

Isaiah 44:24 – 45:25

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The previous section of Isaiah spoke of forgiveness of sins. Isaiah wrote of **the double problem**: the bondage of the nation in Babylon and the rift with the Lord because of their sin. There would be a return from both captivities; they would return home to their land and to their Lord. The result had been announced, but Who would bring this about and how? Isaiah speaks of the lesser problem first. The agent of deliverance from Babylon is Cyrus; later, the One who will deal wisely is Christ (52:13). He will justify many, and even bear their iniquities (53:11). He will bring Jacob back to the Lord (49:5,6), but first Cyrus will set the Lord's exiles free (45:13). One redemption is a foretaste of the other.

44:24 – 45:8 This passage has two lines of “this is what the Lord says” (44:24 & 45:1). The words “made all things” (44:24) and “do all these things” (45:7) show this is a unit. Note “who” ten times as the Lord describes himself in personal terms.

44:24 The emphasis on ‘Redeemer’ continues. God redeems by acting for his people. Before he says what he will do, he reminds them that they are his at his will. When God chooses (or elects), it was his initiative and right to do so, and it is an act on which he follows through to implementation. It is not his compliance with our will. No one in the womb makes the decision to be born. If God started them, he will not later be passive concerning them and let them disappear the way Babylon would end (Isaiah 13,14). He who made the heavens deliberately made Israel intentionally. He is about to specify details of their redemption from their enemies. This intervention to rescue is likened to the sovereign activity of stretching out the heavens. God is equally capable of handling both projects. He can do this by himself with “no god beside him” (Deuteronomy 32:39). One way God retains his glory is by making clear when he acts alone. The resurrection of Christ was not an event in which we helped God (Romans 10:7). We gave God no assistance in the original creation, and we are no help in the new one. God still acts alone in the new creation, again saying, “Let there be light” (2 Corinthians 4:6) in the language of causation.

44:25,26. God speaks. Man tries to speak in a wisdom of his own. The wise men of every society (of talk radio and television too) speak with great authority from the shallow reservoir of their own wisdom. Their predictions are self-serving, often designed to satisfy what their hearers wish to hear (2 Timothy 4:3,4). The true glory of telling and fulfilling is a glory God reserves for himself. To protect his glory, he makes sure the words of false prophets prove to be false. He hates the vaunted wisdom of those who set their wisdom against his, so he makes their wisdom fail (29:14) while his word remains forever. The words of his servants are words he gave his servants. No one can believe in the real God and not believe in his Word spoken in the past, and remaining among us in writing. Since the human mind cannot penetrate the mind of God, we should humbly accept all he tells us.

44:26-28 Finally Cyrus is named. He was first mentioned in 41:2. God tells what he will say. Cyrus will say what God says he is going to say. He will do what God said he would do before Cyrus' father came to life or named his little son Cyrus, just as God said he would. Jerusalem and Judah will rise again, because God said so (v.26). Later in v.28 King Cyrus would say so too (Ezra 1:1-4; 6:3-5). Difficulties hinder, but just as Israel came through the Red Sea on dry land, God will again tell any sea in Israel's way to be dry. The Lord will remove every barrier from their way. Cyrus is God's shepherd, who like a shepherd taking a flock on a journey, will lead Israel back to their land. (Similarly, 1 Kings 13:2 names Josiah years before his time; he too did what God said he would do in 2 Kings 23:16). When the Word of the Lord was read in dark times in Babylon, the people of the world thought Babylon would last and that Jerusalem would never be the home of the Jews again. Those Jews reading the scroll of Isaiah together were the ones who knew that Babylon was finished and Israel would be saved.

45:1-6 The same Hebrew word is used three times to indicate purpose: so that Cyrus may know (v.3), so that something will happen for Israel (v.4), and so that the world may know (v.6). All God does is purposeful (Ephesians 3:11).

45:1 “This is what the Lord says” to Cyrus. What the Lord says is found in vv.2-6. Imagine a word from God to a king written years before his birth? Before the actual words, God refers to him as his anointed. That is the word “Messiah” in Hebrew and “Christ” in Greek, but here it is simply a word to indicate that Cyrus will be God’s tool to accomplish God’s purpose. It is God who took him by the hand to place him on the stage of history with a work to do for God. As a part of that work, Cyrus will be a victorious warrior. It was God who will give him all his victories, and so in time God placed him where he would have the power to say that the Jews could go home.

45:2-4 It is God who would make Cyrus’ path easy (v.2) removing obstacles to his victories. No one observing those events could ever know that, unless they read God’s Word which revealed this. The Lord would include treasures or wealth for him. Darkness means “hidden away”. Cyrus could know by God’s Word that it was God behind all this. He was summoned; this shows that without Cyrus’ intention or knowledge, God was sovereignly using him for his purpose. Yet all this upheaval of nations was God caring for his chosen people. The glory that came to Cyrus was designed for the good of Israel. But if Israel does not take in this word of the prophet, they will not understand God’s hand in history. Later Cyrus would use the Lord’s Name, but at the beginning of his career he had no idea God had set him up as King.

