



# Highlights From the Book of Isaiah

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# The Folly of Those Who Question God's Right to Do as He Pleases (45:9-13)

- Isaiah's prophesy in this section is directed towards an expressed or anticipated response from Israel to the way the LORD has chosen to deliver them.
- The Israelites had been promised "*a new thing*" (43:19), but the specifics of how the LORD planned to deliver them was, in their minds, a let-down.
- For one thing, there were no miracles involved such as the ones that had occurred at the first Exodus.
- On top of that, "*Cyrus*", their promised deliverer was a heathen ruler!
- It was *one* thing to use foreign rulers to *chastise* the people, but quite another for such a person to be the means of their *deliverance*!

# The Folly of Those Who Question God's Right to Do as He Pleases (45:9-13)

- If the LORD had to work in such an unspectacular way, should he not have *at least* used one of *David's* descendants to liberate his people?
- At least in that case the deliverer would have been one from the chosen line and a member of the covenant community.
- Whatever form their complaint took, it is met in this section with a sharp rebuke from the LORD.
- The LORD makes it clear that it is not appropriate to argue with a potter (45:9) or a parent (45:10).
- The LORD's people must accept his sovereignty – and that means *not dictating* to him, but *acquiescing* when he works in the way that pleases him.



# The Folly of Those Who Question God's Right to Do as He Pleases (45:9-13)

*45:9 One who argues with his Creator is in grave danger, one who is like a mere shard among the other shards on the ground! The clay should not say to the potter, "What in the world are you doing? Your work lacks skill!"<sup>10</sup> Danger awaits one who says to his father, "What in the world are you fathering?" and to his mother, "What in the world are you bringing forth?"<sup>11</sup> This is what the LORD says, the Holy One of Israel, the one who formed him, concerning things to come: "How dare you question me about my children! How dare you tell me what to do with the work of my own hands!"<sup>12</sup> I made the earth; I created the people who live on it. It was me – my hands stretched out the sky. I give orders to all the heavenly lights.<sup>13</sup> It is me – I stir him up and commission him; I will make all his ways level. He will rebuild my city; he will send my exiled people home, but not for a price or a bribe," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies.*



**45:9** *One who argues with his Creator is in grave danger, one who is like a mere shard among the other shards on the ground! The clay should not say to the potter, “What in the world are you doing? Your work lacks skill!”*

- Isaiah emphasizes the seriousness of what is taking place here.
- To disagree with God’s ordering of one’s life or one’s world is not a matter of indifference.
- It is a refusal to let God be God, a reversal of roles, in which the creature tries to make the Creator a **servant** who must carry out the **creature’s** plan.
- Of course, not **every** question we might ask concerning God’s work or ways constitutes a **rebellion**.
- Nevertheless, a persistent refusal to allow God to be God, to establish the terms of our relationship with him, as Adam did in Genesis 3 for example, will result in a funeral – our own!

**45:9** *One who argues with his Creator is in grave danger, one who is like a mere shard among the other shards on the ground! The clay should not say to the potter, “What in the world are you doing? Your work lacks skill!”*

- A man who questions God in this way would be like a “*a mere shard among the other shards on the ground*” finding fault with the potter.
- “*a mere shard*” – not even a fully formed clay vessel, but the mere *remains* of a *broken* vessel.
- The “*potter*” in this instance, of course, is God.
- Carrying the illustration further – would there not be a strong impropriety about having a lump of clay, if it could speak, argue with the potter and say by way of criticism: “*What in the world are you doing?*”
- Or, to make the insolence of it even more apparent, what if a clay vessel (“*your work*”) were to criticize the potter who made it, charging him with incompetence (“*Your work lacks skill!*”).

**45:10** *Danger awaits one who says to his father, “What in the world are you fathering?” and to his mother, “What in the world are you bringing forth?”*

- The same thought is now expressed using a ***different*** illustration.
- But this example is even ***more*** revolting than the one given in the previous verse.
- Imagine if a son, who is not yet born, were to complain about his father’s decision to father him or his mother’s decision to bear him!
- Obviously the thought is an absurdity, but that is the very point of the passage: it is just as absurd for Israel to complain about what God will do for ***them*** in the future.



**45:10** *Danger awaits one who says to his father, “What in the world are you fathering?” and to his mother, “What in the world are you bringing forth?”*

- One who questions God’s promises in this way engages in the most bizarre kind of rationalism.
- The omnipotent and omniscient Creator in grace announces that He will bring to this earth an abundance of righteousness and salvation.
- The creature, however, declares that such a promise is not possible.
- In making such a judgment he has ruled God out of his thoughts and based his assertion merely upon the dictates of his own mind.
- He assumes that in his mind, the mind of mere man, he has the right to decide what is and is not allowable for God to do!

**45:11** *This is what the LORD says, **the Holy One of Israel, the one who formed him**, concerning things to come: “How dare you question me about my children! How dare you tell me what to do with the work of my own hands!*

- With this verse the Lord begins His reply to Israel’s inappropriate complaint.
- The language here is stately and majestic.
- The nation is reminded that the one speaking is “*the Holy One of Israel*” and “*the one who formed [Israel]*”.
- Hence Israel is in no position to complain about what the LORD is about to do.

