
Observations from Isaiah

LESSON XXXVI : ANNOUNCEMENT OF SALVATION AND A DELIVERER: CYRUS (44:23-45:13)

General outline (from Oswalt's *Isaiah*):

- I. INTRODUCTION: THE PRESENT AND FUTURE OF GOD'S PEOPLE (1-5)
- II. A CALL TO SERVANTHOOD (6)
- III. BASIS FOR SERVANTHOOD: WHOM SHALL WE TRUST? (7-39)
- IV. THE VOCATION OF SERVANTHOOD (40-55)
 - A. MOTIVE FOR SERVANTHOOD: GRACE (40-48)
 - 1. The Servant's Lord (40)
 - 2. The Servant of the Lord (41:1-44:22)
 - 3. The Lord Redeems His Servant (44:23-47:15)
 - a. Announcement of salvation (44:23-28)
 - b. God's choice of a deliverer (45:1-13)
 - (1) God's promise to Cyrus (45:1-8)
 - (2) God's right to use whom he chooses (45:9-13)

The Lord Redeems His Servant (44:23-47:15)

Announcement of salvation (44:23-28)

Sing 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. "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, who foils the signs of false prophets and makes fools of diviners, who overthrows the learning of the wise and turns it into nonsense, who carries out the words of his servants and fulfills the predictions of his messengers, who says of

Sing, O ye heavens; for the LORD hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel. Thus saith the LORD, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I am the LORD that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself; That frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish; That confirmeth the word of his servant, and performeth the

Sing, O heavens, for Jehovah hath wrought, Shout, O lower parts of earth, Break forth, O mountains, with singing, Forest, and every tree in it, For Jehovah hath redeemed Jacob, And in Israel He doth beautify Himself. Thus said Jehovah, thy redeemer, And thy framer from the womb: 'I [am] Jehovah, doing all things, Stretching out the heavens by Myself, Spreading out the earth — who [is] with Me? Making void the tokens of devisers, And diviners it maketh mad, Turning the wise backward, And their knowledge it maketh foolish. Confirming the word of His servant, The counsel of His

<i>Jerusalem, 'It shall be inhabited,' of the towns of Judah, 'They shall be built,' and of their ruins, 'I will restore them,' who says to the watery deep, 'Be dry, and I will dry up your streams,' who 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."'" (NIV)</i>	<i>counsel of his messengers; that saith to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be inhabited; and to the cities of Judah, Ye shall be built, and I will raise up the decayed places thereof: That saith to the deep, Be dry, and I will dry up thy rivers: That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid. (KJV)</i>	<i>messengers it perfecteth, Who is saying of Jerusalem, She is inhabited, And of cities of Judah, They shall be built, and her wastes I raise up, Who is saying to the deep, Be dry, and thy rivers I cause to dry up, Who is saying of Cyrus, My shepherd, And all my delight He doth perfect, So as to say of Jerusalem, Thou art built, And of the temple, Thou art founded. (YLT)</i>
--	---	--

“Having asserted his promises to redeem (41:1-42:9), and having shown the place of his redeemed people will play in demonstrating his superiority over the idols (42:10-44:22), God now reveals the means by which the redemption will take place: the Persian conqueror, Cyrus. After the opening announcement of salvation (44:23-28), the segment falls into three parts: the so-called Cyrus oracle (45:1-8), with its following justification (45:9-13); an assertion of God’s sovereignty over all the gods (45:14-46:13), which further justifies the use of Cyrus and also sets the stage for the destruction of proud Babylon, which is the third part (47:1-15). ***Especially important is the repeated assertion that the God of Israel is the God of the entire world. The implication is plain: if God is indeed the sole Lord of the universe, then all history, not merely Israel’s, is an outworking of his purposes. Not only can he use unbelievers as easily as believers to accomplish his redemptive purposes, but also everyone, even proud Babylon, is accountable to him.***” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

