

ISAIAH

A Logion Press Commentary

Stanley M. Horton

Foreword By **Roger D. Cotton**


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C. A Redeemed Remnant Gathered 43:1–45:25

1. Israel’s Loving Savior 43:1–7

¹But now, this is what the LORD says—he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

In spite of Israel’s lack of response to God’s judgment, God has not changed His plan and purpose for His people. He created them. He formed the nation. He tells them to stop being afraid, for He has redeemed them. They should never give up their faith in him (cf. 43:5; 44:2; 54:4).

God gave them the name “Israel.”¹ He claims them as His own just as He did when He brought them out of Egypt and brought them to himself (Exod. 19:4). As Moses wrote, He loved them because He loved them (Deut. 7:7–9; cf. 1 John 4:8).

²When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

Because of God’s judgment Israel would pass through waters, rivers, fire, and flames; but God would always be with them.² They could always put their complete trust in Him, and they

¹See Gen. 32:22–32; 35:10; the name means “he struggles with God” or “God strives” or “God rules.”

²“You” is singular. God promises to be with them individually and personally. He is Immanuel, the “with-us God.”

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would never be annihilated.

³For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead.

God is who He is: the LORD, *Yahweh*, the eternal, faithful, covenant-keeping God; He is Israel's God, the Holy One of Israel who revealed himself to Isaiah (chap. 6), Israel's Savior.

Because He is who He is, He could give a whole country, Egypt, as ransom. That is, He delivered the people of Israel from bondage at the cost of plagues on Egypt (Exod. 10:7) and the destruction of their army (Exod. 14:28,30–31; 15:1,3–10). Cush (the present Sudan) and Seba (northern Ethiopia including Meroe) were affected as well.

⁴Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give men in exchange for you, and people in exchange for your life.

Because Israel is valuable to God, honored by Him, and because He loves them, He will give other people instead of them. The repetition of this idea in different words shows emphasis. His purpose is to deliver Israel. God loved the world, but when the world turned away, He chose Israel to prepare the way for a Redeemer. But other nations would have to pay the cost of God's choice of Israel. This, however, put a great responsibility on them. Similarly, God's choice of the Church puts a great responsibility on believers. Because of the assurance of His love, however, this responsibility is not burdensome (cf. Matt. 11:28–30).

⁵Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. ⁶I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth—

Now God points them ahead to a time when Israel would be scattered in all directions. At the same time, He tells them to stop being afraid, for He is with them. He will bring their

descendants who are alive at the end of the age in a new exodus from all directions, even “from the ends of the earth.” (This does not refer to the return from Babylon in 538–536 B.C., for they came only from the east.)

⁷everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”

The primary reference here is back to 43:1, where God is talking about Israel. They are the ones called by His name, created for His glory, formed by His mighty hand—the nation He made. He will not give up on them.

2. ISRAEL’S WITNESS AS GOD’S SERVANT 43:8–13

⁸Lead out those who have eyes but are blind, who have ears but are deaf.

In another court scene, strangely enough the blind and deaf (see 42:18–20) are brought out as witnesses. But they are willfully blind and deaf, for they have eyes and ears. They are not acceptable witnesses in a court.

⁹All the nations gather together and the peoples assemble. Which of them foretold this and proclaimed to us the former things? Let them bring in their witnesses to prove they were right, so that others may hear and say, “It is true.”

With all the nations assembled, they are challenged to produce from among themselves someone (some god or the prophet of some god) who can tell the future and show “former things.” That is, let them show that they have prophesied and produced events like the Exodus from Egypt, the deliverance from Sennacherib, and other former things God has done in the history of Israel. They must do this to be justified, to have the verdict in their favor. Otherwise, let them hear what God has done and admit it is the truth.

¹⁰“You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand

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that I am he. Before me no god was formed,
nor will there be one after me.

God is speaking here to the godly remnant in Israel, especially those rescued from Sennacherib. They are His witnesses, His chosen servants. God has done great things in Israel so they might know, believe, and trust in Him and know that He alone is God (see 37:16).

Pagans believed that the gods they worshiped had been preceded by other gods. Pagans also believed in gods that had newly arisen or been born. But the one true God declares there was “no god . . . formed,” or created, before Him and none would come after Him. He is the eternal God who always was, is, and will be (Exod. 3:14; Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8; Rev. 1:8, etc.).

**11I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me
there is no savior.**

By saying “I am the LORD [*Yahweh*],” God is reminding them of the revelation of himself during the time of the Exodus (Exod. 3:12,14–15; 6:7; 7:17; 8:22; 15:1–2). He saved them then; He will save them now—because He is the Savior and there is no other.

**12I have revealed and saved and proclaimed—I,
and not some foreign god among you. You are
my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “that I am
God.**

God told Moses what He was going to do. He saved Israel and made himself heard among the Israelites at Mount Sinai. When the Israelites came to Sinai they had no idols among them.

