

# Behold the Sovereign Lord of the Nations

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Phil is continuing this section of Isaiah that we began last week and we'll be opening up Isaiah chapter 41 this week. So let's turn that up and we'll read that together. We'll find it on page 601 if we're using a church visitor's Bible. Isaiah chapter 41.

Beginning verse 1.

Like dust with his sword, like driven stubble with his bow, he pursues them and passes on safely. By paths his feet have not trod. Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the Lord, the first and with the last, I am he. The coastlands have seen and are afraid.

The ends of the earth tremble. They have drawn near and come. Everyone helps his neighbor and says to his brother, be strong. The craftsman strengthens the goldsmith and he who smooths with the hammer, him who strikes the anvil, saying of the soldering, it is good. And they strengthen it with nails so that it cannot be moved. But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend, you whom I took from the ends of the earth and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, you are my servant. I have chosen you and not cast you off. Fear not, for I am with you.

Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous hand. Behold, all who are incensed against you shall be put to shame and confounded. Those who strive against you shall be as nothing and shall perish. You shall seek those who contend with you, but you shall not find them. Those who war against you shall be as nothing as all. For I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand. It is I who say to you, fear not. I am the one who helps you. Fear not, you worm, Jacob, you men of Israel. I am the one who helps you, declares the Lord. Your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel. Behold, I make of you a threshing sledge, new, sharp, and having teeth. You shall thresh the mountains and crush them. You shall make the hills like chaff.

[ 3 : 1 1 ] You shall winnow them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the tempest shall scatter them. And you shall rejoice in the Lord. In the Holy One of Israel you shall glory.

When the poor and the needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I, the Lord, will answer them. I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. I will open up rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. I will put in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive. I will set in the desert the cypress, the plain, and the pine together, that they may see and know, may consider and understand together that the hand of the Lord has done this. The Holy One of Israel has created it. Set forth your case, says the Lord. Bring your proofs, says the King of Jacob. Let them bring them, and tell us what is to happen. Tell us the former things what they are, that we may consider them, that we may know their outcome, or declare to us the things to come. 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. I stirred up from the north, and he has come, from the rising of the sun, and he shall call upon my name. He shall trample on rulers, as on mortar, as the potter treads clay. Who declared it from the beginning that he might know, and beforehand that he might say, he is right? There was none who declared it, none who proclaimed, none who heard your words. I was the first to say, Zion, behold, here they are, and I give to Jerusalem a herald of good news. But when I look, there is no one. Among these, there is no counselor, who, when I ask, gives an answer. Behold, they are all a delusion. Their works are nothing. Their metal images are empty wind.

Amen. This is God's words. Well, good morning, and please do turn in your Bibles to Isaiah 41.

We live in a time of political turmoil and uncertainty. And as we look at the nations, as we look at the political landscape, we see chaos. And that chaos has really brought dismay and despair into the hearts of many. I think it's a fair assessment to see that if you're to look around our society that we live in today, you will see lots of people, the vast majority of people, are full of fear because of the uncertainty of the future. And you know, the people of God are not immune to such fear. And I know that's true because I've chatted to some of you. And you've told me that the uncertainty that we face politically really fills you with fear. And I confess that I often feel that way too, so often. And when we feel that fear, we can really be tempted to look to other things, other than God, for security. And so we must be careful. Well, Isaiah 41 will help us greatly.

In Isaiah 41, the Lord reminds his people that he alone is the sovereign ruler of the nations, the sovereign ruler of history. And there is no other. And if you trust in him alone, and if you live under his rule and reign, then you need not fear because your future is so secure.

[ 7 : 29 ] Well, at this stage in his book, Isaiah the prophet is speaking to the people of God who are facing dark and dismal days ahead. At the end of chapter 39, Isaiah has just announced that exile is coming. Remember that back then, the vast majority of the people of Judah, God's covenant people, had rejected the Lord. They'd spurned his grace to refuse the relationship with him. And as a result, the Lord announces that he's going to bring the ultimate covenant curse upon them, exile. I don't know about you, but I heard that word a lot used in church.