CONCLUSION OR INTRODUCTION? (v 23) — since I’m presently following the outline given by Oswalt, v23 is given as an introduction of the wonderful redemption which God will perform through the person of Cyrus. Oswalt admits however the vast majority of commentators make this a conclusive song of praise since God had just proven Himself superior over the idols. Oswalt defends his position by comparing this to the song of praise found in 42:10-13. There the Lord celebrates his victory over His enemies with the emphasis upon God defeating the idols. Here the praise is because the Lord redeems His people with the emphasis upon the fact that God uses history for redemption as well as judgement. But it would be impossible to be for sure whether this forms a conclusion or an introduction, nor does it matter which position one holds. ***“We have here another example of that typical feature of the book: transitional elements that function so smoothly that it is difficult to determine whether they point primarily forward or primarily backward.”*** [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

THE WITNESS OF BOTH JUDGEMENT AND SALVATION — ***“As the elements of the universe were called on to witness Israel’s rebellion (1:2), they are here called on to rejoice over Israel’s salvation (so also 55:12,13). The cycle will be complete when the heaven and earth themselves participate in the redemption (65:17-25; 66:22,23; see also Rom 8:19-22). It becomes evident in this pattern that the redemption being progressively unveiled in the book involves a great deal more than exile and return, although those provide the backdrop on which the larger picture is painted.”*** [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] ***“All creation is to rejoice in the fact that Jehovah has***

completed what He purposed, that He has redeemed His people, and henceforth will show Himself glorious in them. The heavens on high are to exult; also the depths of the earth, i.e., not Hades, which would be opposed to the prevailing view of the Old Testament (Ps 66, cf., 88:13), but the interior of the earth, with its caves, its pits, and its deep abysses (see Ps 139:15); and the mountains and woods which rise up from the earth towards heaven — all are to unite in the exultation of the redeemed: for the redemption that is being accomplished in man will extend its effects in all directions, even to the utmost limits of the natural world.” [K&D, *Isaiah*]

GOD’S PROMISES ARE SUPPORTED BY HIS CHARACTER (v 24-28) — “*God’s promises to redeem are not the empty vaporings of some vanquished local deity. Rather, they are secured by three claims: he brought Israel into existence as by birth (v. 24a), he created the whole world (v. 24b), and he has foretold the future in ways that make fools of all who rely on techniques in order to tell the future (vv. 25-27).* These are the heart of the prophet’s arguments for God....

Looked at from a purely historical point of view, this word seemed impossible. At least as improbable, it seemed, was the word that Jerusalem and Judah would be restored. If Assyria’s fall gave some precedent for hoping that Babylon might fall as well, Babylon’s adoption of Assyria’s oppressive policies must have only strengthened the sense that there was no hope at all for any recovery of the election promises. Yet all that had been foretold in advance, indeed far in advance, and God, who was not part of the system like the idols were, stood as its guarantor.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] *God is unlike the ‘prophets’ of this world (v. 25) who delude, guess, and even at times rely upon Satanic powers to predict. He alone not only predicts the future but is also capable of bringing the predicted events to pass as He desires. This foils the claims of the world’s ‘prophets’ while at the same time confirming the claims of the Lord’s true prophets (v. 26a). One of the most remarkable of those claims was the Jewish return from captivity (v. 26b) under the leadership of Cyrus (v. 28).*