**45:11** *This is what the LORD says, the Holy One of Israel, the one who formed him, concerning **things to come**: “How dare you question me about **my children**! How dare you tell me what to do with **the work of my own hands**!*

- The “*things to come*” are the events that the LORD plans to bring about when he rescues them by means of Cyrus.
- “*my children*” and “*the work of my own hands*” refer to the two illustrations of parent and potter given in the previous two verses.
- To question the Lord about his actions is as *impossible* as the one and as *improper* as the other.
- In essence, this is a *rebuke* from the LORD that says, “Know your place and mind your own business!”
- Nevertheless there is *comfort* to be found in this rebuke: Their proper place is to rest securely in the sovereign care of their God.



**45:12** *I made the **earth**; I created **the people who live on it**. It was me – my hands stretched out the **sky**. I give orders to **all the heavenly lights**.*

- To illustrate the utter absurdity of mere creatures questioning the things the LORD does, the people are reminded of the LORD's sovereign and absolute power as Creator of the universe: the "*earth*" and "*sky*".
- Reference to "*the people who live on [the earth]*" reminds Israel that the scope of the LORD's concern and authority is not limited to **just their** nation.
- "*I give orders*" reflects ironically on how "*you tell me what to do*" in the previous verse.
- Would they **really** presume to give orders to the one who effectively controls the myriad stars in the heavens ("*all the heavenly lights*")?
- As Creator, it is his actions and intention which have given unity and cohesion to all that exists and all that occurs in the universe.

**45:13** *It is me – I stir him up and commission him; I will make all his ways level. He will rebuild my city; he will send my exiled people home, but not for a price or a bribe,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies.*

- Moving from the general to the particular, the unqualified supremacy of the Creator extends into the realm of history, where there can be no doubt about his capacity to put into effect what he has determined to do.
- “*I stir him up*” – that is, Cyrus.
- “*stir... up*”, as from sleep, refers to the start of Cyrus’ career, which will come about through the LORD’s sovereign control.
- The LORD controls not *just* the ***broad sweep*** of history, but the ***detailed timing*** of ***every*** event in history.

**45:13** *It is me—I stir him up and commission him; I will **make all his ways level**. He will rebuild **my city**; he will send **my exiled people home, but not for a price or a bribe**,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies.*

- The LORD will “*make all [Cyrus’] ways level*”
- Compare this with the description given of the preparations that are to be made for the arrival of a king in 40:4 – “*Every valley must be elevated, and every mountain and hill leveled. The rough terrain will become a level plain, the rugged landscape a wide valley.*”
- The LORD does this so that Cyrus will be able to :
  - Rebuild “*my city*” (Jerusalem)
  - Liberate “*my exiled people*” (Israel)
- “*but not for a price or a bribe*” shows that Cyrus will **not** be doing these things for **financial gain**.
- Instead he will be motivated by the LORD’s Sovereign control.



**45:13** *It is me—I stir him up and commission him; I will make all his ways level. He will rebuild my city; he will send my exiled people home, but not for a price or a bribe,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies.*

- And so we read in Ezra 1:1-3:

- *In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia... the Lord **motivated** King Cyrus of Persia to issue a proclamation throughout his kingdom and also to put it in writing. It read:*

- *“This is what King Cyrus of Persia says:*

- *The Lord God of heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth. He has appointed me to build a temple for him in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Anyone of his people among you (may his God be with him!) may go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and may build the temple of the Lord God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem.”*

# Paul's Use of the "Pot and the Potter" Illustration in Romans 9:20-21

An illustration first used by Isaiah in Isaiah 45:9 (and 29:16)

# Paul's Use of the "Pot and the Potter"

## Illustration in Romans 9:20-21

- This is the *second* time we have looked at Paul's illustration of the pot and the potter in **Romans 9:20** – an illustration *also* found in the book of Isaiah.
- The *first* time we saw Isaiah use this illustration was in **Isaiah 29:16** – a passage where Isaiah addresses the impropriety of people saying of the LORD, their creator, that "*He doesn't understand*" that they need to seek protection from *Egypt* rather than God, against the threat posed by Assyria.
- Now in **Isaiah 45:9**, as we have just seen, Isaiah uses this *same* illustration – *this* time to show the impropriety of Israel questioning their creator's use of a pagan ruler to rescue them from their Babylonian exile.