The salvation and the voice of the LORD came only from Him, and, therefore, because Israel experienced this, the LORD says they are witnesses of who He is: God (*‘el*). The Hebrew word *‘el* is the general word for God, which emphasizes that He alone is God. Even though Israel failed, God did not fail. They are witnesses to His faithfulness.

**13Yes, and from ancient days I am he. No one
can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who
can reverse it?”**

The Hebrew *miyom ‘ani hu’*, “From day, I am He,” may mean “Since time began, I am the one true God,” or it may mean “Since I am the one true God today, none can rescue out of my hand.” God will do His work, and no one can hinder or “reverse it.”

3. A NEW EXODUS FROM BABYLON 43:14–21

¹⁴This is what the LORD says—your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: “For your sake I will send to Babylon and bring down as fugitives all the Babylonians, in the ships in which they took pride.

Now the LORD promises a new exodus, this time from Babylon. God who is doing this is the “Holy One of Israel” and is doing it for Israel’s sake. Ships of the “Babylonians” (Heb. *kasdim*, “Chaldeans”) bringing treasures on the Euphrates River caused shouts of joy when they arrived. But God will “bring down” the Chaldeans, and their ships will be used by fugitives seeking to escape.³

¹⁵I am the LORD, your Holy One, Israel’s Creator, your King.”

The judgment God brings on Babylon is related to what God will do for Israel. Again Isaiah emphasizes that He is Israel’s “Holy One,” “Creator,” and “King.”

¹⁶This is what the LORD says—he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters,

God provides “a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters.” He did that at the Exodus when He made a way through the Red (Reed) Sea. He is that kind of God.

¹⁷who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick:

³Some suggest this verse refers to Sennacherib’s driving out Merodach-Baladan in 700 B.C. Cf. W. A. Wordsworth, *En Roeh: The Prophecies of Isaiah the Seer* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1939), 315.

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The victory over Pharaoh's crack chariot troops at the Red Sea is described dramatically (see Exod. 14:1–31). It was complete.

¹⁸Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.

Nevertheless, the time comes when it is necessary to stop remembering and giving attention to the things of the past. God wants us to look ahead to new miracles that will overshadow the old. His loving purpose shows He is a good God.

¹⁹See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.

God has a new deliverance for His people. It is ready to take place. They will know and experience it. God will make a road “in the desert” and rivers “in the wasteland” (wilderness). There was a return in Isaiah's day when Sennacherib destroyed Babylon in 689 B.C.⁴

His son Esarhaddon recorded the fact that captive people escaped at that time, for the Assyrians were concerned only with the Babylonians themselves.⁵ However, Isaiah may be looking here to the return from the Babylonian exile that he prophesied in 39:6. There may be a further fulfillment at the end of the age.

²⁰The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, ²¹the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.

“Wild animals,” especially those living in desert areas, will honor God because of the rivers in the desert that God gives for the benefit of His returning people. He formed Israel for himself and He purposes for them to proclaim His praise. We too are brought to the Lord so that we may praise Him and call on others to praise Him.

⁴Oswald T. Allis, “Book of Isaiah,” in *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), 1:857.

⁵Benjamin R. Downer, “The Added Years of Hezekiah's Life,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 80, no. 319 (July 1923): 386; Daniel David Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1926–27), 2:152.

4. ISRAEL'S UNFAITHFULNESS 43:22–28

22“Yet you have not called upon me, O Jacob,
you have not wearied yourselves for me, O
Israel.

God places the emphasis upon himself when He declares, “Not Me, you have called” (literal translation). These are the people of Isaiah’s day whom God spoke of as “trampling my courts” (1:12). They were making many prayers (1:15). But they could not disguise their sin. They were not really seeking God. They were actually tired of Him; that is, they were tired of the Holy God that He is.

23You have not brought me sheep for burnt offerings, nor honored me with your sacrifices. I have not burdened you with grain offerings nor wearied you with demands for incense.

They brought their “burnt offerings” and “sacrifices” but they were not really offering them to God. They were going through forms without faith in God and without honoring Him for who He is. They were multiplying sacrifices and incense offerings, but God had not asked for that (1:13).

24You have not bought any fragrant calamus for me, or lavished on me the fat of your sacrifices. But you have burdened me with your sins and wearied me with your offenses.

Indeed, it was not the sweet calamus (or the oil from it) nor the fat of sacrifices that they “lavished” on God; instead they loaded Him down with their sins. The NIV translates the Hebrew verb as “lavished” here (but as “sated” in Lam. 3:15). And here it has a touch of irony. They neglected God, were stingy in their worship, and the only thing they “lavished” on God were sins that were bad enough to make one vomit (cf. 1:13). “Burdened me” (Heb. *he’evadtani*) can also mean “compelled me.” That is, their sins compelled Him to do a work of judgment. Also their “offenses” (their guilt with its consequences) “wearied” Him. Repeated, unconfessed sins made judgment necessary.

25“I, even I, am he who blots out your trans-

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gressions, for my own sake, and remembers
your sins no more.