I hear it in sermons all the time. I use it in sermons all the time. And I just think that it tends to wash over me just what a horror it actually was. In the years ahead, the Lord is going to raise up Babylon, a war machine that's going to come upon Judah and Jerusalem will be ransacked and ruined. The temple will also be ransacked and ruined. The vast majority of the people of God will be either put to the sword. So they're going to see loved ones executed in front of them, or they're going to be taken off as prisoners, including the Davidic King is going to be taken away. It was horrible, brutal. That is what the people of God have just heard at the end of chapter 39. But as we saw last week, that message of horror is replaced by a message of real hope in chapter 40. Isaiah has given a revelation from the Lord about the glorious future that lies beyond the exile. And he's to go immediately to proclaim this to God's people. Words of comfort for the remnant of faith, the group of real believers within Judah, so that they will be strengthened, lifted up, and kept through the Babylonian oppression, so that they will not fall away from the Lord.

In chapter 40, verse 1 to 11, we saw that the Lord promises to come personally and save and shepherd his people. And when he does this, it will be an earth-shattering act of redemption, akin to the exodus that the Lord carried out in the past. The Lord is going to come personally from the wilderness.

He's going to march, remember, over this victorious, triumphant highway that will spread out in front of him. He will be utterly unstoppable. No one can stand in his way. And he will come, he will seek and gather in all his lost people from Babylon. At the same time, he will wipe away Babylon, and he will pick up his people in his arms. He will turn, he will walk back to Zion, and he will rule there in glory forever and ever and ever. And every individual, every member of God's flock will never have a need ever again, because their needs will be constantly met by the Lord. But as we saw also last week, you remember that the remnant of faith, the Lord knows what they're made of. He knows that they might be full of doubts when this happens, because of the grim circumstances that they're in. They might find it hard to trust these promises of God. And so it seems they had two doubts, and Isaiah answers these two doubts. So the first doubt that they had was this, can the Lord shepherd and save us? Is he powerful enough? And in verse 12 to 26 of chapter 40, Isaiah says, yes, of course he is. Do you not remember who he is and whose law says he is? He is the all-powerful, all-knowing creator. He's not a big man. He's not just a big version of you. He's not a big creature. His strength and his might are limitless. He really is mighty to save and shepherd you and to make good his promises. The second doubt that the remnant of faith had was this. Yeah, but does the Lord really want to save and shepherd us? Is he willing?

And Isaiah finishes off chapter 40, verse 27 to 31, by declaring, yes, the Lord really wants to save and shepherd you. Behold your God. He's coming. He's ready and willing to give you a share of his limitless strength. He will give you it in the hard days ahead. And ultimately, in the end, if you wait for him, if you stake your all upon his promises, he will raise you up in power. You will soar as though you had eagle's wings. And in chapter 40, the Lord carries on this ministry of comfort to the exiles in Babylon. And here, it seems that the exiles also doubted whether the Lord was really the sovereign ruler of the nations, the sovereign ruler of history. They no longer found it easy to believe the songs that we've sung earlier in this service. They couldn't bring themselves probably to sing that God is the God of the ages, history's maker, because they were surrounded by impressive and intimidating idolatry. So as they looked around at the Babylonian temples round about them, they maybe started to think to themselves, well, hang on a minute, who is the victorious God? Who's the Lord who controls all of this? Perhaps it's the Babylonian gods. Maybe we got it wrong. Maybe it's Marduk and his pantheon.

[ 12 : 46 ] Maybe he defeated the Lord. Some of them may have abandoned the Lord completely and started to trust in Marduk and the other gods of Babylon as their hope for years to come. I think that would have been a huge temptation for the exiles, the remnant of believers. And in chapter 41, Isaiah smashes all that sort of thinking to pieces. He's written this chapter to safeguard the remnant of faith from idolatry. And before we get into the text, just notice the structure. Those of you who know me know that I love a good sandwich. I've had many sandwiches in my life. I cannot hide that fact.