THE UNLIKELY CHOICE OF CYRUS AS ‘SHEPHERD’ (v 28) — without question one of the most remarkable prophecies in the Bible is the return of the Jews from captivity under the guidance of a man named 150 years in advance. The choice of the man is remarkable as well: Cyrus was not one of the chosen people but rather a heathen, outside the covenant of grace. “The description of the pagan emperor in terms appropriate to a Davidic monarch must have been troublesome to a devout Judean. How could such a one be called My shepherd (cf. 2 Sam 5:2; 1 Kings 22:17; Ezek 34:23)? Or how could it be said that someone such as this, unclean and unconsecrated, could fulfill God’s wish (Ps 5:4)? But this is precisely the kind of new thing that the Lord was talking about (43:19). If the house of David had demonstrated its craven disregard for God (7:13; 39:7), God would find a new way to keep his ancient promises, even to the house of David. In a wonderfully ingenious way, just as the foreigner, Ruth, became an ancestress of David (Ruth 4:13-22), the foreigner Cyrus typifies the Davidic Messiah (Isa 53:10; Zech 11:4; 13:7; John 8:29; 10:11). [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] “There have already been allusions to Cyrus, but these have not named him; for his name has been held back for this great moment of poetic-prophetic climax. Only in 1 Kings 13:2 do we find anything quite comparable in the OT, though Isaiah 52:13-53:12 could hardly be made more wonderfully specific by the mention of the name of Jesus. Only a little less dramatic than the name is the description of Cyrus as ‘my shepherd’ (v. 28), for this was a pagan foreigner.... The lost sheep were to be rounded up and returned to their true fold in Judah by this foreigner, who would make possible the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the very temple — the sacred temple — of Israel’s God. This oracle gives the first explicit reference in the Book of Isaiah to God’s plans to rebuild the city.” [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

ONE CANNOT AVOID THE LOGIC OF ISAIAH'S ARGUMENT — *“Those who take biblical theology seriously cannot avoid the nature of Isaiah’s arguments. One must face those arguments, and deny or accept their truthfulness. Isaiah claims that the evidence for the uniqueness of God, that he is the sole creator, rests on his ability to predict novel turns of history in advance, an ability the idols and their technicians do not have. Specifically those predictions included Assyria’s all but total conquest of Israel and Judah, Assyria’s failure to capture Jerusalem, the fall of Assyria, the fall of Jerusalem and Judah to Babylon, the exile, the fall of Babylon to Cyrus, Cyrus’ proclamation of freedom and encouragement to rebuild, the return of a remnant, and the establishment of a messianic kingdom. The shape of the present book and the absence of any authorial identification except that of Isaiah ben Amoz lead me to believe that these predications had been made far in advance of the events, and that their eventual confirmation would be the crowning evidence that Israel’s God is God alone. One cannot escape this logic. One must either accept the evidence as given and adopt the conclusion, or else admit that the evidence has been tampered with and deny the conclusion.”* [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

“This great passage, with its two explicit references to Cyrus, has attracted much scholarly discussion. For many modern scholars it represents the strongest argument for ‘Deutero-Isaiah,’ for they cannot conceive of supernatural predictive prophecy of such detail. Yet it cannot be denied that the context for such predictions is the most appropriate in the whole Bible; for Isaiah 40-48 says more about the Lord’s power to predict than any other passage.” [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

LESSONS FROM PROVIDENCE — A strong lesson is here for us to learn. How did God ‘name’ Cyrus? How did He arrange the details concerning how Cyrus would one day release the children of Israel from Babylonian bondage? Did God send angels to deliver a flaming message to Cyrus’ parents in the naming of the child? Did a message appear in the heavens telling Cyrus to let His people return to the land? Did God miraculously send fire from heaven to destroy the Babylonians so Cyrus could set Israel free? No, as one observes all these incidents it is obvious everything occurred in a rather mundane fashion: without doubt the naming of the child was as natural as the naming of any other child born at that time; yet after the parents ***had made their decision*** it was in complete agreement with a 150-year old prophecy! As Cyrus grew as a world leader, his strength and might of the army occurred ***just as natural as any other growing world-power*** with nothing which one could declare to be miraculous. Cyrus’ policy of allowing captives to return to their home land was something which developed in Cyrus ***by a matter of his own choice*** as a part of his natural maturing process, perhaps by incidents which happened to him even in childhood. The point is that throughout all of the life of Cyrus (*not even a saved man, 45:4!*) he developed and matured as natural as any world leader of the day, and the decisions he made were not in consideration of God nor His people. ***Cyrus just lived his life in the manner of which he desired. Yet behind all of Cyrus’ life was the mysterious providential hand of God guiding, directing, allowing in some instances and preventing in others. Every decision Cyrus made was somehow inclusive within the plan of God, even Cyrus’ decisions to sin!*** What are the lessons for us?