At the same time, it is God alone who can blot out the sin resulting from willful rebellion—not because it is deserved, but for His own sake. When this is done, forgiveness is complete: The record is wiped clean. God will never remember their sins anymore. This is pure grace—flowing freely from God’s inexhaustible mercy—which God is here offering to His people.

²⁶Review the past for me, let us argue the matter together; state the case for your innocence.

Yet before there is divine forgiveness, before the record is cleansed, the sinner must go to trial. There must be confession, reminding God of the sins. It is very easy for us to block out things we do not want to remember, but we must not do that if we want God’s forgiveness.

To “argue the matter together” means recognizing what the law requires and admitting that innocence cannot be proved. Only when the sinner admits his sin can there be justification that forgives and wipes the record clean.

²⁷Your first father sinned; your spokesmen rebelled against me.

The “first father” is probably Adam. Some take it to be Abraham or Jacob. In any case, the first father also implies the first sin. And in Isaiah’s own day, Israel’s “spokesmen,” that is, their priests (and probably their prophets), as intermediaries or mediators, had also rebelled against God.

²⁸So I will disgrace the dignitaries of your temple, and I will consign Jacob to destruction and Israel to scorn.

Because of this rebellion God has disgraced the officers of the holy place (cf. 1 Chron. 24:5). He has given Jacob “to destruction” (Heb. *lacherem*, “to the ban”)⁶ as something God abhors. This also meant that he has given Israel over to be scorned and

⁶This was done to Jericho because its inhabitants were evil: All except Rahab totally rejected God even though they knew what He had done in delivering Israel and giving it victories (Josh. 6:17; see also Josh. 2:10).

reviled by the rest of the world (cf. Deut. 28:37). Their hearts were not open to His love.

5. GOD'S SPIRIT TO BE OUTPOURED 44:1-5

¹But now listen, O Jacob, my servant, Israel, whom I have chosen.

The prophesied destruction will not be total, however, and the scorn and revilings will not last forever. Nor will the sins of his people destroy God's purpose. God still calls the people of Jacob "my servant, Israel," His chosen, and wants them to listen.

²This is what the Lord says—he who made you, who formed you in the womb, and who will help you: Do not be afraid, O Jacob, my servant, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.

God was their Maker, the One who formed them from their birth as a nation. He will keep on helping them. Again He tells them they must stop being afraid. Cowardly fear and faith do not mix (cf. 2 Tim. 1:7).

God calls Israel "Jeshurun," His "dear upright (righteous) one," because that is what He wants them to be (Deut. 32:15; 33:26-29). The repetition of "servant" and "chosen" from verse 1 indicates that God has not and will not change His mind about them (cf. Rom. 11:29). He will have a godly remnant from among them. God will not allow Israel's failure to cause Him to fail.

³For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.

God will bring about a change by pouring out His Spirit, becoming like water on a wasteland. The downpour will be so great that it will be like streams flooding dry ground. It will bring wonderful blessings from God. This outpouring, however, is in the future. It is not to be upon the people of Isaiah's day, but upon their descendants (cf. 32:15; 59:21; Jer. 31:33-34; Ezek. 36:26-27; 37:14; 39:29; Joel 2:25-29; Zech. 12:10 to 13:1).

The initial outpouring was on the Day of Pentecost (Acts

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2:4,17-18). But there will be further fulfillment for Israel in the millennial restoration.

4They will spring up like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by flowing streams.

The restoration will bring a fresh blessing. No longer will they continue to be in spiritually dry land.

5One will say, 'I belong to the LORD'; another will call himself by the name of Jacob; still another will write on his hand, 'The LORD's,' and will take the name Israel.

The work of the Spirit will cause every individual to testify, declaring their relationship to the LORD both in writing and in speaking. They will also take the "name" (character and nature) of Israel. That is, Jews who were not living for God will be transformed and become real Israelites, honoring God and enjoying the rights and privileges He gives them.

6. THE FOOLISHNESS OF IDOLATRY 44:6-20

6"This is what the LORD says—Israel's King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God.

In another court scene, indicated by the questions and the call for witnesses in the verses that follow, the LORD now reassures Israel that He is indeed their King and Redeemer, the Almighty LORD of Hosts, having the armies of heaven at His disposal. By calling himself "the first and . . . the last," He is emphasizing that He alone is God. Whenever Israel forgot that and turned to other gods or other things, they blocked the flow of God's promise.

Again Isaiah emphasizes the contrast between the pagan concept of many gods and the existence of Israel's God: There was no god before Him, none will come after Him. He always was and always will be. Unlike the idols, He was not formed by anyone; He is not dependent on anyone. He is supreme. The New Testament applies this to Jesus (Rev. 1:17; 22:13): He is God manifest in the flesh (John 1:1,14).

7Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and lay out before me what has

happened since I established my ancient people, and what is yet to come—yes, let him foretell what will come.

God is the one who has directed the history of His eternal people (cf. 66:22; Jer. 31:35–37). He proclaimed it. He established it. He knows what is coming in the future as well. The challenge is to the pagans. Let them declare the future if their so-called gods are able to reveal it. Israel's God alone is omniscient. He can fulfill His promises.