45:5,6 Open to Cyrus was the prospect of recognizing the will of the Lord in his rise to power. He never did worship the one true God. He could have announced that all other gods are false, and thereby the people of the world would know that the idols are false, for no idol could declare Cyrus’ emergence as ruler over all people. Yet the Lord did use Cyrus to preserve Israel and so in that way he made the Lord known. The Lord Jesus, the Son of David (2 Timothy 2:8), came through Israel. This is related to Cyrus’ position of power and decision that the Jews could go home.

45:7 God creates light and darkness, which can mean prosperity and trouble. God alone orders the experiences of mankind. He really is God. God’s sovereignty is not some conclusion we make about him, but an aspect of his deity he repeatedly claims for himself.

45:8 This prayer of expectation must be read in light of the context. The matter of Cyrus is a reason for thanksgiving because God in the heavens has acted righteously. Then let the earth open her mouth in appropriate response to receive. In this way, righteousness will grow in this earth (and not just sin!), coming from the righteousness of God in heaven. God’s righteousness included bringing Cyrus and all his terror to the nations he subdued. Or it is better to say that God subdued nations before Cyrus (v.1). The Lord answers the prayer saying he has created the salvation the earth needs. While all power and right is God’s, here he encourages the supplication of his people where we may pray about his deeds on earth. This shows that the sovereignty of God does not promote passivity in men. The prayer God commands us to pray pleads, “Your will be done” – said by men who then work to do his will (Matthew 6:10).

45:9-11 The news of Cyrus as the Gentile liberator of Israel is jarring news. The Jews wanted to be a sovereign nation again. Isaiah’s message implies that they will live under Gentile domination. Thus God’s plan to use Cyrus is not fully welcome. God’s people feel they could improve on God’s plan, a plan that did not appear wise in their eyes. These verses address specifically the issue of God’s sovereignty. Clay cannot complain to the potter about what he is doing, and Israel is the clay. The potter does what he wants. They needed to learn that. Children should not complain to their parents (v.10). Israel would be complaining over “things to come” – things related to Cyrus and his victories. Israel would prefer that all the Gentile nations just fall at their feet, and they could just go home and be left alone. This is a sinful challenge to the sovereign right of God to act as God. Sin in us always reacts against the rights of God and claims rights we do not have. Every challenge against divine sovereignty is from a lust for his throne.

We see more clearly now. God did not return Israel to its former national state. His people became those who learned to live in the world under Gentile powers, preparing the way for how the church now exists all over the world. His kingdom is beyond the boundaries of Israel; it is now from the rising of the sun to the place it

goes down (v.6). God knows what he is doing and will not yield his right to act as the God he is (Romans 11:33-36).

45:12,13 These verses may be understood better if we imagine someone saying to the Lord, “Who do you think you are, and where did you get the right to do this?” His reply is that if he is the Creator of the hosts above (and even the Creator of those who complain!), he has full rights over his own work. God then simply repeats what he is going to do. He says, “I will ...” and no one can do anything about it. It is sad that Israel was slow to accept his explanation that God was raising up Cyrus for the sake of Israel (v.4). Cyrus not only set the exiles free, he would do it without the motive of some gain for himself (v.13) so said the Lord Almighty who controlled Cyrus’s actions, words and motivation concerning Israel.

45:14-25 This section combines revelation about Israel and the nations. The nations come to Israel in submission, recognizing that Israel’s God is true and that the other gods are false. The Lord is with Israel, therefore these believing Gentiles, in order to come to God, must come to the people of God and join them (v.14,20,22,23). This is related to the new kind of existence for Israel after the Babylonian Captivity. God was keeping his promise to Abraham that all peoples would be blessed through him. In the New Testament the church is a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9), yet the church is not a nation with boundaries, nor a nation of one language or location. This is what was about to happen in the return from Babylon; the people of God would lose being an independent nation. The break with the past was in place; hereafter they would live under Gentile domination. They would still be his covenant people but as a distinct political entity that would disappear. They would lack a nationally recognized son of David to sit on a throne in Jerusalem, even though the genealogy would be consciously kept (Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-37). Israel would be more and more a nation located throughout the world, composed of all who turn to the Lord to be saved – an invitation extended to the ends of the earth (45:22). (See Galatians 3:26-29; in Romans 11:11-32 Gentile branches are grafted into Israel). It would be a kingdom of God on earth existing in all other kingdoms. Two parallel paragraphs begin with “This is what the Lord says” and end with the salvation of Israel. In both paragraphs, Gentiles join in with Israel in confessing one God, the God of Israel.

45:14 These Gentiles coming to the Lord come to Israel. They are so committed to their new allegiance that they bring their wealth. They bind themselves and follow Israelites. They have learned and they confess (note vv.23,24) the God of Israel is the only God. It is as if they say, “Your God is the only one and we know it; please let us in too.” Their conversion is sincere, fervent and unforced by Israel. God subdued nations under Israel, so that they “assemble as the people of the God of Abraham” (Psalm 47:3,9).