But notice that this passage is structured like a sandwich. There's two bits of bread, and you'll find those bits of bread in 1 to 7, verse 1 to 7, and in 21 to 29. And in those bits of bread, the Lord is addressing the nations, especially Babylon, and their false gods. And in between, in the middle, in the filling of the sandwich, if you like, the Lord addresses his faithful people.

So let's look at the bits of bread under our first point this morning. Here's our first point. The Lord exposes the sheer folly of trusting false gods. The Lord exposes the sheer folly of trusting false gods. So imagine I'm sitting in exile in Babylon some 200 years after Isaiah had written this book. I feel disheartened. I feel tempted to trust Marduk. I unravel the scroll of Isaiah.

I open it up at chapter 41. I read it, and I see that it assures me that trusting in false gods is utterly futile, beyond stupid. Please look at verse 1.

Listen to me in silence, O coastlands, O nations. Let the peoples renew their strength. Let them approach. Let them speak. Let us together draw near for judgment. So where are we in verse 1? Answer, a courtroom. A massive courtroom. And the Lord calls all of the nations into the courtroom to stand before him for questioning. And just notice, before he gets on to the questioning about their behavior, he graciously and compassionately offers them strength, divine strength. Look what he says there, let the peoples renew their strength. He gives them a chance to receive strength from him. That is a direct echo of chapter 40, verse 31, where the Lord promises to give strength to those within his covenant people if they trust his word. That is what the Lord is also compassionately holding out to the nations here. But will they accept such a gift? Will they turn to the Lord away from their gods and worship him as the true living God alone, the Lord of history? That is what the Lord goes on to tell them in verse 2 to 4. I am the God of the ages. There is no other. And to prove this, that he is the sovereign Lord, he gets the nations, he lifts up their eyes, and he gives them a view into the future. He gives them a vision. He says, look, look into the future, look to the east. Do you see this new human superpower king who's rising up just now? Do you see the way in which he's knocking over other rulers of other nations like they're pieces on the chessboard? Do you see how he's moving so fast and so victorious, so furiously through the earth, it's almost like his feet aren't touching the ground? He is that way. That coming king is that way because I have raised them up to be that way.

[ 16 : 20 ] I am the Lord of history. I am the ruler of the political landscape. And by the way, that leader, he's headed straight for you, Babylon and other nations. That's what the Lord says. Look at verse 4.

Who has performed and done this? Who has divine lordship over history? Answer, me. I, the Lord, the first and with the last, I am he. And the Lord is saying, don't think that this coming king that I'm telling you about is a one-off. I've done this from the very beginning. No throne on earth has reached the top by itself. Any human power and any human throne that has reached the top, it's only done so because I have placed it at the top and let it. I am the living God, the sovereign Lord of history.

I once heard a Sunday school teacher say to their little kids in their Sunday school class, and remember class, history is his story. His story. The Lord's story. And he works out all things in conformity to the purposes of his will. That is what the Lord has just revealed to these nations in the courtroom in front of him. And the reasonable, the logical, the only proper response to this Lord of history surely must be to turn to him and to surrender everything that you have under his rule, to acknowledge him and to abandon all other vestiges of security and hope, to 100% live under his rule and protection. But that is precisely what the nations refuse to do. Please look at verse 5 to 7.

The coastlands have seen, they've seen, they've heard what's coming and they're afraid. The ends of the earth tremble. They have drawn near and come. Everyone helps his neighbor.

Be strong, they say. The craftsman strengthens the goldsmith and he who smooths with the hammer, him who strikes the anvil, saying of the soldering, it is good. And they strengthen it with nails so that it cannot be moved. So the peoples hear of the coming of Cyrus, the Persian king. We know that's true because later on in Isaiah 44, Isaiah says that this is Cyrus, the coming king of Persia, who will wipe out Babylon. So the nations hear this and they're full of fear. They're trembling. And instead of turning to the real king, the one behind Cyrus, they ignore him. And look where they turn.