⁸Do not tremble, do not be afraid. Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago? You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock; I know not one."

God again reassures Israel, telling them to stop trembling in terror, to stop being afraid, that is, of their enemies (see 35:3–4; 41:10–13; 43:1–2). God has given prophecies that have been fulfilled, and they are His witnesses to this. God again stresses that there is no other God, "no other Rock," that is, a refuge, a strength, an assurance of power, permanence, and faithfulness. He is the only real God.

⁹All who make idols are nothing, and the things they treasure are worthless. Those who would speak up for them are blind; they are ignorant, to their own shame.

In contrast to the reality of the true God, the idol makers and their idols are "nothing" (Heb. *tohu*, "emptiness"), that is, they are meaningless. "All who make idols" and "those who would speak up for them" delight in what is worthless: without profit, without benefit. The idols are their own witnesses. They do not see or know, that is, they are not true witnesses, and consequently they will be put to shame (along with their worshipers).

¹⁰Who shapes a god and casts an idol, which can profit him nothing?

The question is brilliant sarcasm. The shaping of a god or the casting of an idol results only in an icon that is unable to help. Nothing is more stupid than thinking a human being can fashion something that can rise to the level of divinity and become

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capable of offering supernatural help.

¹¹He and his kind will be put to shame; craftsmen are nothing but men. Let them all come together and take their stand; they will be brought down to terror and infamy.

All those who join themselves to idols “will be put to shame.” The workmen who made the idols are merely human. And they are the source of the ideas for the gods they make. In their weakness and sin, how can they make a real God? The time will come when they will “come together” (that is, before God’s judgment bar). Then they will all be afraid and be “put to shame” at the same time.

¹²The blacksmith takes a tool and works with it in the coals; he shapes an idol with hammers, he forges it with the might of his arm. He gets hungry and loses his strength; he drinks no water and grows faint.

The following verses are full of tremendous satire showing the foolishness of idolatry. The example is an idol made of wood. The word “idol” is not in the Hebrew. The blacksmith is making the tool. Isaiah first reaches back and “reverses the procedures that we would have been inclined to follow.”⁷ Tools are necessary: There must be an ax to cut down the tree. So a “blacksmith” (Heb. *charash barzel*, “a craftsman of iron”) makes it; he has a strong arm as he heats and shapes the ax. But he is only human and he gets hungry and thirsty. He hardly has the strength and endurance to finish making the ax. How different from the Lord who never grows tired or weary and who can indeed renew our strength (Isa. 40:28–31).⁸

¹³The carpenter measures with a line and makes an outline with a marker; he roughs it out with chisels and marks it with compasses. He shapes it in the form of man, of man in all

⁷H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971), 2:105.

⁸The NIV and others interpret the verse of making a metal idol rather than an ax. However, the word “idol” is not in the Heb. and the irony seems to be of “clumsy tools and weak workmen” as “the source from which an idol springs.” Leupold, *Exposition of Isaiah*, 2:106.

his glory, that it may dwell in a shrine.

The woodworker is just as foolish as the blacksmith. He takes a measuring line, spreads it out in the shape of a man, makes an outline with a “marker” (probably red chalk), shapes it with carving knives, makes an outline with a compass (for making circles), and makes it into “the form of a man.” He does the best he can to make it like the beauty or glory of humankind, that is, like the most handsome of humankind—not to rule the universe but only to stay in a “shrine” (Heb. *bayith*, “house”).⁹ What a contrast to the true God who is everywhere present. As Solomon said of Him, “The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built” (2 Chron. 6:18).

¹⁴He cut down cedars, or perhaps took a cypress or oak. He let it grow among the trees of the forest, or planted a pine, and the rain made it grow.

Isaiah looks with irony at the origin of the wood used to make the idol. The trees that are cut down are not cut down to be gods. The woodsman cuts them down for himself, unconcerned about what kinds of trees they are. Before that, he allows some to grow because they are in a forest. Or he may plant a pine tree nearby for himself, and the rain nourishes it.

¹⁵It is man’s fuel for burning; some of it he takes and warms himself, he kindles a fire and bakes bread. But he also fashions a god and worships it; he makes an idol and bows down to it.

The first reason for cutting down trees in those days was to provide fuel for warmth and for baking. But from the same log, a pagan makes a god, an idol, and “bows down to it.”

¹⁶Half of the wood he burns in the fire; over it he prepares his meal, he roasts his meat and eats his fill. He also warms himself and says, “Ah! I am warm; I see the fire.” ¹⁷From the rest

⁹A temple or shrine was often called the “house” of a god. But pagans also kept idols in their homes.

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he makes a god, his idol; he bows down to it and worships. He prays to it and says, "Save me; you are my god."

He cuts the log in half. He uses half to cook with and warm himself, and "from the rest" (not a special part), he makes his idol. He sees the fire and exclaims over its warmth. Then he worships the part he has saved from the fire, prays to it, and asks it to save (or rescue) him, for it is his god, all the god the poor fellow has. What foolishness!

