

## ‘Silence! In My courtroom!’ Part 1

I’ve been asked to speak from **Isaiah 41** over the next two weeks, I’ll deal with the first seven verses today and we’ll deal with the rest of the chapter next week. But this chapter which is very prophetic in nature, a chapter in which God calls for justice, a chapter where God tells us that a certain man will become ruler over forty-nine countries. But God says in about 150 years from now, He will use this man to utterly destroy every enemy of Israel.

Now let me say a few words about Isaiah. Isaiah was born somewhere between 760-780 B.C. and his father was called Amoz. He was a prophet of the southern kingdom of Israel, Judah. He was married and had two sons, both of which had prophetic names. The oldest child was named Shearjashub, and his name means, ‘**a remnant will return**’. The younger child was named Mahershalalhashbaz, and his name means, ‘**hastening to the spoils**’ or ‘**hurrying to the prey**’. And like I said, both names were prophetic because they spoke of the pending plunder of both Damascus which is Syria and Samaria which is Israel, by the Assyrians.

Now the Book of Isaiah covers one of the most significant periods of history in reference to the final years of the northern kingdom of Israel before they went into captivity. You can read all about it in **2 Kings 15-20** and **2 Chronicles 26-32**.

Let me share with you a very basic outline of the **Book of Isaiah**. **Isaiah 1-39** deal mainly with Judah and Jerusalem at a time when the city was still standing and when the southern kingdom was threatened with invasion by the Assyrians. **Isaiah 40-55**, speak about the return and restoration of Israel, after the exile from Babylon and the promised Messiah. In **Isaiah 56-66**, Isaiah speaks about the great reward for all those who trust and obey God. He proclaims the hope for the afflicted and judgment for the evil.

And so, as we go to our text, we find ourselves right at the start of Isaiah’s prophecies concerning Israel’s return and restoration back to Jerusalem.

One day in a courtroom, there was a man who was on trial for stealing a lady’s purse but maintained he was innocent. The judge asked the lady to point out the man who stole her purse and, so she pointed to the man and said to the judge, ‘**Yes, that’s him. I saw him clear as day. I’d remember his face anywhere.**’ At which point, the defendant, trying to defend his innocence shouts out, ‘**there’s no way you could have seen my face, lady. I was wearing a mask!**’

**Have you ever been summoned to court?** Now I’ve never personally been summoned to court but people who have, speak about a silence that comes upon room when the judge walks in. Well, in much the same way, **Isaiah 41** is a courtroom setting, where we find God is the judge and Israel and all the nations of the earth have been summoned to appear before Him.

Now at the end of **Isaiah 40:31**, Isaiah told Israel that “**those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength.**”. It appears Israel have been waiting and are asking the question, **how and when will the Lord renew our strength?** And so, God says in **Isaiah 41:1** “**Be silent before me, you islands! Let the nations renew their strength! Let them come forward and speak; let us meet together at the place of judgment.**”

Now the first nation whom God speaks to is the ‘**islands**’, which represents all the Gentile nations of the earth. And I can imagine the nations going about their life as usual, people are busy working and selling their goods, people are having parties and getting married. People are going to worship their gods, making their idols, yes, people are busy with the hustle and bustle of life and life is going on as normal.

But then God, the judge, enters the room and says, ‘**silence**’. And loved ones, I don’t know about you, but when God speaks, I prefer to shut up and listen to what He has to say. Let me ask you, **when was the last time you fell silent and listened to God speak?**

Now I’m not talking about hearing a big booming voice from heaven which says, ‘**listen to Him!**’ like He did with Peter, James and John up the mountain. I’m not even talking about reading your Bible to study it, I’m talking about simply reading you’re your Bible to listen.

You see, God can speak to us through sermons, Bible studies and even through a simple discussion with someone about His Word. But you’ll be amazed how loudly God can speak to us through simply reading His word. We come to the Scriptures with our minds already made up about what the Scriptures are saying and God says, ‘**silence**’!

‘But God, I’ve read this text a hundred times and I know what it means’, and God says, ‘you think you know what it means but will you just shut up and listen to what I’m actually saying.’

And loved ones I think sometimes we’re afraid of silence. We come to worship every week and fill each moment of our worship with everything from singing to speaking. And I think there are times when God looks down at our worship, and says to Himself, why can’t they just be silent for a moment! Why don’t they stop and reflect upon the Scripture they’ve just heard! Why can’t they stop and reflect upon the words of the hymn they’ve just sung!

