, they are found in the biblical record, not elsewhere. If Isaiah knows or even suspects that the predictions are not predictions at all, it is not only disingenuous of him to argue as he does here, it is completely inexplicable. Why expend this much eloquence on a case one knows is false?” (Oswalt 1998: 100).

v29 “The gods are not false because they are represented by idols. Rather, the beautiful idols are worthless because the gods behind