[ 18 : 44 ] It's absolutely deluded. They turn, first of all, verse 6, to each other. They ignore the lord of the nations, the lord of time. And they turn to other little creatures of dust. And they say to each other all sorts of false hopes. They say, don't worry about this coming judgment. It's all, you know what, it's going to be fine. Be strong. You can do this. We can do this. We can get through this. We can overcome. Everything's going to be okay. Let's be strong. Come on. We can do this. People in the world today say that type of false hope to each other all the time. My friend was once going through radiotherapy and he was sitting in the waiting room and opposite him was a man sat covered in blankets with breathing apparatus to help him. He was clearly days away from dying. Very fragile. Very weak.

He was a ghost of a man. And he smiled at my friend and he said, do you know what? The doctor said I would have three months to live after my diagnosis. Well, I'm on my sixth month now since my diagnosis. I'm still going. Things are looking up. I'm going to be all right, you know.

When my friend went back in for further treatments over the following weeks, he never saw that man again because the man had died. Sadly, he was giving himself false hope. And that is precisely what the nations do here in the face of their fear. False hope and the inevitability of their destruction by Cyrus. And they're completely deluded. And look what they turn to next for security and comfort. Verse 7, they turn to the false gods that they themselves have made and created. That's what the scene is here.

All of the idolaters, all those who are involved in making the statues of false gods, they give each other hope. They say, come on, let's be strong. And then they turn away from each other and say, come on, let's go. I've got an idea. Let's go and nail down our idols. The statues we've made, let's go and nail them down so that they won't topple off their pedestals. And you know, once they've done that, they go, they fetch their tools, they nail it down and they stand back from what they've done and they go, do you know what? This is good. This is really good. We're going to be fine. We are so so strong. We're all sorted.

It's madness, isn't it? You're not reading this thinking, this is absolute madness. Just notice, please, that these verses tell us that the false gods that human beings make are really a product of human fear. They're a product of human fear. When the human heart doesn't know the true sovereign Lord of the universe, the Lord of history, it will be full of fear. And the political upheavals that are around them will just ramp up that fear. And to try and cope with the fear, the human heart of unbelief will take something within the created order and try and look to it as God. It is madness. Please look at verse 21.

[ 21 : 38 ] Set forth your case, says the Lord. Bring your proof, says the king of Jacob. Let them bring them and tell us what is to happen. Go on, tell us the former things, what they are, that we may consider them, that we may know their outcome or declare to us the things that are to come.

So we're back in the courtroom here. This is a comical image. The Lord says to the nations who are stood before him, right, go on, out you go, go on and fetch your idols. Go and bring them in here. Of course, you'll need to carry them because your idols can't walk in here of their own accord.

They need you to carry them. These gods that you trust in to save you for the future. Go on, bring them in in front of me, set them before me, and I will question them. And so the nations go out of the courtroom, they pick up their idols, they carry them in, these gods they think will save them, and they place them down in front of the Lord, these statues of stone and wood, and the Lord starts to mock them and taunt them.

And he says to them, go on, gods, come on, you mighty sovereign gods, those that the people trust in. Come on, show us that you are the all-knowing lords of history. Come on, review what's going to happen like I've just done in verse 2-4 with the coming of Cyrus. Come on, show us your power to know the future.

Nothing. All right then, says the Lord, come on then, show us about the significance of the past. Show us the meaning of history. Why has everything happened the way it's happened? Come on, show off your omniscience.

[ 23 : 11 ] Hello? Anyone there? Again, there's nothing but silence. Verse 23, the Lord carries on the mockery. He says to the gods, well, if you're not going to disclose anything about the future, and if you're not going to tell us about the significance of the past, then why don't you do a powerful work for us?

Come on, show us off your power. Do something. I'll let you choose. Do good or do evil. Just do something right in front of us, right here, right now in this courtroom, so that we may be dismayed by your power and terrified.