- we should be reminded of a fundamental teaching of scripture prior to looking at providence: ***never lay sin at God’s doorstep***. How the hand of God guides and directs within the realm of the natural is a mystery we can never fathom. It’s a mystery how we can think, feel, make decisions and every decision is exactly the decision we want to make, yet at the same time it is true that every decision we make is within the plan of God. ***But regardless of how we attempt to reconcile these paradoxes in our own minds, we must remember that God is never to blame for our sin. Is our choice to sin within the plan of***

God? — yes! Is God to blame for our choice to sin? — never! We are responsible for our choices and we cannot blame anyone for our sin except ourselves and our own fallen nature.

- ***The key to understanding providence is the word “balance.”*** I’m not speaking of those who deny God’s sovereignty. That argument is refuted by the entire book of Isaiah! Rather I’m arguing for a balance between God’s sovereignty and the responsibility of man. For example: those stressing man’s responsibility lose much comfort and peace in the God who controls the universe, because in their mistaken effort to maintain man’s “freedom” they limit God’s providential oversight. This is seen in many Baptist churches by the over-emphasis of evangelism and even by the use of human psychology in the fight to get “decisions” for Christ. But there are extremes on the other end as well, the most obvious being those who refuse evangelistic appeals because “God will save who He wants with or without us.” Another example of the over-emphasis of the sovereignty of God is seen by those who are afraid *not* to mention God’s rule in our hearts “*lest we fail to give the glory to God.*” Paul was not afraid of that and surely none would say he erred in his balance. In one passage Paul speaks of “*Satan hindering him*” (1 Thes 2:18) with no corrective addition of “*but it was only because God permitted it.*” Almost all of Paul’s writings might be summed up by theology, then application. Yet while Paul is writing to us to pray, obey, study, witness, love, be kind, and the many other admonitions he gives, he almost never says “*pray, but if you do it’s because God put it in your heart... obey, but if you do it is because God...*”. Would any bible student dare accuse Paul of “*robbing glory from God?*” What we learn from this is ***there are times to teach that all piety and holiness comes from God. But it is not taking any glory from God if that is not added every time an admonition is preached.***

- who are we? What are our strengths and weaknesses? All of us can look at ourselves and find an area in which we are not proud and possibly find it even an area of hurt. Our modern culture teaches us our failings is our parents’ fault. But the Bible teaches us that even our weak areas are within the control of providence. While we cannot use God as a scapegoat as our failings nor should we ever use providence as an excuse to escape our responsibility to improve, we can use the teaching of providence as a source of blessing to realize that ***in some mysterious way I am who God intended me to be. He is not to blame for my sins but He has made me who I am ‘for such a time as this.’***

- providence also should be considered as we think of the future, and to do so makes us fear and tremble. What will you do in life? What type of person will you be? As we think of the future we should stand in awe at the absolute sovereignty of God. ***In some mysterious manner God is in control of the choices we make in this life, even those choices which lead to heartache and pain.*** One example: *who will you marry? Will your marriage be a blessing or a curse?* For one not walking with the Lord and fighting against His will, that person may make a perfectly rational choice to marry the object of his / her love, yet that choice will have behind it the hand of God and may be a matter of heartache which the Lord could use to bring us back to Him. Or we could walk with the Lord and submissively seek His face on who we should marry and the Lord can bring a person into our lives and guide our decisions in such a manner that our marriage is a great source of blessing and is used by the Lord to honor Him and glorify Him. What a difference! ***We need the blessings of God in our lives and without Him, even the ‘best’ decisions we make can be used to judge and***

discipline us to bring us back to Him. How much better would it be than to seek His face in the beginning and submit to His will in everything rather than learn the hard way.