18They know nothing, they understand nothing; their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see, and their minds closed so they cannot understand.

The idol worshipers neither know nor discern the truth; God has smeared over their eyes and their hearts, so their eyes and their minds are stuck shut. They have become like their idols.

19No one stops to think, no one has the knowledge or understanding to say, "Half of it I used for fuel; I even baked bread over its coals, I roasted meat and I ate. Shall I make a detestable thing from what is left? Shall I bow down to a block of wood?"

The result is that none of the idol worshipers "stops to think" (Heb. *lo' yashiv 'el libbo*, "it does not return to his heart"). The contrast does not even occur to them, so they do not have enough knowledge or discernment to ask the right questions about their use of the same log for fire as well as for worship.

20He feeds on ashes, a deluded heart misleads him; he cannot save himself, or say, "Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?"

Part of the log becomes ashes as the idolater cooks and warms himself. Part becomes an idol. So as he worships the idol, he is trying to nourish himself spiritually on little more than ashes.

He is deceived. He cannot rescue himself from the idol worship nor does he know enough to say the idol that is in his "right hand" (that he depends on) is false. His "deluded heart" (the Heb. includes the mind) leads him astray.

7. GOD WILL REDEEM AND RESTORE ISRAEL
44:21-45:25

a. Jerusalem To Be Inhabited 44:21-28

21^aRemember these things, O Jacob, for you are my servant, O Israel. I have made you, you are my servant; O Israel, I will not forget you.

Israel did not form God; God formed Israel. He redeemed them from Egypt. He formed them from their very beginning, from their birth as a nation. God assures them that they are still His servants, and He will not forget them.

22I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you."

God assures Israel that He has wiped out their rebellion "like a cloud" and their sins "like the morning mist" (or "a mass of clouds"). God's call is for them to return to Him, for He has redeemed them. He has paid the price they could not pay. Even before they repent, the price is paid, and He is wooing them to himself.

23Sing for joy, O heavens, for the LORD has done this; shout aloud, O earth beneath. Burst into song, you mountains, you forests and all your trees, for the LORD has redeemed Jacob, he displays his glory in Israel.

God had delivered Jerusalem from Sennacherib. But He promises a greater deliverance and restoration. The call is for the heavens to shout with joy and the "earth beneath" (the "lower parts of the earth," KJV; that is, on its surface, where the mountains and trees are¹⁰) to shout in triumph, because of what the Lord has done. Let the very mountains open up with a shout of joy and the forest with every individual tree as well, for the LORD has not only redeemed but will openly display His glory "in Israel."

¹⁰Heb. *tachtiyyoth 'erets*, "lower parts of the earth," a poetic phrase contrasting earth with heaven. Cf. Eph. 4:9 where Jesus descended to the lower parts of the earth to be born of a virgin.

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The necessary fulfillment, of course, involved Christ openly manifesting the Father's glory during His life on the earth (John 1:14,18). But the glory will be manifest in and through national Israel when Jesus returns and establishes His millennial kingdom. This is the same concept which is expressed in Romans 8:22—creation involved in the restoration process. The glory also ties in with the “new heavens and new earth” motif (see Isa. 65:17).

24“This is what the LORD says—your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb: I am the LORD, who has made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself,

As a climax to this chapter God again declares who He is and what His purposes are. He is Israel's Kinsman-Redeemer. He not only formed the nation of Israel, He is the Maker of everything: stretching out the heavens, spreading out the earth. He alone made it. He, the eternal One, is both Redeemer and Creator.

25who foils the signs of false prophets and makes fools of diviners, who overthrows the learning of the wise and turns it into nonsense,

He “foils the signs” of ignorant pagan prophets and diviners (braggarts who boast about the miracles they can perform). He “makes fools” of those who make predictions by casting lots. He “overthrows” the wise, making a mockery of their wisdom.

Archeologists have found thousands of messages from the wise men and diviners of Assyria and Babylonia telling their kings good things, promising victory, but not one foretelling the judgment that God caused to fall on them.

26who carries out the words of his servants and fulfills the predictions of his messengers, who says of Jerusalem, ‘It shall be inhabited,’ of the towns of Judah, ‘They shall be built,’ and of their ruins, ‘I will restore them,’

In contrast, God has confirmed and carried out the “words of his servants” (the prophets), and brought to completion the

counsel of “his messengers.” The prophecies foretell that Jerusalem will continue to be inhabited, the cities of Judah ruined by Sennacherib will be rebuilt, raised up. There was a further fulfillment in the return from Babylonian exile.

27who says to the watery deep, ‘Be dry, and I will dry up your streams,’

God dried up the “watery deep” for Israel to cross the Red Sea. He will dry up the rivers before Israel when this new exodus occurs (this imagery is part of the Exodus motif).

28who says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, “Let it be rebuilt,” and of the temple, “Let its foundations be laid.”’