And again, the courtroom remains silent and utterly still. For the gods of the nations are silent and inactive, because the gods of the nations do not exist.

They are mere products of human imagination and rebellion against God. And the Lord's summary of them at the end of the chapter there is scathing. He says, they are an abomination in my sight.

And those who trust in these false gods are also an abomination. They are detestable to the living God, the Lord of history. And so if I was sitting in exile in Babylon, if I was tempted, even for the slightest, to trust in Marduk, the God of Babylon, then Isaiah 41 would give me a really healthy dose of reality, a loving slap in the face.

[ 24 : 26 ] The Lord alone, the God of Israel, is the sovereign Lord of history. And friends, all of us here today in this room and downstairs watching on the screens, we need Isaiah 41 to keep us from slipping into idolatry as well, because idolatry is alive and kicking today.

There are millions all over the world whose idolatry looks a lot like the idolatry back then. Just go to India, for example, and you will meet millions of people who are full of fear because of the uncertainty and the fragility of life.

And instead of turning in the real sovereign Lord of the nations and looking to him, they look to man-made statues. I had a friend who grew up in a Hindu home. He told me about his childhood.

He said his day would begin by getting up really early. He would come down the stairs into his family's shrine, this little box, and he would open up these little curtains and he would wake up the gods.

And of course, the gods were symbolized by these little wooden statues that could fit in the palm of his hand. And he would take the god out carefully, very carefully, and he would bathe the god and wash the god.

[ 25 : 36 ] And then he would leave a little dish of food out for the god to feast upon. It didn't matter that every day when he came back to look at the dish, the same food was there from the day before, untouched. And he would also have all sorts of elaborate things he had to do in order to put the gods to sleep.

They needed him to read a bedtime story to them. And he once said to me, you know, looking back, I cannot believe how ludicrous it was. I cannot believe I believed that, but I actually did.

I believed that those little carved images had the ability to help me in daily life and had the ability to help me make sense of my place in the universe. It is nonsense.

But friends, just in case we start to feel superior because we don't carry out such practices, let me tell you how the Heidelberg Catechism, one of the great documents of the Reformed faith, defines idolatry.

Heidelberg Catechism says this, what is idolatry? Answer. Idolatry is having or inventing something in which one trusts in place of or alongside of the true God who has revealed himself in his word.

[ 26 : 45 ] And that is actually how the Bible describes idolatry. It is a matter of the heart. It is anything more important to you in your heart than to the Lord. Anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you that which only God can give you, it's an idol.

One theologian says this, a false God is anything so central and essential to your life that should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living. An idol has a controlling position in your heart so that you can spend most of your passions and energy, your emotional and financial resources on it without giving a second thought.

It can be family and children, or career and money making, or achievement and critical acclaim, or saving face and social standing. It can be a romantic relationship, peer approval, competence and skill, secure and comfortable circumstances.

Your beauty and your brains can even be idols. The great political or social causes of our day can be turned into idols. Your morality and your virtues can become idolatrous.

Even your success in Christian ministry can become idolatrous. An idol is whatever you look at and say in your heart of hearts, if only I had that, then I will feel secure in this life.

[ 28 : 05 ] And I'll feel that my life has meaning, value and significance and security. Now there are many ways to describe the kind of relationship to something like this, but perhaps the best word to describe this is worship.

If anything becomes more fundamental than God to your happiness, meaning in life and identity, then friends, it has become an idol. And in the West today, our culture has massive idols.

Cultural idols. The big ones are probably things like this idea of individual freedom, self-discovery, personal affluence and fulfillment. All these good things can and do take on disproportionate size and power within a society.

They promise safety, peace and happiness if we base our lives on them. But in reality, they are idols. Ideologies as well. Ideas that people take on, belief systems that control people and master people and move the directions of their lives, they too can become idols.

So just because we don't bow down to statues of stone doesn't mean that we haven't slipped into idolatry today. We must let the Lord's courtroom speech in Isaiah 41 warn us idolatry is futile, seriously futile.

