



# Highlights From the Book of Isaiah

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# The God Who Does All These Things (44:24 – 45:7)

- In the chapters preceding today's text, Isaiah has diagnosed a double need in the Lord's people:
  - National Bondage to Babylon (42:18-43:21)
  - Spiritual Bondage to Sin (43:22-44:23)
- He now talks about how these needs will be met.
- It is revealed to Isaiah that the LORD will bring deliverance from *national* bondage through a heathen conqueror named Cyrus.
- Cyrus unwittingly acts as the LORD's servant by conquering Babylon and liberating the LORD's people.

# The God Who Does All These Things (44:24 – 45:7)

- But liberation from national bondage solves only *one* problem.
- In the meantime, the need for a solution to the *deeper* problem of *sin* has become ever *more* urgent.
- So, Cyrus enters and leaves the stage of history. His task, the lesser solution, is done.
- The greater task (deliverance from *spiritual* bondage to sin) awaits the *greater* servant.

# The God Who Does All These Things (44:24-28)

*44:24 This is what the LORD, your [Redeemer], says, the one who formed you in the womb: "I am the LORD, who made everything, who alone stretched out the sky, who fashioned the earth all by myself,<sup>25</sup> who frustrates the omens of the empty talkers and humiliates the omen readers, who overturns the counsel of the wise men and makes their advice seem foolish,<sup>26</sup> who fulfills the oracles of his prophetic servants and brings to pass the announcements of his messengers, who says about Jerusalem, 'She will be inhabited,' and about the towns of Judah, 'They will be rebuilt, her ruins I will raise up,'<sup>27</sup> who says to the deep sea, 'Be dry! I will dry up your sea currents,'<sup>28</sup> who commissions Cyrus, the one I appointed as shepherd to carry out all my wishes and to decree concerning Jerusalem, 'She will be rebuilt,' and concerning the temple, 'It will be reconstructed.'*

**44:24a** *This is what the LORD, your [Redeemer], says, the one who formed you in the womb...*

- The description “*your Redeemer*” shows that this is addressed to Israel collectively (‘you’ and ‘your’ are singular).<sup>1</sup>
- Israel is in a special relationship with the LORD, so that he will provide them with assistance in times of need.<sup>1</sup>
- Furthermore, his care for them goes back to the very start of their existence, for he is “*the one who formed [them] in the womb*”.<sup>1</sup>
- Translated into history, this would refer to the entire period of time before the actual constitution of Israel as a nation.<sup>2</sup>
- It would include the time of bondage in Egypt and also the period of the patriarchs.<sup>2</sup>
- Their origin and the LORD’s commitment to them form the basis for what he now announces to them, and they can listen to it with *confidence*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mackay, John L. – *A Study Commentary on Isaiah Volume 2: Chapters 40-66* (pp. 154-155)

<sup>2</sup> Young, Edward – *The Book of Isaiah Volume 3: Chapters 40–66* (p. 172)

**44:24b** *I am the LORD, who made **everything**, who **alone** stretched out **the sky**, who fashioned **the earth all by myself**...*

- This verse declares that the LORD is the sole Creator of “*everything*” found in the cosmos – animate or inanimate.
- He acted “*alone*” and “*all by [himself]*” when he made “*the sky*” and “*the earth*”, which combine to form the standard Hebrew description of the universe (cf. 40:12; 44:23).
- The analogy of erecting a tent is used to describe creation, with the LORD “stretching out” the heavens as tent fabric above the earth and “spreading out” the earth as the base (cf. 40:22; 42:5).

44:25 *who frustrates the omens of **the empty talkers** and humiliates the omen readers, who overturns the counsel of the wise men and makes their advice seem foolish...*

- Here we see the LORD's ongoing providential activity, particularly in relation to *knowledge and wisdom*.
- There are *two* groups mentioned here who are unable to compete with divine wisdom that comes from the LORD *alone*:
- The *first* group is referred to here as "*the empty talkers*".
- This group fails to live up to their claims because the LORD continually "*humiliates*" them.

