

God controls history – deliverance through Cyrus and then the Servant of God

• Isaiah calls Cyrus the messiah! – ‘Secular’ messiahship

• God can use anyone to bring about His will

• A ‘messiah’ – one chosen by God to do something unusual in the history of the world

• Cyrus overcomes earthly forces – Jesus overcomes Satan and brings redemption

• God has a special purpose in allowing Cyrus to rise to power

• God’s purpose is to bless Israel

Isaiah 44:24–48:22 is a major section in Isaiah’s prophecy in which some more details of the great deliverance God promises to Israel are set out for us. There is a preliminary deliverance through Cyrus and then a yet greater deliverance through a divine but suffering Servant of God^{□1}. In a further section^{□2} we shall see more of what lies ahead for Israel. The whole section focuses on Cyrus: his task^{□3}, the sovereignty of Yahweh in sending him^{□4}, the place he has in God’s plan^{□5}, his offensiveness to Israel^{□6} and God’s ultimate triumph over him^{□7}.

Isaiah goes on to speak of God’s very detailed control of history. He has Cyrus in the grasp of his hand.

¹*‘This is what Yahweh says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armour, to open double-doors before him so that gates will not be shut . . . ’*

Isaiah 45:1 actually calls Cyrus the messiah! The prophecies concerning Jesus call him the Servant of God, God’s King, but do not use the term ‘God’s Messiah’. It shows that there is such a thing as a God-ordained ‘secular’ messiahship. God can use anyone anywhere – from Persian soldier to talking donkey – to bring about his will for his people and his kingdom. He is the head over all things for his people.

Actually Isaiah clarifies the idea of ‘messiahship’ for us. A ‘messiah’ is one who is obviously and strikingly chosen by God to do something unusual in the history of the world^{□1}. He is used by God to further the purposes of redemption (as Cyrus was in a preliminary manner^{□2}). He easily conquers opposition to God’s plans and purposes^{□3}. He is strikingly successful in his influence upon the nations^{□4}. It becomes clear that God is behind his activities and that the real agent in what has happened is God himself^{□5}. In Cyrus’s case all this was ‘secular’ and military. In the case of Jesus the same ‘Messiahship’ is seen at a higher level. Cyrus moved around the earthly forces and powers that were against Israel. Jesus overcomes Satan and brings eternal redemption. But the pattern is the same.

God will prepare the way for Cyrus.

²*‘I myself will go before you and will level the barriers; I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron.’*

God has a special purpose in letting this Persian soldier arise to great power.

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

God’s purpose in working through a pagan soldier is to bless Israel, his people.

□1 49:1-55:13
 □2 56:1-66:24
 □3 44:24-45:8
 □4 45:9-13
 □5 45:14-25
 □6 46:1-13
 □7 47:1-48:22

□1 see Isaiah 41:25
 □2 45:11-13
 □3 see Isaiah 47
 □4 see 45:1-3
 □5 see 45:1-7

• Cyrus does not know God, but God has a use for him

⁴*For the sake of Jacob my servant,
of Israel my chosen,
I summon you by name
and bestow on you a title of honour,
though you have not known me.
⁵I am Yahweh, and there is no other.'*

It is not that Cyrus is a believer. Cyrus does not know God at all. But God has a purpose to use him.

*'Apart from me there is no God.
I will strengthen you,
though you do not know me,
⁶so that from the rising of the sun
to the place of its setting
people may know there is none besides me.'*

The lesson – God has control, even over calamitous events

Many great lessons are to be learned from God's use of Cyrus. One is the greatness of God's control over history, even over things that seem to be calamitous.

*'I am Yahweh, and there is no other.
⁷I form the light and create darkness,
I bring peace and create disaster; I,
Yahweh, do all these things.'*

• God cannot be tempted with evil

• God 'creates disaster' to bring about His purposes

• Joseph – sold into slavery but was then able to protect his family from famine

• Jesus – crucified for us

• God steered the Babylonians' sinfulness to bring about His will

The significance of prayer

• Isaiah turns God's promise into prayer – God answers

God does not create moral evil; we must not translate 'I create . . . evil'. The word here means 'disaster', 'calamity in the course of history'. This is part of the biblical teaching concerning the relationship between God, moral evil and history. God cannot be tempted with evil, neither does he tempt anyone into sin. People are tempted when they are drawn into sin by the own fallen desires¹. But God does control the course of history! He 'creates disaster' not in the sense of forcing evil into being, but in the sense of controlling history so that even disasters are within his will and eventually bring about the furtherance of his purposes. Joseph's brothers' despicable act of selling Joseph into slavery was wicked. They were deliberately doing what they did. Later Joseph said, 'You meant it for evil; God meant it for good'. The wickedness arose from the heart of Joseph's brothers. It was 'disaster' for Joseph and yet God was controlling what was happening. Eventually the 'disaster' that fell on young Joseph brought about protection of Jacob's family in a day of famine. The death of Christ upon the cross is the greatest example of the same principle. 'This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, **you** crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men'².

The Babylon invasion of Israel in the sixth century BC was a disaster which involved much wickedness on the part of the Babylonians. God brought it about not by forcing Babylonians to do something **different** from what they wanted to do but by steering and manipulating their sinfulness in such a way that it brought about his will, not their own will.

Another lesson has to do with the great significance of prayer. Isaiah prays:

⁸*Rain down, O heavens from above.
Let the clouds pour down righteousness.
Let the earth open.
Let salvation and righteousness be fruitful;
let it make them grow together.'*

When Isaiah knows what God has promised, he turns the promise into prayer. And God answers.

'I myself, Yahweh, will surely create it.'

¹ see James 1:13-14

² Acts 2:23



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Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)* books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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