



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

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 God¹. In a further section² we shall see more of what lies ahead for Israel. The whole section focuses on Cyrus: his task³, the sovereignty of Yahweh in sending him⁴, the place he has in God’s plan⁵, his offensiveness to Israel⁶ and God’s ultimate triumph over him⁷.

- 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

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

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

‘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 . . . ’

• God can use anyone to bring about His will

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.

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

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 world¹. He is used by God to further the purposes of redemption (as Cyrus was in a preliminary manner²). He easily conquers opposition to God’s plans and purposes³. He is strikingly successful in his influence upon the nations⁴. It becomes clear that God is behind his activities and that the real agent in what has happened is God himself⁵. 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.

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

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

God will prepare the way for Cyrus.

‘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 allowing Cyrus to rise to power

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

‘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 is to bless Israel

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

‘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.'*

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

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 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.

¹ see James 1:13-14

• 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

² Acts 2:23

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

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.

The significance of prayer

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.'*

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

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

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