45:15-17 In one sense God had hidden himself (v.15), because his plan to include Gentiles was not transparent to his own people; it was a surprise to them. Two groups are addressed here: **1)** those who continue to worship idols, even though many Gentiles are leaving them and “coming over” to Israel (v.14). **2)** The other is Israel saved with an everlasting salvation. The two groups end up being either ashamed or saved. But there are only two groups – those with idols, or those now called Israel. Israel here cannot refer to a group that excludes the Gentiles who have come to them. The salvation is said to be everlasting; it looks into the future and says that whosoever believes in the Lord shall never be put to shame (28:16; Romans 10:13). All those “saved by the Lord” shall certainly be saved without exception, because this salvation falls on Christ who is able to fulfill it (John 6:39).

45:18 In Isaiah 38-55 God’s role as Creator is repeatedly connected with his ongoing work of salvation. In divine initiative he is still at work on his projects. God cannot conceive of a world he made for his glory which does not end up knowing him. His involvement in his creation as Redeemer fits his claim of it as his possession. (Compare Psalm 24:1 and Psalm 96.)

45:19 God has spoken plainly, reliably and truthfully. No promise of his deceives. His word once given is in the open. Today no book is more widespread and spreading in all the earth than the Bible. No book is more ignored and resisted than the written word of God. The events of the gospel did not happen “in a corner” (Acts 26:26). The message is in print all over the world. Some day all men will learn, with some too late, that there is a God and only one, and then they shall have to bow when they wish they did not have to do so.

45:20 The fugitives are those who left their former religions and came as fugitives in a journey to Israel to be rescued. In coming, they leave behind idols that cannot save. It is God who says, ‘Gather’, ‘come’, ‘assemble’. This assembling is to the Lord who calls them to come to him and also to assemble with his people. Worship of the God of Israel cannot be individualistic. Those who reject public worship are violating the desire of God.

45:21 The familiar court challenge is “Who foretold this?” The events in this context being foretold are the emergence of Cyrus whose decisions relate to a string of events which follow, such as Israel back in their land with more and more from outside coming to join them (14:1). It is a major surprise that the people of God who so often worshipped the false gods of their neighbors, now find their neighbors coming to believe in the true God. The flood of Gentiles to the God of Israel came after the coming of Christ, but who foretold all this? It was the Lord, the Savior, not an idol.

45:22 In Isaiah, the God of Israel issues his invitation to the people of the world to turn to him. If they do, they will be saved; they need only recognize the true God and bow before him in repentance and faith. This does not mean that we are justified as the result of a life of repentance (the Christian life really is a life of repentance), for that would be a “works” salvation. It does mean that there is no true turning to the Lord unless there is a turning from the other gods. In the Bible of the Jews, God invites Gentiles to himself and to them. When what their God predicted happened before their eyes in their synagogue, many had fits of jealousy and rejected their God as a result (Acts 13:42-52). By doing so, they joined the other group, the Gentile idol worshippers!

45:23 All others will come to bow and confess who the real Lord God is, and acknowledge that the idols were all false. God swears they will do so; he made an oath to Abraham concerning all nations on earth (Genesis 22:15-18; Hebrews 6:13-15). There is only one people of God who worship one Lord alone and confess the same faith (Ephesians 4:1-6).

The Apostle Paul quotes this text from Isaiah: *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father* (Philippians 2:9-11). In Isaiah it was the Lord (Yahweh) saying all would bow before him. That Paul says they will bow before Jesus, this shows that he believed Jesus to be Yahweh, the Lord God of Israel. He was an apostle writing under the Holy Spirit, and what he affirmed of Christ in this way is true. The New Testament expresses that Jesus is **Lord** more than it says he is God. No higher proof can be found of the deity of Christ than that the Bible uses of the divine Name applied to Christ.

45:24 What will they say when they confess (v.23)? They will say in the Lord *alone* (i.e., the idols are excluded) are righteousness and strength. They look to the Lord and not to their righteousness or strength (40:28-31). But in the Lord they receive both. Strength is clearly a provision in their experience. In 53:11, Christ, the Righteous One, justifies many by providing for them a righteousness they did not have, until he gave them his. (See also 24:16.) No man can confess Christ and then depend on his own righteousness. True believers say, “In the Lord alone are righteousness and strength.”

45:24,25 The section ends with two sets of people. Some left idols and turned to the God of Israel. The others reject him and even raged against him. They will appear before him for judgment (Revelation 20:11-15; John 5:22,23). One group will be put to shame; the other will be identified as descendants of Israel. This further evidence of the expansion of the nation when Gentiles come in (54:3; 55:4,5). In the Lord they will be found righteous. To be in Christ is to receive the righteousness that comes from God (Philippians 3:7-9) and to have joy in the Lord.