44:25 *who frustrates the **omens** of the empty talkers and humiliates the **omen readers**, who overturns the counsel of the wise men and makes their advice seem foolish...*

- This group would include the pagan priests who issued oracles, as well as “**omen readers**” who try to authenticate their claims on the basis of “**omens**”.
- In Babylon this often involved astrology – interpreting heavenly phenomena in order to predict the future.
- Sometimes it involved seeking omens in a religious ritual.
- For example, a question would be whispered in the ear of an animal and, after it was sacrificed, its entrails, particularly its liver, would be examined to find the answer using an elaborate set of instructions.



44:25 *who frustrates the omens of the empty talkers and humiliates the omen readers, who overturns the counsel of **the wise men** and makes **their advice seem foolish...***

- The second group described here are “*the wise men*”.
- Those in this group made *no* claim to supernatural revelation or ability to read the stars.
- They proceeded on the basis of observing human conduct and recalling precedents, so that they could predict and formulate their advice.
- They were liable to fail – though they did not *always* do so – because they were unable to discern the LORD’s ultimate purpose in shaping human history.
- Nor could their wisdom deal with situations that were *unique*, for they could only make their projections on the basis of previous patterns of events, whereas the LORD can shape outcomes that are completely new, and so make “*their advice seem foolish*”.

44:26 *who fulfills the oracles of his **prophetic servants** and **brings to pass** the announcements of his messengers, who says about **Jerusalem**, ‘She will be inhabited,’ and about the towns of **Judah**, ‘They will be rebuilt, her ruins I will raise up,’*

- Divine revelation given by the LORD stands in **utter contrast** to the proclamations of the two pagan groups just described.
- The message proclaimed by the LORD’s “**prophetic servants**” is **reliable** because it is sent by the one who is able to ensure that what he has revealed actually comes to pass.
- He talks here about the destiny of “**Jerusalem**” and “**Judah**” as an **example** of a prophetic word which the LORD “**brings to pass**”.

44:26 *who fulfills the oracles of his prophetic servants and brings to pass the announcements of his messengers, who says about **Jerusalem**, ‘**She will be inhabited**,’ and about **the towns of Judah**, ‘**They will be rebuilt, her ruins I will raise up**,’*

- The **three** divine declarations given here picture a time of **recovery** for “**Jerusalem**” and “**the towns of Judah**”:
  - “**She will be inhabited**”
  - “**They will be rebuilt**”
  - “**her ruins I will raise up**”
- Because this passage is going to **climax** with the prediction of a **foreign conqueror**, the LORD is assuring his people of their coming good fortune.
- He does this so that they will not think Cyrus is just **another tyrant** who will **oppress** them.

- Here we have a reference back to the time of the *Exodus* and to the way in which the LORD then removed every obstacle that stood in the way of his people's deliverance in that day.
- At the Red Sea they could see no way forward, and had grave doubts (Exod 14:10-12), yet the LORD was able to provide a miraculous path forward through the sea.
- The precedents set at the Exodus show that every obstacle that one might imagine would be in the way of the rebuilding of Jerusalem can be swept aside, no matter *how* formidable it might seem.

**44:28** *who commissions **Cyrus**, the one I appointed as shepherd to carry out all my wishes and to decree concerning Jerusalem, 'She will be rebuilt,' and concerning the temple, 'It will be reconstructed.'*

- Here we see a startling climax where Isaiah identifies the one whom the LORD will use to carry out his purposes.
- The agent used is *not* Israel, or even a *representative* of Israel, but his name, "*Cyrus*", marks him out as a Gentile *foreigner*.
- The Hebrew form of the name is *Koresh*, corresponding to the Persian *Kurush*, which gave rise to the English form, *Cyrus*, through Greek and Latin.
- Such detailed naming of an individual has attracted much critical attention among liberal scholars, because they don't believe that Isaiah had the miraculous ability to *make* such a prophecy.
- Therefore, liberals argue that these words must have been inserted into the book of Isaiah many years later by someone other than Isaiah, even though there is *no* manuscript evidence to support this idea.

**44:28** *who commissions Cyrus, the one I appointed as shepherd to carry out all my wishes and to decree concerning Jerusalem, 'She will be rebuilt,' and concerning the temple, 'It will be reconstructed.'*

- But there is **far** more at issue here than the presence of just one name.
- Over and over again, Isaiah points to the **accuracy** of predictive prophecy as a **key piece** of evidence in his argument against the false gods who **can't** predict the future.
- The LORD is **unique** because he **can** and **does** say, often well in advance, what in fact, **does** come to pass.
- The **proper** response to such prophecies is to **worship** the God who is able to make such predictions with uncanny accuracy – **not** to concoct some theory about how the text was changed at a later date, thereby removing any possibility of it being miraculous.
- If we do not accept the claim that a miraculous predictive prophecy has occurred here, we are left with something **other** than the God whom Isaiah presents.