The God who delivered Israel from Egypt calls Cyrus¹¹ “my shepherd.” He will fulfill all God’s pleasure, and he will say the word for Jerusalem to be rebuilt and the foundation of the temple to be laid. This looks ahead to a distant future and was fulfilled exactly (2 Chron. 36:23; Ezra 1:2–3; 6:3–4). The Jewish historian Josephus said that this passage was shown to Cyrus and it encouraged him to make his decrees to send the Jews back to rebuild their temple.¹² This was soon after Cyrus conquered Babylon in 539 B.C. Jerusalem had, and still has, an important place in God’s plan.

b. God Will Use Cyrus To Restore Israel 45:1–13

14“This is what the LORD says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut:

God addresses Cyrus, letting us know that all his great victories were really God’s victories. Up to this time, God’s “anointed” included priests, kings, prophets, and patriarchs (see Ps. 105:10–15). Now God calls a polytheistic pagan king His “anointed” (Heb. *mes̄iach*, “messiah”). Although Cyrus did not

¹¹Isaiah now specifically names Cyrus (cf. 41:2). See introduction, p. 23.

¹²Josephus *Antiquities* 11.1–2.

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know it, God by His Holy Spirit had set him apart and would be directing him to bring deliverance and restoration to Israel. To enable Cyrus to do this, God would take hold of his “right hand . . . to subdue nations,” opening doors and gates before him. God used the people of Babylon to throw open the gates to the army of Cyrus in 539 B.C. and give Cyrus a triumphal entry, complete with palm branches.¹³

“To strip kings of their armor” was an Assyrian custom. Sennacherib did this to Mushezibk-Marduk, the rebel king of Babylonia. Isaiah surely would have known about the custom and the history. It was a public demonstration signifying kings being stripped of their power.

2I will go before you and will level the mountains; I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron.

Because God would personally “go before” Cyrus, rough places and other barriers would become smooth and even metal doors and bars would not be able to hinder his progress. The ancient Greek historian Herodotus said the gates of Babylon were made of bronze.¹⁴

3I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the LORD, the God of Israel, who summons you by name.

The people Cyrus conquered would not be able to hide their treasures from Cyrus. God wanted Cyrus to know that He is “the LORD, the God of Israel,” who called him “by name” in advance. Jewish tradition says Daniel took this prophecy and showed it to Cyrus, and this encouraged Cyrus to give the proclamations found in 2 Chronicles 36:22–23 and Ezra 1:2–4.

4For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my

¹³John E. McKenna, “Isaiah: Background,” in *Old Testament Survey*, ed. William S. LaSor, David A. Hubbard, and Frederic W. Bush, 2d. ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 282–83, points out that some “thoroughgoing theists . . . believe that Cyrus’ name indicates an exilic date for chs. 40ff.” But he also says that “the argument for multiple authorship from the mention of Cyrus is not entirely compelling.”

¹⁴Joseph A. Alexander, *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2 vols. in 1 (1875; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), 2:178.

chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me.

As a polytheist, Cyrus told the Babylonians that their gods had chosen him to deliver them from the misrule of Nabonidus and Belshazzar.¹⁵ He did not know the one true God before he entered Babylon. He actually gave the Babylonian god Marduk credit for his victories.¹⁶ But God was the one who truly commissioned him. Because God chose Israel and made Israel His servant, He would personally call Cyrus and name him as His anointed one, chosen to fulfill His purpose for Israel.

5I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me, **6**so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting men may know there is none besides me. I am the LORD, and there is no other.

God's purpose in calling Cyrus and restoring Israel was to bring universal recognition that He alone is God, "there is no other." The east and the west still need to know this.

7I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things.

The contrast here is between "light" and "darkness" on the one hand and "prosperity" (Heb. *shalom*, including well-being, health, wholeness, harmony, blessing, fulfillment, and prosperity, especially spiritual prosperity) and "disaster" (Heb. *ra'*) on the other. The Hebrew word *ra'* is a general word including calamity and anything disagreeable or undesirable. It is some-

¹⁵James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3d ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 316.

¹⁶The records of Cyrus state: "Marduk . . . on account of (the fact that) the sanctuaries of all their settlements were in ruins and the inhabitants of Sumer and Akkad had become like (living) dead, turned back (his) countenance, 'his' an[ger] [abated] and he had mercy (upon them). He scanned and looked (through) all the countries, searching for a righteous ruler willing to lead him (i.e. Marduk) (in the annual procession). (Then) he pronounced the name of Cyrus, king of Anshan, declared him (lit.: pronounced [his] name) to be(come) the ruler of all the world." Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 315.

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times used of moral evil, but God is never the creator of moral evil. As a holy God, He does bring judgment, however; the judgment He sends may be severe, even disastrous.

It should also be noted that in the sixth century B.C., at or shortly after the time of Cyrus, Zoroaster (Zarathustra) began teaching a dualistic religion. Zoroaster claimed a good god controlled good and spirit, while a bad god controlled evil and material elements—as well as created the physical universe while the good god was not looking. This verse leaves no room for any such dualism.

