



1. God's 'Israel' must learn their everlasting security

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21'Remember these things, Jacob, for, Israel, you are a servant of mine. I have made you, you are my servant; Israel, I will not forget you.

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

• We worry that God will abandon us

Sometimes we are depressed and alarmed over our weaknesses. We have confessed this sin or that sin so many times. 'Surely God will now abandon us', we say to ourselves. A heavy dark cloud blots out the sunshine. But clouds can disappear very quickly and Isaiah wants this one to be gone! One strong wind and the clouds are gone. The dark thunderstorm over us disappears. The sun is shining. No trace is left of the threat that was hanging over us. We may return to God, says Isaiah.

• But God disperses the storm and makes the sun shine – we may return to God

23Sing for joy, O heavens, for Yahweh has taken action; shout aloud, O earth beneath. Tops of the hills, burst into song; burst into song, forests of the valleys, and all your trees, for Yahweh has redeemed Jacob, he will display his beauty in Israel.

• Heaven and earth are needed to help us praise God

The very planet is now called upon to rejoice with the redeemed servants of God. Heaven and earth is needed to help us praise God. The hills and the trees are invited to sing songs of praise. It is perhaps a strange idea to us, but it is typical of the Bible to take it for granted that the very world we live in is affected by our relationship to God. When we are restored, the planet is restored. Earth around us is sweeter green; the heavens above are deeper blue. When we are singing the world around us is singing as well.

• When we are restored, the planet is restored

2. God now lets them know who the first deliverer will be: a conqueror named Cyrus

2. God now lets them know who the first deliverer will be: a conqueror named Cyrus. Again God speaks as the Creator.

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

• Again God ridicules the idols

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25'I am the one who foils the signs of boastful fortune-tellers and makes fools of diviners, who turns back the wise and makes nonsense of their knowledge.'

• He speaks of His power to control the future

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26'I am the one who carries out the words of his servants and fulfils the predictions of his messengers, who says of Jerusalem, "It shall be inhab-

ited,” of the towns of Judah, “They shall be built,” and of their ruins, “I will restore them,”

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

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 deliverer is Cyrus

• He will be the person to release Israel from the bondage of Babylon

• He will fulfil the divine plan for Judah’s rescue

• The Judeans were allowed to restore their temple and Daniel prospered

• God’s people are safe for ever – he may chastise them but will not abandon them

• He can use a pagan king to rescue them

• God cannot forget His chosen

☞1 see also 45:1

Now for the first time^{☞1} the actual name of the deliverer is given: Cyrus! In his later years the name might have been known to Isaiah from the Achaemenids (forerunners of the people we call the ‘Persians’). There would be a Cyrus the First very shortly after the time of Isaiah. But Isaiah knows he is seeing into the future. He knows by the Holy Spirit that someone with the name ‘Cyrus’ will be the one who will release Israel from bondage in Babylon. It would be through this new power – Isaiah sees it through the Holy Spirit – that the restoration of the Jerusalem temple will come. A ‘Cyrus’ would be a kind of ‘messiah’ to fulfil the divine plan for the rescue of Judah from Babylon. Many years later Cyrus the Great, grandson of an earlier Cyrus, came to the throne of Persia. A few years later he was threatening Babylonia, and on 16 October 539 he defeated Babylon. Shortly after, the Israelites were allowed to go home, as many as wanted to. But Isaiah had predicted that a ‘Cyrus’ – someone in the line of Persian kings – would be the one that God would use. In the first year of his rule Cyrus issued a decree by which all exiles, if they wished to, were allowed to go home. The Judeans were allowed to restore their temple and its fittings. During the first three years of Cyrus’s rule in Babylonia Daniel prospered.

God’s people are safe for ever. The Creator-God chose them and redeemed them. He may chastise them severely as he did when he sent his people into Babylonian exile. But his chastening does not mean that in any way he has abandoned them. He superintends history and the nations’ story revolves around the security of the people of God. If necessary God can take a pagan king and use him to rescue his people. ‘I have made you, you are my servant; Israel, I will not forget you’, says God. Sometimes, like Israel, God’s people sin so badly, for so many years, you would think the privilege of being called ‘servant’ of God has been lost. Isaiah has said that Israel had become a blind and deaf servant. How can God still use this term for his people? But when God’s elect wander far from him, he still loves them. He does not throw us out of his service as quickly as we might imagine. Our name and our title – ‘servant’ – are still engraved on the palms of his hands. God cannot forget his chosen. He says to all who are his: ‘O Israel, I will not forget you.’ If necessary he will raise up a Cyrus to send us home.

Dr Michael Eaton (1942-2017) was highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. Born in the UK, he lived for many years in Kenya where he became a citizen. He was one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship in Nairobi. His Preaching through the Bible books are highly popular worldwide, written in a clear and down-to-earth style but underpinned by rigorous scholarship. Some of these books have been reformatted as individual sheets for personal and group study and preaching. The New Testament volumes have been re-edited and combined in the Branch Commentary. The Old Testament, including previously unpublished material will follow. More details: www.slices.org.uk.