**44:28** *who commissions Cyrus, the one I appointed as **shepherd** to carry out all my wishes and to decree concerning Jerusalem, 'She will be rebuilt,' and concerning the temple, 'It will be reconstructed.'*

- Cyrus is identified here as the LORD's "*shepherd*", a kingly metaphor which presents him as raised up by the LORD so as to "*carry out all [his] wishes*", that is to say, all of the purposes that the LORD has in mind for him to carry out.
- The focus here is not on the large number of nations that Cyrus would conquer, but on the way in which, after the defeat of Babylon and the liberation of the exiles from Judah, Cyrus would take steps to promote the reconstruction of Jerusalem, and especially of the temple (cf. Ezra 1:1–5; 6:1–5).
- The LORD shows that all that will occur is under his control and in accordance with "*[his] wishes*" by predicting it a century and a half before the event.

# God Uses Cyrus to Deliver His People (45:1-6)

45:1 *“This is what the LORD says to his chosen one, to Cyrus, whose right hand I hold in order to subdue nations before him and disarm kings, to open doors before him so gates remain unclosed: <sup>2</sup> ‘I will go before you and level mountains. Bronze doors I will shatter and iron bars I will hack through. <sup>3</sup> I will give you hidden treasures, riches stashed away in secret places, so you may recognize that I am the LORD, the one who calls you by name, the God of Israel.*



# God Uses Cyrus to Deliver His People (45:1-6)

*45:4 For the sake of my servant Jacob, Israel, my chosen one, I call you by name and give you a title of respect, even though you do not submit to me. <sup>5</sup> I am the LORD, I have no peer, there is no God but me. I arm you for battle, even though you do not recognize me. <sup>6</sup> I do this so people will recognize from east to west that there is no God but me; I am the LORD, I have no peer.*

# God Uses Cyrus to Deliver His People (45:1-6)

- In Isaiah 45:1-6 we have a royal oracle in which God addresses Cyrus: “*This is what the LORD says to his chosen one [literally, “anointed one”], to Cyrus*”.
- “Anointing” refers to a special equipping for a specific task that God has given.
- Those who were anointed in the OT include priests (Exod 28:41), prophets (1 Kgs 19:16) and kings (1 Sam 10:1).
- However, *nowhere else* in the OT is a foreign king designated in this way.
- Cyrus, in his writings, claimed to have been chosen and appointed by the Mesopotamian god, *Marduk*.
- But *in reality*, Cyrus was guided and directed by the Sovereign LORD to bring about *his* purposes (i.e. “*Cyrus, whose right hand I hold*”).

# God Uses Cyrus to Deliver His People (45:1-6)

- The LORD will “*subdue nations before him and disarm kings, to open doors before him so gates remain unclosed*” that is, God will allow Cyrus to enter regions, seize power and rule sovereignly over them.
- Starting in verse 2 God speaks to Cyrus, informing him that he will go before him to smooth his way: “*I will go before you and level mountains*”
- “*Bronze doors I [the LORD] will shatter and iron bars I will hack through.*” – a reference to the hundred bronze gates which were said to line the walls of Babylon
- God will also give Cyrus the great riches hidden away in Babylon’s storehouses: “*I will give you hidden treasures, riches stashed away in secret places*” (v. 3).
- All these blessings will be bestowed upon Cyrus to confirm to him that he is being used of God – “*so [Cyrus] may recognize that I am the LORD, the one who calls you by name, the God of Israel.*”

# God Uses Cyrus to Deliver His People (45:1-6)

- God has singled out Cyrus, summoning him by name and bestowing on him a title of honor, though Cyrus did not return the honor – *“I call you by name and give you a title of respect, even though you do not submit to [literally, “know”] me.”*
- God’s purpose in doing this is to bring deliverance to his chosen people – *“For the sake of my servant Jacob, Israel, my chosen one”*
- An important lesson to draw from these verses is that God can use people to accomplish his purposes even when they are unaware of him doing so.
- He can do this because he is the LORD, and there is no other – *“I am the LORD, I have no peer, there is no God but me”*