‘Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.’ (Prov 3:5,6 KJV)

The Lord Redeems His Servant (44:23-47:15)

God’s choice of a deliverer (45:1-13)

God’s promise to Cyrus (45:1-8)

“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: I will go before you and will level the mountains; I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron. I 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. For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me. I 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, 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. I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things. “You heavens above, rain down righteousness; let the clouds shower it down. Let the

Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. For Jacob my servant’s sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me. I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things. Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth

Thus said Jehovah, To His anointed, to Cyrus, Whose right hand I have laid hold on, To subdue nations before him, Yea, loins of kings I loose, To open before him two-leaved doors, Yea, gates are not shut: ‘I go before thee, and crooked places make straight, Two-leaved doors of brass I shiver, And bars of iron I cut asunder, And have given to thee treasures of darkness, Even treasures of secret places, So that thou knowest that I, Jehovah, Who am calling on thy name — [am] the God of Israel. For the sake of my servant Jacob, And of Israel My chosen, I call also thee by thy name, I surname thee, And thou hast not known Me. I [am] Jehovah, and there is none else, Except Me there is no God, I gird thee, and thou hast not known Me. So that they know from the rising of the sun, And from the west, that there is none besides Me, I [am] Jehovah, and there is none else, Forming light, and preparing darkness, Making peace, and preparing evil, I [am] Jehovah, doing all these things.’ Drop, ye heavens, from above, And clouds do cause righteousness to flow,

earth open wide, let salvation spring up, let righteousness grow with it; I, the LORD, have created it. (NIV)

open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the LORD have created it. (KJV)

Earth openeth, and they are fruitful, Salvation and righteousness spring up together, I, Jehovah, have prepared it. (YLT)

These first eight verses of this chapter forms an address to Cyrus, called by many commentators the “Cyrus Oracle.” While speaking to Cyrus however (*“This is what the LORD says to his anointed, to Cyrus ...”* — v. 1), it is more accurate to say the Lord is speaking to the despairing Israelites who cannot see how the glowing promises of restoration can be kept. This is obvious by what precedes and follows this portion of scripture.

THE ‘CYRUS CYLINDER’ — one of the great findings of archaeology has been what’s called the ‘Cyrus Cylinder,’ a clay cylinder inscribed in cuneiform. It was discovered in 1879 and is now located in the British Museum, London (see the appendix at the bottom of the lesson). Many commentators make reference to this cylinder in connection with this oracle and some find a great deal of similarity. But Oswalt and others also make note of the great many differences between what the Lord says and what Cyrus had recorded. Indeed, *Oswalt calls the Cyrus Cylinder a ‘propaganda piece celebrating his conquest of Babylon.’* “One of the dramatic differences from the Cyrus Cylinder is that whereas there Cyrus’s virtues, strength, and leadership skills are put forward as the reasons for Marduk’s choosing him, here they do not even enter into the picture. The three reasons given (vv. 3,4,6) have solely to do with the nature and character of God. ***It is not human perfectibility on which the world’s hope rests, but the grace and the providence of God.***” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] “In the Cyrus Cylinder, the king attributes his victories to Marduk, god of Babylon; yet in Ezra 1, Cyrus is quoted as asserting that the Lord had given him dominion. ***Clearly Cyrus used the names of deities without any sense of exclusiveness.*** Josephus recorded that ‘these things Cyrus knew from reading the book of prophecy which Isaiah had left behind two hundred and ten years earlier.’” [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

CYRUS THE ANOINTED (v 1) — if Isaiah’s readers were surprised when the Lord called Cyrus ‘*God’s shepherd*’ (44:28) then they had to have been thrown into shock when the Lord calls Cyrus ‘*His anointed*.’ To be ‘anointed’ in the OT was reserved for priests, prophets and the kings of Israel (Lev 4:3; 1 Sam 2:10; 16:6; 24:6; 26:9,11,23; 2 Sam 19:21; Ps 18:50; 105:15; 1 Chron 16:22; Hab 3:13). It is the meaning of the Hebrew word messiah and the Greek word Christ (therefore ‘*Jesus Christ*’ means ‘*Jesus the Messiah, Jesus the Anointed One*’). ***“He is the only king of the Gentiles whom Jehovah ever [anointed].”*** [K&D, *Isaiah*] “Surely God could only use persons from his own elect people to accomplish his purposes. But that is exactly the point that Isaiah has been trying to make: ***God is not the Lord of Israel alone; he is the God of the whole world. Israel’s election is not for itself, and thus neither is its deliverance necessarily to be effected by itself.*** It is this sense in which *anointed* is used here: Cyrus has been especially chosen and empowered to carry out the purposes of God. ***In this sense he typifies the Messiah: he is God’s chosen instrument through whom God’s gracious purposes will be accomplished, especially as through him God is revealed to the world.***” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