You see, we get out of our beds in the morning and say, ‘right I’ve got to get to work now, ok keep working, it’s almost dinner time, keep working it almost home time’. ‘Keep driving, your almost home, keep going, dinner is almost done, stay awake, EastEnders is about to start.’ ‘One more push and I’ll be chilled out in bed, ready to sleep to start the next day’. And the busyness of our lives spills over into our worship and we just don’t know how to stop and be quiet. But God in heaven is shouting out to us, ‘silence, be still, and know that I am God!’ as Psalm 46:10 tells us.

You see loved ones, when God speaks, not only do people stop to listen but they stop doing what they’re doing. Here in Isaiah, God is calling the world to court and He says, ‘you be quiet and listen while I speak. Then gather your strength and we’ll talk and see what’s what.’

In other words, once God has spoken, then they will be invited to make their decision together, regarding who God is and what He has done, and who they are and what their gods have done. God is basically getting them ready to see whose God grants strength and whose god doesn’t.

Isiah 41:2-4 “Who has stirred up one from the east, calling him in righteousness to his service? He hands nations over to him and subdues kings before him. He turns them to dust with his sword, to windblown chaff with his bow. He pursues them and moves on unscathed, by a path his feet have not travelled before. Who has done this and carried it through, calling forth the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD—with the first of them and with the last—I am he.”

Now that God has everyone’s attention, He begins this courtroom scene with a question. He asks the nations and their gods, **who is it that raised up the man who destroys nations?** Now this is a reference to the future coming of Cyrus, the king of the Medes and the Persians. Later in **Isaiah 44:28** God says this about him, “He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, “Let it be rebuilt,” and of the temple, “Let its foundations be laid.”

**Isaiah 45:1+2** “This is what the LORD says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut.” Isaiah’s prophecy concerning him came to fulfilment as he was the king who actively assisted the Jews in rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem under Ezra and Zerubbabel. You can read all about it in **Ezra 1:1-11** and **Ezra 6:3-5**.

Now this text makes us face the sovereignty of God and the freewill of men. God’s prediction of Cyrus doesn’t mean that Cyrus was predestined to do this. Everyone has the free will to choose who to follow and who to obey. We all know that God doesn’t design treachery but God can design treachery into His plan. God doesn’t make men do evil but God can use evil men, just like He did with Judas and Nebuchadnezzar to fulfil His plans. You see, the reason God made the prediction was to let the Israelites and the nations of the earth know that He was in control.

I remember many years ago speaking with a dear brother who was getting worried about all the terrorism, all the earthquakes, all the tsunamis that were happening in the world. And he asked me, don’t those things worry you? I just gave him a hug and said, ‘this is my Father’s world, my brother.’

God is in control, we may not understand why He does things the way He does. We may not understand why He allows certain things to happen in our lives or in this world. But this is His world and He is in control. The Message translations says this in **Job 36:26** “Take a long, hard look. See how great he is—infinite, greater than anything you could ever imagine or figure out!”

Now loved ones, this prophecy was made 150 years in advance, way before Cyrus was even born. In other words, God is asking them a question about something that hasn’t even happened yet, as though it had already happened. And so, basically God is asking the nations, **which God knows the future?**

And notice how God describes this man who won't even be born for another 150 years. He meets victory at every step, he tramples kings under foot, his sword crushes his enemies into dust, the nations are like worthless stubble before him. He is a conquering king and he defeats all his enemies while he himself is unscathed. **But how does this happen? Where does this superpower which doesn't even exist yet come from?**

The father of a small boy would occasionally sneak into a neighbour's orchard and pluck some of the choicest fruit. He always made sure, however, that **'the coast was clear.'** One day with his son tagging along, after carefully looking in every direction and seeing no one, he crept through the fence. He was just about ready to help himself when the youngster startled him by crying out, **'Dad! Dad! You didn't look UP! You forgot to see if God is watching.'**

The nations are going to be destroyed by Cyrus and the nations will be wondering where he came from. **Did he come from the east? Did he come from the south? Did he come from the north or west?** They would look everywhere but up because they refused to believe that God was watching.