8“You heavens above, rain down righteousness; let the clouds shower it down. Let the earth open wide, let salvation spring up, let righteousness grow with it; I, the LORD, have created it.

What God wants is to bring not judgment but salvation. He calls for the heavens to “rain down righteousness” and for the earth to open up to receive it so that together they may cause salvation and righteousness to “spring up.” God is determined to accomplish this in His own way, for He alone creates. This anticipates what Isaiah says about the new way of life that results from the work of the Suffering Servant, the Messiah.

9“Woe to him who quarrels with his Maker, to him who is but a potsherd among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, ‘What are you making?’ Does your work say, ‘He has no hands?’

The “woe” is directed to Israelites who questioned God’s ways, challenging His right to do as He wills. This may refer specifically to their disapproval of God choosing to use a Gentile like Cyrus to deliver them. Broken pottery on the ground has no right to challenge the potter for what he has done. Neither does the clay have a right to challenge or question him concerning what he intends to make or whether he has the “hands” (i.e., the skill or ability) to make it.

10Woe to him who says to his father, ‘What have you begotten?’ or to his mother, ‘What have you brought to birth?’

The same principle applies to anyone who would question a man or a woman about the children they intend to have. (“What have you begotten” could also be translated, “What right do you have to beget children?”¹⁷) Some questions are improper. To ask God such a question is certainly improper. Those who say this have no trust or faith in the Lord.

11“This is what the LORD says—the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker: Concerning things to come, do you question me about my children, or give me orders about the work of my hands?

Now the LORD applies the above principle to Israel. God is Israel’s “Maker,” Israel’s Potter. The invitations to ask and command (see KJV) are clearly ironic; thus they appear as questions rather than statements in many contemporary versions, including the NIV. They mean Israel has no right to question God’s purposes with respect to the events to come, for they are sons (Exod. 4:22) and He is the Father. Nor do they have the right to command Him nor give orders to Him with respect to His work, for they are the clay and He is the divine Potter. This does not mean they need to be afraid, for He has already demonstrated that He is a loving Father and a skillful Potter. They are safe in his hands.

12It is I who made the earth and created mankind upon it. My own hands stretched out the heavens; I marshaled their starry hosts.

God has, in fact, demonstrated His ability and skill by His work in the creation of the earth, humankind, and the heavens with all the host of stars that are there because of His command. The use of the word “created” here emphasizes the uniqueness of His creation of human beings. We owe allegiance to Him by right of His creation.

13I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free, but not for a price or reward, says the LORD Almighty.”

¹⁷George A. F. Knight, *Servant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1984), 93.

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This same mighty God will prove His power by raising up Cyrus in a right way and making his paths straight. God will be the one directing him so that he will become a builder of Jerusalem and will set the people of Israel free—free to go back to their own land. Because God will move upon Cyrus, no one will need to ransom them.

c. God Will Save Israel 45:14–25

14This is what the LORD says: “The products of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush, and those tall Sabeans—they will come over to you and will be yours; they will trudge behind you, coming over to you in chains. They will bow down before you and plead with you, saying, ‘Surely God is with you, and there is no other; there is no other god.’”

The remainder of this chapter continues to declare something far greater than deliverance from Babylon. As a result of God’s work of restoration, the goods and the people of nations who were once enemies will come to Israel—recognizing God is among them and that “there is no other God.” Ethiopia (Cush) is now what is called the Sudan. The Sabeans were the people of what is now Yemen. They were known as a great commercial people, even trading with India. The chains of these peoples are chains they put on themselves, indicating they come willingly, submitting themselves to the LORD, bringing their wealth with them.

15Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God and Savior of Israel.

Those who come from the Gentile nations will recognize the God of Israel as the Savior, commenting that in the past He had been hidden from them. As the context indicates, He had hidden himself in Israel, so the Gentiles didn’t know Him; at the same time, He was revealing himself to Israel, active in a relationship with them. Even so, His plans are still a mystery to those who do not let the Spirit reveal Himself to them through the written Word, the Bible (cf. Luke 10:21 where “Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, ‘I praise you, Father, Lord

of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.’”).

¹⁶All the makers of idols will be put to shame and disgraced; they will go off into disgrace together. ¹⁷But Israel will be saved by the LORD with an everlasting salvation; you will never be put to shame or disgraced, to ages everlasting.

“The makers of idols will be put to shame and disgraced,” indicating humiliation. (This fits the time of Isaiah, about 700 B.C., not the later times.) In contrast, the LORD has an “everlasting salvation” for Israel, and they¹⁸ “will never be put to shame or disgraced” once they enter into that salvation.

¹⁸For this is what the LORD says—he who created the heavens, he is God; he who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it; he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited—he says: “I am the LORD, and there is no other.