GOD FIGHTING THROUGH CYRUS (v 1-3) — The Lord says he will ‘*take Cyrus by his right hand*’, a common biblical and Semitic phrase which ***indicates both choosing and intimate fellowship.*** God, taking Cyrus by hand so to speak, will subdue nations and kings (‘*loosen the loins of kings*’ is to remove the enemy’s weapon’s belt which then leaves the robe hanging down

freely so that it entangles the legs). In v. 2 Cyrus' path before him is smoothed by the hand of God, preparing the way for Cyrus. The mightiest defenses has been broken down. The treasures normally kept hidden are given over to him. ***It is important to note the activity of God in all of this: God is not outside of history but rather is involved and guides history as it pleases Him.*** Nations will fall. Some people will be imprisoned or killed, others will be freed. All of this under the active guiding hand of God. This is important to remember as we enter war in our nation. President Bush had it right while giving his speech before Congress: ***"The course of this conflict is not known, yet its outcome is certain. Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them. Fellow citizens, we'll meet violence with patient justice, assured of the rightness of our cause and confident of the victories to come. In all that lies before us, may God grant us wisdom and may he watch over the United States of America."*** [President Bush, Address to the joint session of Congress, September 20, 2001]

‘FOR THE SAKE OF...’ (v 3, 4, 6) — the Lord gives three reasons for doing this, each time introduced by the same Hebrew word meaning ‘so that...’ or ‘for the sake of...’. What were the Lord’s reasons for using Cyrus? —

- so that Cyrus would recognize Who it was that commissioned him (v. 3). ***This does not necessarily imply conversion any more than the Egyptian Pharaoh was converted when the Lord led the children of Israel out of Egypt. Pharaoh knew and recognized the hand of God but that does not demand a submissive obedience and salvation.***
- for the sake of God’s elect people Israel (v. 4). The promises of God will never fail nor falter.
- so that the whole world may know there is none other than God (v. 6). Note the progression: that Cyrus may know, that Israel may know, and that the world might know.

This is not a bruised ego speaking, *“O, that all would recognize Me as wonderful!”* That is an entirely humanistic response, one that would be common among mankind. ***For God to desire people to know Him is not a selfish consideration but rather a selfless consideration, a desire of love. Man’s greatest need is to know the Lord and if man is ignorant of God, the blame cannot be laid at the feet of God. The only thing keeping any person from the Lord is the sinful desire not to submit to Him — nothing but our own depraved choice keeps us from Him!***

GOD SOVEREIGN OVER ALL, ‘GOOD’ AND ‘BAD’ (v 7, 8) — prior to getting into the particularly difficult portion of these verses, the gist is God declares two areas in which to support His claim of absolute sovereignty: nature and history. Both of these He uses what is called ‘*the figure of antinomy*’ or polar opposites. We do the same when we speak of ‘*from north to south, east to west*’ to imply everything. ‘*He was a mess from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet.*’ In like manner God uses the opposites to illustrate He is sovereign over all ... period! ***“What Isaiah asserts is that God, as creator, is ultimately responsible for everything in nature, from light to dark, and for everything in history, from good fortune to misfortune. No other beings or forces are responsible for anything.... Young is probably correct when he says that what is being combated is the basic dualism of the human heart, in which we attribute good things to a good god and bad things to a bad god.”*** [Oswalt, Isaiah]

THE DIFFICULTIES ... — “The declaration is so bold, that Marcion appealed to this passage as a proof that the God of the Old Testament was a different being from the God of the New, and not the God of goodness only.” [K&D, Isaiah] ***The problem with such a verse lies not within God***