[ 29 : 24 ] Here's a couple of questions that you could ask your heart this morning that might expose where they are. Here's the first question. What things am I currently looking to in life in order to find happiness, meaning and identity?

What things am I currently looking to in life to find happiness, meaning and identity? The answer to that question isn't immediately the Lord. The chances are you've slipped into idolatry.

Another exposing question to ask ourselves is this. What makes me feel secure in this life? What makes me feel secure in this life? Again, if the answer isn't immediately the Lord, you're in trouble.

I'm in trouble if that's the case in my heart. The Lord says, stop trusting in the things of this earth. Look to me. For all those who look to me will have a wondrous future.

And that's what we're going to look at briefly in the last point in our sermon as we look at this middle part of the sandwich of our passage. Verse 8 to 20. Very briefly. The Lord promises a secure future for all those who trust him.

[ 30 : 35 ] A secure future for all those who trust him. We're going to walk through these verses. I'll summarize them. And as we go through, just notice how the relationship between the Lord and his people as described in this section is a complete contrast to the relationship between the nations and their gods described in the bits of bread either side of it.

And I want you to see as we go through these different contrasts, there's four that I'm going to pull out here. You will see just how much better it is to live under the Lord than it is to live under a false God.

So here's the first contrast. First contrast is this. The nations, as we've just heard, they made their own gods. They have to make their own gods. But Israel, the Lord's people, they have been made by the Lord.

That's what he says in verse 8 to 9. Look at that, please. But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend, you whom I took from the ends of the earth and called from its farthest corner, saying to you, you are my servant.

I have chosen you. And do not cast you off. You see, for Israel, they can look back in their history and they can see the way in which they've been called, chosen, and established as a nation by the Lord's hand.

[ 31 : 49 ] They have been made by the true and living God. They are cared for the true and living God. Goes all the way back to their father Abraham when he called Abraham out of the Chaldeans, which was, of course, the land of Babylon, funnily enough.

What great hope that gives Israel. But the nations have no such hope. When the nations look back in history, all that they can see is the way in which their forefathers invented their gods and created their gods with their own hands.

Hopeless in comparison. Second contrast. We saw in verse 5 that the nations are full of fear. They are loaded with fear.

And they receive no real comfort from their gods. Just look at what Israel receives from their God. Verse 10. He says, Fear not. Fear not.

Why? Because I am with you. Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you even in your darkest hour, even when things seem so bleak.

[ 32 : 52 ] And you think I'm not there. I am there. I am with you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Great hope. The nations know nothing of that.

They are racked full of fear. Third contrast. We've seen in verse 6 and 7, the pagan nations are actually the ones who bring strength to their own gods.



The gods of the nations require the pagans to go and give them their strength. But again, things are so wonderfully different with the Lord, the Holy One of Israel.

He is the one who gives his people an endless supply of strength. And really, he's picking up here on the great promise that he laid out at the end of chapter 40. His righteous hand will strengthen his people.

He will hold them. The pagan nations know nothing of that. And when we are racked full of fear as the church today, we can look in our fear to the Lord and we can see him and see how powerful he is and how much bigger he is than anything on the face of the earth.

[ 33 : 54 ] And he will give us the strength that we need. The nations know nothing of that. Well, the fourth contrast, and this is the main one, is that the nations don't receive any words from their gods about the future.

The nations have no hope for the future. They've just got more and more fear and uncertainty. But contrast that with the Lord. The Lord gives his people great words about the future.

And there's a future that is secure. And that is what we see from verse 11 to the end. And again, the Lord is really picking up the glorious promises that he made in chapter 40 and fleshing them out here.

So let's run through these verses. Verse 11, the Lord says that in the future, his people will be completely free. Once and for all, from all their oppressors and their foes.

In fact, in verse 12, the Lord says that Israel will one day get up and they will look around the nations around them to see if they can find their oppressors. And they'll say, where have they gone? Where are all our foes?

[ 34 : 53 ] Where have they gone? They've been wiped off the face of the earth because the Lord is holding his people in his left hand. And obviously that means the Lord's hand is free, verse 13, to wipe out the enemies that they face.

