

• *A pagan soldier will rescue the people of God!*

God uses paganism to carry forward his plans for his people – something that people generally dislike

• *We ask why God uses things that are evil*

Whether we like it or not, God insists that he is at work in this world

• *He is the Creator*

• *He commands what will happen*

• *He will use Cyrus to rescue Israel*

• *Israel will be exalted*

A military-political leader by the name of Cyrus is to come to be the rescuer of Judah, at a time when the Judeans will be in exile in Babylon. A pagan soldier is to rescue the people of God! Isaiah knows that his readers will find this difficult. But the prophet insists that we cannot argue with God.

God uses paganism to carry forward his plans for his people. But this is something that men and women generally dislike. The prophet says:

⁹*Woe to him who goes to law against his Maker,
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"?*

¹⁰*Woe to him who says to a father,
"What have you begotten?"*

or to a mother,

"What have you brought to birth?"

¹¹*This is what Yahweh says –
the Holy One of Israel, and its Potter:*

Concerning things to come, ask me!

*About my sons and the work of my hands,
please command me!*

It is an old, old problem. Why – we ask – does God allow evil in this world? And why does he even say that he **uses** things that are evil? How can a military conqueror be used to rescue a people who are the ones through whom salvation will come?

Whether we like it or not, God insists that he is at work in this world. He is the Creator.

¹²*'It is I who made the earth
and created mankind upon it.
My own hands stretched out the heavens.'*

He is the one who gives commands concerning what will happen.

'I gave orders to all their vast multitude.'

He is clear and dogmatic that he will bring Cyrus to rescue Israel.

¹³*'It is I who will raise him up in righteousness;
I will make all his ways straight.
It is he who will build my city
and set my exiles free,
but not for a price or reward,
says Yahweh Almighty.'*

It will lead to the exaltation of Israel. Eventually gentiles will come into the people of God.

¹⁴*This is what Yahweh says:
'The products of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush,
and those Sabeans, people of stature,
they will come over to you
and will be yours;
they will walk after you,
coming over to you in chains.'*

• Eventually gentiles will come into the people of God

Isaiah is amazed by this prediction

• God's plans for Israel are perplexing and distressing, but...

(i) These surprising acts of God will work out for the eventual benefit of his people

(ii) What God is doing is bringing salvation

• God is doing what no idol can do

(iii) He has purposes for the entire human race

(iv) His purposes for the human race involve a Saviour who comes to Israel

• Pagan nations should look to what is happening

They will bow down before you and put a request to you, saying, "Surely God is with you, and there is no other; there is no other god."

Isaiah reacts to this prediction in amazement.

¹⁵*Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, Saviour.*

The prophet feels that God is hiding himself (but note verse 19). The Israelites of Isaiah's day (eighth century BC, we remember) are very perplexed that Assyrians are being allowed to overrun their land, and then are defeated. It is even more distressing for them to be told that Assyrians will fail to defeat them but Babylonians will succeed and the Judeans will be exiled. Then they are told they will be rescued by a Persian soldier! The people do not like it! And Isaiah expresses his amazement: 'Truly you are a God who hides himself!'

But (i) these surprising acts of God will work out for the eventual benefit of his people. 'Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God of **Israel** . . .' There are many countries that have been mentioned in Isaiah's prophecies, especially the Assyrians and the Babylonians, and now Cyrus the Persian. But everything God is doing is not at first for them. It is for Israel and the church of the Lord Jesus Christ which will emerge out of Israel. If we wait to see what emerges in our world, we shall see it is all for the purpose of extending the kingdom of God.

(ii) What God is doing is bringing salvation. 'Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, **Saviour**.' Eventually through Israel and a Jewish Saviour, salvation will come to the whole world. This salvation can come in no other way except through the God of Israel. God is doing what no idol can do.

¹⁶*All the makers of idols will certainly reap shame and disgrace; they will go off into disgrace together.*

¹⁷*But Israel will be saved by Yahweh with an everlasting salvation; you will never be put to shame or disgraced, to ages everlasting.*

(iii) **He has purposes for the entire human race.** God is not silent; he speaks ('For this is what Yahweh says . . .'). He is the Creator ('he who created the heavens . . .'). He has purposes for the whole human race

¹⁸*For this is what Yahweh 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 shapeless, but formed it to be inhabited. 'I am Yahweh, and there is no other.'*

(iv) **His purposes for the human race involve a Saviour who comes to Israel.** The pagan nations will do well to look to what is happening in Israel.

¹⁹*'I have not spoken in secret, from somewhere in a land of darkness; I have not said to Jacob's seed, "Seek me but find nothing." I, Yahweh, speak what is right; I declare things that are plain.'*

in Israel

- God reveals Himself

(v) To turn to the God of Israel will bring salvation immediately for any gentiles

- Isaiah addresses any gentiles wishing to escape idolatry

- Idols and their worshippers cannot help or predict the future

- Only God is predicting what will really happen

- God is the only Saviour

- Any gentile may find immediate salvation if they turn to God

- Gentiles' attitude to God will lead to disgrace or to worship

- Gentiles who turn to God will become part of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ

Actually God is not hiding himself¹; he is revealing himself ! He was not speaking in some hidden place or in some land of darkness. God is light. He speaks plainly. If we have difficulty, the difficulty is not in God's obscurity; it is in our unbelief. He does not speak to us in order that we might be lost in bewilderment.

(v) **To turn to the God of Israel will bring salvation immediately for any gentiles.** Isaiah addresses any among the gentiles who wish to escape the futility of idolatry

²⁰*'Assemble yourselves and come; you who are escaping from the nations, gather together.'*

The idolaters cannot help them.

'There are people who have no knowledge, those who carry about idols of wood, who pray to a god that cannot save.'

The idols and their worshippers know nothing of the future.

²¹*'Tell what is to be, present the case. Yes, let them take counsel together.'*

Only God is predicting what will really happen.

'Who foretold this long ago, who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, Yahweh?'

Such a God is the only Saviour.

'And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Saviour; there is none but me. ²²Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.'

Any gentile may find salvation immediately — even in Isaiah's eighth century BC – if they will turn to God and his promises. Everyone will bow the knee one day; they may as well bow the knee now.

²³*'By myself I have sworn, a word has gone forth in righteousness, a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear.*

²⁴*Each one will say of me, "In Yahweh alone are righteousness and strength."*

In the end the gentiles' attitude to God will lead to disgrace or to worship.

All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame. ²⁵In Yahweh all the seed of Israel will be found righteous and will give praise.

Many will turn to the God of Israel eventually; they may as well turn to him now. Faith in Israel's God will bring the gift of righteousness. All gentiles who turn to the God of Israel will become part of God's people, God's new Israel, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.



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