Himself but rather our finite ability to understand how His sovereignty interrelates with man's responsibility (as previously discussed in this lesson). Using a common illustration of the railroad tracks, they are always parallel and never come together although as we stand on the tracks and look down the way, it appears they do come together. ***I've found the best thing to do is to keep these separate for our own well-being. To God there is no paradox; to us, we cannot bring these two together without entering error.*** In commenting on these verses, one of the best explanations I've ever read is given here by Oswalt: "Without question such a sweeping assertion raises some serious problems, especially as we try to puzzle out issues of justice and fairness. At the same time, we must take into account the point being made and the alternative. ***The point is that everything which exists, whether positive or negative from our perspective, does so because of the creative will of God. The alternative to this view is that things happen in the world of nature or history that have their origin in some being or force other than God, things that he is powerless to prevent. If that alternative is correct, then God is but one of the gods and is as powerless to save us from ourselves as they are. Furthermore, he is no more the expression of ultimate reality than they are. Since he is limited, we must look beyond him for whatever is final in this world.*** Given that alternative, it is easy to see why Isaiah makes his point in such an unqualified way. To be sure, one can and should make qualifications, given the rest of Scripture. But that is the correct direction to move: from principle to qualification. If we start with qualification, we will never reach the overarching principle." [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] Possible explanations:

- one possible interpretation is to **understand the meaning of the Hebrew word to not refer to 'evil' in the sense of sin but rather 'bad events in life.'** The NIV takes this perspective in it's translation: *'I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster'* (NIV). "The Hebrew word *ra'* has a wide range of meanings, much like the English word 'bad.' Like 'bad' it can refer to moral evil ('Hitler was a bad man') or to misfortune ('I'm having a bad day') or merely to that which does not conform to some potential, real or imagined ('That's a bad road'). This is not the case with the common English equivalent for *ra'*, 'evil,' which almost always refers to moral wickedness. This if we read 'I ... create evil' (AV), we conclude that God causes people to make morally evil decisions. That this is not the correct translation of *ra'* in this circumstance is shown by the opposite term used, which is *šālôm*, 'health, well-being, peace, good relations, good fortune.' The opposite of these would be those connotations that we most commonly ascribe to 'bad.' ***What the prophet is saying is that if bad conditions exist in my life, they are not there because some evil god had thwarted the good intentions of a kindly but ineffectual grandfather-god, who would like me to have good conditions but cannot bring them about. They are there solely as a factor of my relations to the one God. They may be there because I have sinned against his natural and moral laws, or they may be there for reasons that he cannot explain to me. But they are not there in spite of God. He is the only uncaused cause in the universe.***" [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

- Others leave the interpretation of the Hebrew word as 'evil' as Keil and Delitzsch, *'I Jehovah, and there is none else, former of the light, and creator of the darkness; founder of peace, and creator of evil: I Jehovah am He who worketh all this.'* Other similar translations: *'I am the LORD, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.'* (KJV) *'I [am] Jehovah, and there is none else, Forming light, and preparing darkness, Making peace, and preparing evil, I [am] Jehovah, doing all these things.'* (Young's Literal Translation) "The meaning of the words is not exhausted by those who content themselves with the assertion, that by

the evil (or darkness) we are not to understand the evil of guilt but the evil of punishment. *Undoubtedly, evil as an act is not the direct working of God, but the spontaneous work of a creature endowed with freedom.* At the same time, evil, as well as good, has in this sense its origin in God—that He combines within Himself the first principles of love and wrath, the possibility of evil, the self-punishment of evil, and therefore the consciousness of guilt as well as the evil of punishment in the broadest sense. When the apostle celebrates the glory of free grace in Rom 9:11ff., he stands on that giddy height, to which few are able to follow him without falling headlong into the false conclusions of a [fatalism] and the denial of all creaturely freedom.” [K&D, *Isaiah*]