Isaiah 45:9 *One who argues with his creator is in grave danger, one who is like a mere shard among the other shards on the ground! The clay should not say to the potter, "What in the world are you doing? Your work lacks skill!" (NET)*

Isaiah 29:16 *Your thinking is perverse! Should the potter be regarded as clay? Should the thing made say about its maker, "He didn't make me"? Or should the pottery say about the potter, "He doesn't understand"? (NET)*

Romans 9:18 *God has mercy on whom he chooses to have mercy, and he hardens whom he chooses to harden. <sup>19</sup> You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who has ever resisted his will?" <sup>20</sup> But who indeed are you – a mere human being – to talk back to God? *Does what is molded say to the molder, "Why have you made me like this?"* <sup>21</sup> Has the potter no right to make from the same lump of clay one vessel for special use and another for ordinary use? (NET)*

# Paul's Use of the "Pot and the Potter"

## Illustration in Romans 9:20-21

- The Apostle Paul's use of this illustration occurs in a section of Romans where he is discussing God's *rejection* of Israel, and God's *calling* of the Gentiles to salvation in large numbers. (9:6-29)
- In this section, the Apostle Paul establishes the *absolute right* of God to do with His fallen creatures *whatever* He pleases.
- Furthermore, Paul demonstrates from the Old Testament that God's promise to Abraham *never* meant that He would save all of Abraham's *physical* descendants.

# Paul's Use of the "Pot and the Potter"

## Illustration in Romans 9:20-21

- What God's promise to Abraham meant was that God would give Abraham a *spiritual* seed.
- He would create a spiritual nation out of *some*, but *not all*, of Abraham's natural descendants
- Paul shows that from the *outset* it had been up to *God* as to *how many* and *which* of Abraham's physical descendants would be included in the promise and be saved.

# Paul's Use of the "Pot and the Potter" Illustration in Romans 9:20-21

- Towards the *end* of chapter 9, in verses 14-24 Paul responds to *two* objections that he anticipates his argument may raise in the minds of his readers:
  - **Objection #1** – Does God's act of *election* - His choosing some sinners to be saved by grace but not others -- make God *unjust*? (9:14-18)
  - **Objection #2** – Does God's sovereign control over men render them unaccountable? (9:19-24)
- It is in Paul's answer to this *second* objection that he uses the pot and potter illustration.



# Paul's Response to Objection #2 (Romans 9:19-24)

Those who deny the sovereignty of God in all things will often say that if God has sovereign control over a man's **will**, then it would be **unfair** for him to hold that man **accountable** for his sins.

**9:19**

*You will say to me*

*then [Paul, in light of what you are saying],*

*“Why does he [God] still find fault?*

*For who has ever resisted his will?”*

If you are one who has raised this objection, listen carefully to the **warning** given by Paul in verses 20-23, in the form of **four** questions.

# Paul's Response to Objection #2 (Romans 9:19-24)

[Question #1]

**9:20** *But who indeed are you – a mere human being –  
to talk back to God?*

*Does what is molded [i.e. “the pot”]  
say to the molder [i.e. “the potter”],  
“Why have you made me like this?”*

In other words, Paul is saying, “What **audacity** for a sinful creature to talk like this to Almighty God, the **Creator!**”

# Paul's Response to Objection #2 (Romans 9:19-24)

[Question #2]

<b>9:21</b>	<i>Has the potter [God is the potter] no right to make from the same lump of clay [fallen humanity is the clay] one vessel for special use [His elect] and another for ordinary use [the non-elect] ?</i>
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# Paul's Response to Objection #2 (Romans 9:19-24)

[Question #3]

<b>9:22</b>	<i>But what if God, willing to demonstrate his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the objects of wrath [the non-elect] prepared for destruction?</i>
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# Paul's Response to Objection #2 (Romans 9:19-24)

[Question #4]

<b>9:23</b>	<i>And what if he [God] is willing to make known the wealth of his glory on the objects of mercy [the elect] that he has prepared beforehand for glory—</i>
<b>9:24</b>	<i>even us, whom he has called, [drawn to Christ] not only from the Jews [Abraham's <b>physical</b> descendants] but also from the Gentiles?</i>

# Next Time

I plan to look at a glorious passage that talks about: “**The Future Vindication of God on the World Stage**” in **Isaiah 45:14-25**.

**Verse 23** of this section is cited by the Apostle Paul in **Romans 14:11** where he says “*every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.*”

# Class Discussion Time



# Class Discussion Time

- In his book “*God in the Dock*” C.S Lewis made the following observation about modern man (even in his day):
  - *“The ancient man approached God (or even the gods) as the accused person approaches his judge. For the modern man the roles are reversed. He is the judge: God is in the dock. [Modern man] is quite a kindly judge: if God should have a reasonable defense for being the god who permits war, poverty and disease, he is ready to listen to it.”*
- Can you see how today’s text (both in Isaiah and Romans) condemns the audacity of this outlook of modern man?
- Have you ever heard someone (either an unbeliever or perhaps a Christian say in response to some biblical doctrine like the sovereignty of God in salvation) “I couldn’t worship a God like that”?
- What do you think the Apostle Paul would have said to someone who said that?



# Class Discussion Time

- Why do you think that the Apostle Paul – when addressing the objection that it would be unjust for a totally sovereign God to hold men accountable – never tries to engage the philosophical difficulty that men claim exists there, but instead rebukes the ***audacity*** of one who would even ***ask*** such a question?
- Is there something for us to learn from the Apostle Paul's response when ***we*** encounter such objections?