

# GOD'S POWER TO EXECUTE JUDGMENT UPON ALL WHO DEFY HIM

## ISAIAH 41:01-07

### ***Introduction***

Freedom is one of the major cravings of the human heart. People want to be free to live, worship, work and move about as they wish. The human heart rebels against restraint, bondage and enslavement. Yet when the human heart and the experiences of day-to-day life are objectively and honestly evaluated, one tragic fact jumps to the forefront: we are enslaved to sin and death. No person can keep from committing sin, and no person can keep from dying. From the moment we are born, we are doomed to sin, to act selfishly and commit wicked deeds. And we are doomed to die. Fundamentally, to be human means to be a sinner doomed to die. As much as we may dislike this truth, we are all held in bondage to sin and death.

But there is wonderful news: God can free us from sin and from death. We can live righteously and godly in this present life, and we can inherit eternal life, but only by the power of God. This is the important message of this Scripture: *Set Free Through God's Power to Control Human History, the Very Deeds of People*, 41:1 -29.

- I. God's power to execute judgment upon all who defy Him (vv. 1-7).
- II. God's power to protect and provide for Israel (His people) (vv. 8-20).
- III. God's power to prove that He is the only living and true God (vv. 21-29).

### ***Isaiah 41:01-07 God's Power to Execute Judgment upon All Who Defy Him***

God has the power to execute judgment on the wicked, and history is rapidly moving toward that climactic day when that point in time arrives, the struggle between light and darkness, good and evil, righteousness and wickedness, faith and unbelief will be over. Only the LORD and those who truly believe and follow Him will survive the final and terrifying day of judgment. But note: God does not always wait to execute judgment on the wicked. Sometimes, His hand of judgment begins to fall even as acts of wickedness (sin, evil, unrighteousness) are being committed. This was the case in Isaiah's day and in succeeding generations. Sadly, people and nations were living in a cesspool of immorality, unrighteousness, lawlessness and violence. The people were steeped in idolatry and false worship. Despite that, God still loved the world, every individual and every nation. Thus He inspired Isaiah to issue another prophecy, a warning of coming judgment. All the people and nations needed to know this fact: God has the power to execute judgment upon all who defy Him.

1. God issued a summons for the nations of the earth to gather for a trial (v. 1).  
Attendance at the trial was compulsory not optional. The summons was issued to *all*
-

*the islands*, to all people and nations from the most distant corner of the earth. They were instructed to approach the LORD in reverence and silence, for they were being summoned to face the judgment of God because of their terrible, destructive and wicked behaviour.

2. God asked the people and the nations two key questions (vv. 2-4). Keep in mind that God was giving Isaiah insight into the future day when judgment would be executed against the Babylonian Empire.
  - a. God's first question directly addresses the issue of judgment: Who has the power to raise up a ruler to execute judgment on the nations? Note that the ruler to be raised up would come from the *east* (v. 2). He would conquer nations, subduing king after king and defeating numerous armies with his sword and bow. This is a clear prediction of Cyrus, king of Persia (559-530 B.C.).

In a compelling demonstration of the prophecy's accuracy, Isaiah revealed that the name of the king would be Cyrus even though it was years before this king appeared on the scene of human history (Isa. 44:28; 45:1). In an earlier prophecy, Isaiah had revealed that the agent of God's wrath on Babylon would be the Median Empire, which is another prophecy predicting the rise of Cyrus (Isa. 13:17-18).

The point being stressed here is God's power. It was His power alone that raised up Cyrus to execute judgment on the wicked nations who had defied Him and persecuted His people. Cyrus would destroy these nations, pursuing their kings as well as their citizens, killing some and capturing others, until all the people were subjected and made a part of the great Persian Empire. Cyrus and Persia would be unscathed and unstoppable, all because God was using Cyrus as His agent of judgment.

- b. God's second question has to do with the issue of sovereignty: Who has the power to control the affairs of mankind, the behaviour of nations and people down through history (v. 4)? Today, we can look back through history and see that the prophecy concerning Cyrus actually took place. What God predicted happened. Cyrus conquered Babylon and all the nations within the Babylonian Empire, carrying out God's judgment upon the nations of that day and time. From a historical perspective, it is evident that God controlled the affairs of the human race from Isaiah's day to the day of the Persian Empire, a period of more than 160 years. Yet it was not only during that brief period that God exercised His power and sovereignty over the affairs of the human race. God is sovereign over the entire world at all times. He controls the affairs of all nations through all the generations of history.
3. So far in this passage, the one who executes judgment and controls the affairs of the human race has not been identified. But now the answers to the two questions are given, and they are given by God Himself. He alone, the Lord, has this power (v. 4b).