The Lord says, that's going to happen. That will happen. So have no fear. Do not fear. Verse 14 to 15, the Lord says to Israel, at present, Israel, you're just like a worm, a little worm.

That is right now, you are so weak. If I had a strengthometer, then you, Israel, would be at the very bottom, the weakest of all the nations. But when I come, I'm going to redeem you. And when I do, you will be transformed.

You will go from being a worm to being the ultimate threshing sledge. Now those of you who don't know what a threshing sledge is, I don't know what a threshing sledge was and so I had to look it up in the commentaries.

But it was apparently a powerful piece of farming equipment. A huge wooden frame that underneath had these very daunting metallic teeth. And the farmers would use them to pull over the land and it would churn up the crops and be used in the threshing process.

[ 36 : 01 ] Well the Lord says, now you look like a worm, but I'm going to transform you into the ultimate threshing sledge. You will be such a big threshing sledge that I will pull you across the mountains and the mountains will crumble before you like chaff in the wind.

And remember of course that when the prophets usually speak about mountains, it's a figurative way of talking about superpowers and kings. It's really talking about the fact that one day the Lord's people will be so powerful and before their very eyes they will see their enemies and all the kings who've rejected the Lord and have oppressed them they will be destroyed in front of them.

And where will the Lord take his people? Where will he place them? Well verse 17 to 20 has the answer. Let me read these to you. When the poor and the needy seek water and there is none and their tongue is parched with thirst I the Lord will answer them.

I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers on the bare heights and fountains in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water and the dry land springs of water.

I will put in the wilderness the cedar the acacia the myrtle and the olive. I will set in the desert the cypress the plain and the pine together that they my people may see and know may consider and understand together that the hand of the Lord has done this.

[ 37 : 26 ] The Holy One of Israel has created it. So the Lord says I am going to take you to a place of paradise. paradise. I will take you to a place that at one time was a wilderness of barrenness and death emptiness no life no water so no life could be sustained in it but I am going to take that place and I am going to transform it I am going to turn it from that wilderness into a beautiful garden of paradise full of trees and what will run through the garden of paradise answer a wonderful limitless river of life giving water.

that's where the Lord's people are headed that's where you're going says the Lord I'm going to put you there and when you're there you will know me completely you will understand you will never be oppressed ever again you will live perfectly in this paradise and you will know me and you will enjoy me forever and ever and ever and ever so says the Lord to his exiled people which would you rather have?

would you rather trust in the idols of the pagan nations round about you? Trust in Marduk? Well go for it go for it but you must know that in the end that will come to nothing but fear hopelessness and utter destruction all those who choose the gods of the nations who choose idols they will be blown away by the Lord in front of his church like chaff on the last day but if you trust me says the Lord if you do all that you can to turn away from the idols of your heart and put yourself under my rule and trust me then I promise to give you a future that will be so glorious you won't even be able to comprehend how glorious it's going to be and in the present as you wait for that glorious future to come I will keep you and you need not fear this world of turmoil and chaos and uncertainty I will strengthen you I will keep you going behold I am the sovereign lord of the nations the sovereign lord of history so turn away from idols and trust me and you will not be disappointed well amen let's bow our heads for a moment and then I'll pray for us almighty and gracious god heavenly father we praise you and confess that you alone are the true living god all other gods are false gods mere inventions of man's rebellious and fearful hearts we confess that so often we feel afraid in this dark world so often we are dismayed and distressed because of the turmoil around us and so often we choose not to turn to you but instead to look to other things that are less than you for help lord please help us please convict us that this turning away from you is so wrong and instead by the power of your spirit please help us to cast ourselves completely upon you more and more every day we praise you for the glorious future that you have promised to everyone who builds their lives upon your promises so please draw near to us this day and give us the help and the strength that we so desperately need to persevere by faith so that we will all make it to that great garden of paradise we pray these things in Jesus precious name amen