# God Uses Cyrus to Deliver His People (45:1-6)

- Cyrus typically credited his gods with his victories, so it is doubtful that he understood that the LORD was guiding him.
- But Cyrus did desire to appease as many gods as possible in order to curry favor with them.
- The ultimate purpose of bringing deliverance to Israel was to demonstrate God's glory across the world and show the nations that no god can compare with the LORD – *“I do this so people will recognize from east to west that there is no God but me”*

# The God Who Does All These Things (45:7)

*45:7 I am the one who forms light and creates darkness; the one who brings about peace and creates calamity. I am the LORD, who accomplishes all these things.*

# The God Who Does All These Things (45:7)

- The passage then concludes here as it started (cf. 44:24), proclaiming God as the creator.
- Among his creative powers is his ability to create “*peace*” – a reference to what Cyrus and Israel would experience) and “*calamity*” (the outcome for Babylon).
- Because this verse can also be translated “*I [the LORD]... create evil*” (KJV), it often raises the question of whether a morally pure God could create evil.

# God Has Sovereignly Ordained *All Things* – Whether They Be Good or Bad (45:7)

- *I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things.*
- God as Creator is the ***ultimate*** cause of:
  - Everything in nature from light to dark
  - Everything in history from good fortune to misfortune
- *When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD **caused** it? (Amos 3:6 )*



# Some Examples of God Ordaining Evil Acts

- God hardened the heart of Pharaoh: “*I [God] will harden Pharaoh's heart*” (Exodus 7:3)
- The Lord “*placed a lying spirit in the mouths*” of Ahab’s prophets (1 Kings 22:23).
- God raised up Assyria to punish Israel for their rebellion against Him and then turned around and punished Assyria for what they did to Israel! (Isaiah 10 – especially verses 5-6, 12)
- God allowed *Satan* to inflict harm on Job, but when Job describes what happened, he says: “*The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. May the name of the Lord be blessed!*” *In all this Job did not sin, nor did he charge God with moral impropriety*”. (Job 1:21-22)

# How Can a Holy God Ordain Acts of Evil?

- Illustration: The Selling of Joseph into Slavery – **One** Event – **Two** Intentions:
- *So when the Midianite merchants passed by, Joseph's brothers pulled him out of the cistern and sold him to the Ishmaelites for 20 pieces of silver. The Ishmaelites then took Joseph to Egypt. (Genesis 37:28)*
- Later Joseph described the event to his brothers in this way: “*As for you, **you meant to harm me, but God intended it for a good purpose, so he could preserve the lives of many people, as you can see this day.**” (Genesis 50:20)*

# How Can a Holy God Ordain Acts of Evil?

- Ultimately God intends that *all* events of history be for *His glory* and *the good of His people*:
- *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever! Amen.*  
(Romans 11:36)
- *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.* (Romans 8:28 NIV)

# How Can a Holy God Ordain Acts of Evil?

- The *Ultimate* Example: the worst sin ever committed in all of human history!
- The early Christian church prayed this to God:  
*For indeed both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, assembled together in this city against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, to do as much as your power and your plan had decided beforehand would happen.* (Acts 4:27-28)

# Next Time

I plan to look at a warning passage that talks about: **“The Folly of Those Who Question God’s Right to Do as He Pleases”** in **Isaiah 45:9-13**.

A portion of this section is alluded to by the Apostle Paul in **Romans 9:20**

# Class Discussion Time



# Class Discussion Time

- Do you have difficulty understanding how a Holy God could ordain an evil act?
- Did the passages and ideas that I presented today help you understand how this could be the case?
- If God was able to bless his people through a pagan ruler who didn't even believe in him, do you think it's possible that God could raise up an unbelieving man in **our day** that could do that?
- Our passage today exposes two groups who **claim** to have answers, but who are **opposed** to divine wisdom:
  - The “Empty Talkers” who give advice based on “omens” and oracles from their pagan gods
  - The “Wise Men” who give advice based on their observations
- Do these two groups exist in our day? If so, who would you see them as being?

# Class Discussion Time

- Does the ability that Isaiah had to predict the specific name of a future pagan ruler over a hundred years before he was even born increase your confidence that God's Word is what it claims to be?