He is the First and the Last. By *First* is meant that He preceded all the generations of people and nations on earth and, in fact, brought them into being. By *Last* is meant that He will still be existing and overseeing the last generation of human history. He is the eternal God, the Lord of history (Isa. 44:6; Heb. 13:8; Rev. 1:8; 2:8; 21:6; 22:13).

4. In descriptive language, God states the twofold purpose of the coming judgment (vv. 5-7). These two purposes reveal the true heart of God. Even when He has to execute judgment against the wicked, God's heart is full of compassion and love, not vengeance.

In executing judgment, God's first purpose is to strike fear in people to arouse them to repent. When people are stricken with fear, they sometimes turn away from their sins and back to the LORD, crying out for His help. Isaiah predicted that when the nations and islands, the very ends of the earth, saw the hand of God's judgment being executed through Cyrus, they would fear and tremble under the weight of the judgment.

God's second purpose for executing judgment is to show that the people trusted in one another and in their false gods (vv. 6-7) rather than in the LORD. Isaiah predicted that the nations would run to one another to seek help and to form alliances against the Persians. They would encourage one another to be strong, to turn to their idols and false gods for help. They would even build new and better idols, hoping to secure their favour as they opposed the Persian war machine. Of course, their idols and false gods were of no use when the Persians attacked. Keep in mind that God's purpose was to execute judgment against the people and nations because of their wickedness and their false worship. Once the wicked hearts and idolatry of the people were exposed, there was hope that they would turn back to the Lord in repentance.

**Thought 1.** God alone can execute judgment against all the wicked people and nations of this earth. He alone has the power to oversee and control all nations in addition to all the leaders and citizens of all generations. God dwells in pure holiness and perfection, possessing all knowledge and all power. In view of that, He knows the truth about every nation, every leader and every citizen. God knows the heart and behaviour of us all, whether good or bad, righteous or wicked. As He warned the generations of Isaiah's time, so He warns all generations, including ours today: the Day of Judgment is coming. We must all give an account for what we have done and are doing. If we live good, righteous lives, we will be rewarded. But if we live sinful, wicked lives, we will face the hand of God's judgment and be doomed to eternal separation from Him. Listen to God's warning to the wicked of the earth:

**Mat 16:27** *“For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.”*

**Mat 24:30** *“At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.”*

**Mat 25:31-33, 41** *“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left...Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”*

**2 Pet 2:9** *If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.*

**2 Pet 3:7** *By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.*

**Jude 1:14-15** *Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: “See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him.”*

**Rev 1:7** *Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.*

**Rev 20:11-15** *Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

**Jer 17:10** *“I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.”*

**Thought 2.** The motivation for God's judgment must always be remembered. Judging us from a heart of love and compassion, He seeks to save us from harming ourselves and others. Our sinful behaviour is what causes so much of the destruction of life and property and the pollution of the environment in the world. An honest evaluation of the devastation we cause reveals that our hearts are wicked, selfish and greedy, and it should strike fear in us. Exposing the truth of our sinful hearts and behaviour should arouse us to repent. It is for this reason that God disciplines and judges us when we commit evil. Repentance is our only hope to escape God's judgment:

**Acts 3:19** Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.

**2 Cor 7:10** Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

**2 Cor 7:14** I had boasted to him about you, and you have not embarrassed me. But just as everything we said to you was true, so our boasting about you to Titus has proved to be true as well.

**2 Pet 3:7-10** By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. 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. 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 in it will be laid bare.

**Eccl 8:11-13** When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, people's hearts are filled with schemes to do evil. Although a wicked person who commits a hundred crimes may live a long time, I know that it will go better with those who fear God, who are reverent before him. Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow.

**Jer 7:13-15** While you were doing all these things, declares the LORD, I spoke to you again and again, but you did not listen; I called you, but you did not answer. Therefore, what I did to Shiloh I will now do to the house that bears my Name, the temple you trust in, the place I gave to you and your fathers. I will thrust you from my presence, just as I did all your brothers, the people of Ephraim. So do not pray for this people nor offer any plea or petition for them; do not plead with me, for I will not listen to you.

**Ezek 18:21** But if a wicked man turns away from all the sins he has committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, he will surely live; he will not die.

**Ezek 18:31** Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel? ■