And notice that God answers His own question, in **Isaiah 41:4** **"I, the LORD—with the first of them and with the last—I am he."** **"I am the One who will raise up this invincible army that will rule the world."** **"I am the One who has raised up every generation and every nation from the beginning of the world! Who else could it possibly be?"**

Now there's a question for the evolutionists and atheists. **Who else, if not the God of the Bible, could have possibly created the universe? Who else, if not the God of the Bible, could have possibly created life? And loved ones, do we really believe that mankind is in control of our own destiny? Do we really believe that we're in control of the planet?**

**Colossians 1:16+17** **"For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."** The Lord created the universe and He is the One who is holding it all together, **who else could it possibly be?**

Near the end of his life, Jean-Paul Sartre who was a French philosopher told His friend Pierre Victor, **'I do not feel that I am the product of chance, a speck of dust in the universe, but someone who was expected, prepared, prefigured. In short, a being whom only a Creator could put here; and this idea of a creating hand refers to God.'** **Do you know what he's saying? He's saying, who else could possibly have created him, if not God!**

Now remember Isaiah is speaking about the future of Israel and the Gentile nations. God is holding this court and making these statements before the Gentiles and their dead idols. And He goes on to say in **Isaiah 41:5-7** **"The islands have seen it and fear; the ends of the earth tremble. They approach and come forward; they help each other and say to their companions, "Be strong!" The metalworker encourages the goldsmith, and the one who smooths with the hammer spurs on the one who strikes the anvil. One says of the welding, "It is good." The other nails down the idol so it will not topple."**

God speaks of the nation's again, and of their future response to this future threat, as though it has already happened. But when it does happen, the world is terrified of Cyrus. And so, they are so scared, that they decide the best option they have against Cyrus is to make more gods. They gather themselves together to encourage each other and say, **"Be strong! Yes, this is a good image you've made! It doesn't even fall over!"** These guys are so proud of themselves, they're manufacturing new gods and truly believe that they will save them from the coming onslaught from Cyrus.

I can imagine God shaking His head and thinking of **Psalm 115:4-8** where the writer says, **"But their idols are silver and gold, made by human hands. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see. They have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but cannot smell. They have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but cannot walk, nor can they utter a sound with their throats. Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them."**

I can imagine God shaking His head and thinking of what Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 45:20** **"Ignorant are those who carry about idols of wood, who pray to gods that cannot save."** Nothing, not an army, not one person, not one manufactured idol, is ever going to save them from what was going to happen 150 years now. It was going to be the end of the world for them, it was going to be the end of their world.

And people who refuse to believe that God is, people who refuse to believe that God is planning to bring this present world to an end. Those are the people who are still manufacturing idols today to try and stop the end of the world from happening.

We'll manufacture catalytic convertors, that'll save our planet! We'll manufacture space rockets and search the universe for intelligent life, maybe aliens can save our planet! We'll manufacture new drugs, they'll help us live forever! We'll manufacture a man called Bruce Willis, He'll save us from Armageddon!

A young boy went to the cinema with his younger brother who was considerably smaller than him. After they'd seated themselves, the young boy asked his brother, 'Can you see the screen?' 'Nope,' was the reply. 'Well,' said the older brother, 'just laugh when I laugh.'

These idols makers can't see how foolish this idea of worshipping a handmade god is. People will try and manufacture anything today to keep God out of the equation. And as Christians, we shouldn't be laughing at them but praying for them. God said, Cyrus' coming was a done deal, 150 years before it happened.

God still says, the end of the world is a done deal, and He said it just over 2000 years ago. **2 Peter 3:8-10** "But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord, a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare." Judgment Day is as certain as your death and paying your taxes, it's coming, and no-one will escape it.

Just before the death of actor **W.C. Fields**, a friend visited Fields' hospital room and was surprised to find him thumbing through a Bible. Asked what he was doing with a Bible, Fields replied, 'I'm looking for loopholes.' Now we hear all the time about how some people escape the justice system in this world. And they seem to get away with their crimes, but loved ones, God's justice system doesn't have any loopholes in it.

And do you know why God hasn't come to bring all this godless idolatry to an end yet? If you're not a Christian, do you know why God hasn't come back to bring it all to an end yet? He loves you so much, He doesn't want you to perish like all those other idol manufacturers. He wants you to know that He is patiently waiting for you to turn to Him.

The nations of the earth were preparing for Cyrus coming by making themselves a bunch of metal and wooden objects and called them gods. The question is, how are you going to prepare for the Day in which history has never seen and a Day which is never to repeated?

That's the question that Peter asks and answers in **2 Peter 3:11+12** "Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming."

You see loved ones, God is patient, but there's a time coming when His patience will run out. And if we as Christians truly believe this, we should be living like we believe it. God is looking for holy and godly people whose lives reflect God's glory in every way. I'm so looking forward to that Day, aren't you?

Court is now adjourned until next week, where we'll continue with this courtroom scene and find out what God has to say to Israel and all these so-called gods.