The guarantee of that “everlasting salvation” (v. 17) is the fact that God is the Creator of the heavens and earth. And He did not create it for emptiness, but “to be inhabited.”¹⁹ He has not changed His original purpose.²⁰ He does not intend to destroy all the people on earth. Nor will He allow wicked, ruthless men to do so. He will restore his creation and will always have a people who will love and serve Him. There is no one else worthy of worship, for He alone is God. That “there is no other” serves notice on the idolaters that ultimately they will be without a god when the LORD brings things to fulfillment.

¹⁹I have not spoken in secret, from somewhere in a land of darkness; I have not said to Jacob’s descendants, ‘Seek me in vain.’ I, the LORD, speak the truth; I declare what is right.

¹⁸“You” (v. 17) is plural and refers to every individual Israelite who has been saved.

¹⁹Adam was the first man (1 Cor. 15:45). The earth was not inhabited before that time.

²⁰Timothy Munyon, “The Creation of the Universe and Humankind,” in *Systematic Theology*, ed. Stanley M. Horton, rev. ed. (Springfield, Mo.: Logion Press, 1995), 220–22.

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God has openly confirmed His purpose. He never told Jacob's descendants to seek Him "in vain" (in emptiness or meaninglessness). He always conceived His word to be plain: In contrast to the pagan oracles, the false prophets, and the predictions of astrologers and other dabblers in the occult, what God says comes from His righteousness and is always right.

20"Gather together and come; assemble, you fugitives from the nations. Ignorant are those who carry about idols of wood, who pray to gods that cannot save.

The call is for all the "fugitives [escapees, refugees] from the nations" to draw near to the LORD. Some consider the fugitives to be Israelites coming out of the nations; others take them to be Gentiles. Some apply this to nations that enter the Millennium: They have turned away from idols to seek the LORD and they recognize that Gentiles who carry images of wood are "ignorant" and do not know what they are doing. They realize that they have prayed to a god that by its very nature "cannot save." God's purpose was always for Israel to evangelize other nations, going forth in His name.

21Declare what is to be, present it—let them take counsel together. Who foretold this long ago, who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, the LORD? And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me.

With irony, God again challenges the idol worshipers to "take counsel together" (see 41:21–22). They must admit that God alone has declared his eternal purposes of salvation "from the distant past." He is righteous and therefore He is to be trusted. He alone is a Savior. The world has no other hope.

22"Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.

Now God reveals that His salvation is not just for Israel, but for the "ends of the earth." He revealed His purpose to Abraham to bless all the families (nations) of the earth (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; cf. Pss. 22:27–28; 65:5). That has never changed.

Too many in the world are still looking in the wrong direction. Everyone needs to turn to the LORD and be saved.

²³By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear.

God made this same kind of oath to confirm his promise to Abraham (Gen. 22:16). That word is a righteous word from a truly righteous God, a faithful God, a God we can depend on. It will accomplish His purpose: “Every knee will bow” in submission and “every tongue . . . swear” allegiance to God. The New Testament makes it clear that the promise comes through Jesus and involves recognizing Him as Lord (Rom. 14:10–11;²¹ Phil. 2:10–11).

²⁴They will say of me, ‘In the LORD alone are righteousness and strength.’” All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame.

Only in the LORD is true righteousness and the strength to live by it. He alone is our source. We can come into His presence, for He is accessible; we have a new and living (resurrected) Way, our Lord Jesus (Heb. 10:19–22). We stand in His righteousness, not our own (cf. Phil. 3:9). In contrast, all those who are angry with God (because they worship idols or want only material things) “will come to Him and be put to shame.” This may mean they will repent or at least have opportunity to repent.

²⁵But in the LORD all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous and will exult.

But the “descendants of Israel” will not shrink back in shame. They will be justified, vindicated, treated as righteous, and will praise God and glory in the LORD, fulfilling their destiny (cf. Rom. 11:26).

²¹Paul quotes here from the Septuagint version.

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STUDY QUESTIONS

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1. What assurance does God give Israel and why?
2. In what sense does God make Israel His witnesses?
3. What will God do to bring about an exodus from Babylon?
4. What evidence is there for an exodus from Babylon in Isaiah's day?
5. Why was it necessary for God to judge Israel?
6. What shows God had not changed His plan for Israel in spite of their failures?
7. What will be the result of the outpouring of God's Spirit?
8. How does Isaiah contrast the true God with idols in chapter 44?
9. How will God display His glory in Israel?
10. How is God going to use Cyrus?
11. What is God going to do for Cyrus and why?
12. What does God say of himself in chapter 45?
13. Why did some Israelites question God, and what was His response to them?

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D. Babylon's Fall 46:1–48:22

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1. THE LORD SUPERIOR TO BABYLON'S DEITIES 46:1–13

¹Bel bows down, Nebo stoops low; their idols are borne by beasts of burden. The images that are carried about are burdensome, a burden for the weary.

Isaiah now returns to his own day, to the time when Sennacherib destroyed Babylon.¹ Cyrus is no longer in view. Cyrus honored and worshiped the gods of Babylon instead of carrying them off as Sennacherib did. Bel was the chief god of

¹Oswald T. Allis, "Book of Isaiah," in *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), 1:857.