‘I AM CREATOR; THEREFORE, TRUST ME’ (v 8) — why is the Lord making all these assertions concerning His sovereignty and His creative powers? Is this merely a theology lesson for Israel? No, the Lord brings together a ‘lyrical call to nature’ to bring together the salvation the Creator has planned through Cyrus. *“Isaiah is not primarily interested in proving that God is Creator. Without question he passionately believes that proposition, but his reason for putting it forth is to support his claims that God is the only one who can deliver. If Israel is in the darkness and trouble (ra‘) of exile, it is solely because of the Lord. Therefore it is to the Lord alone that Israel should look in order for the darkness to be turned to light and the trouble to well-being (šālôm).”* [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] “In the prospect of this ultimate and saving purpose of the mission of Cyrus, viz., the redemption of Israel and the conversion of the heathen, heaven and earth are now summoned to bring forth and pour down spiritual blessings in heavenly gifts, according to the will and in the power of Jehovah, who has in view a new spiritual creation.” [K&D, *Isaiah*]

The Lord Redeems His Servant (44:23-47:15)

God’s choice of a deliverer (45:1-13)

God’s right to use whom he chooses (45:9-13)

<i>“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?’ Woe to him who says to his father, ‘What have you begotten?’ or to his mother, ‘What have you brought to birth?’ “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? It is I who made the earth and created mankind upon it. My</i>	<i>Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands? Woe unto him that saith unto his father, What begetteth thou? or to the woman, What hast thou brought forth? Thus saith the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me. I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even</i>	<i>Wo [to] him who is striving with his Former, (A potsherd with potsherds of the ground!) Doth clay say to its Framer, ‘What dost thou?’ And thy work, ‘He hath no hands?’ Wo [to] him who is saying to a father, ‘What dost thou beget?’ Or to a wife, ‘What dost thou bring forth? Thus said Jehovah, The Holy One of Israel, and his Former: Ask Me of the things coming concerning My sons, Yea, concerning the work of My hands, ye command Me.’ I made earth, and man on it prepared, I — My hands stretched out the</i>
---	---	--

own hands stretched out the heavens; I marshaled their starry hosts. I 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.” (NIV)

my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded. I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the LORD of hosts. (KJV)

heavens, And all their host I have commanded. I have stirred him up in righteousness, And all his ways I make straight, He doth build My city, and My captivity doth send out, Not for price, nor for bribe, said Jehovah of Hosts. (YLT)

As if to respond to the objections by the Israelites prior to those objections being voiced, the Lord reminds His chosen people of His prerogative to use who He pleases and to act as it pleases Him alone. *“When we put ourselves into the position of the Hebrew people, it is not hard to realize what a dissonant note this prophecy of Cyrus would sound. When they think of return from the Babylonian exile, they think of a second exodus, with manna from heaven, water from rocks, and another Moses. How shocking for them to hear that their deliverer would be a pagan who did not even know the Lord, Yahweh.... We may say, as is certainly correct, that this turn of events is one more example of the ‘new things’ that manifest the creative sovereignty of God (43:19; 48:6; etc.); but that is much easier to say after the fact than when one is immersed in the shockingly changed mode of operation.” [Oswalt, Isaiah]*

THE ISSUE: GOD’S RIGHT AS CREATOR — *“Here the issue is stated in terms of the right of the Creator to develop his creation in the way he chooses. The creation is in no position to dictate the terms or conditions of its development. So long as God does what is consistent with his own character and his stated purposes for creation, no successful challenge to his dominion can be mounted.” [Oswalt, Isaiah]*

WOE TO THOSE WHO FIGHT PROVIDENCE — the term ‘woe’ used here is a funeral cry and emphasizes what happens when one refuses to acknowledge the sovereignty of God over His creation. *“To disagree with God’s ordering of one’s life or one’s world is not merely a matter of preference or outlook. At bottom, it is a refusal to let God be God, a reversal of roles, in which the creature tries to make the Creator a servant to carry out the creature’s plan.... [A] persistent refusal to allow God to be God, to establish the terms of our relationship with him, as in Gen. 3, will result in a funeral — our own.” [Oswalt, Isaiah]*

ILLUSTRATIONS OF GOD’S SOVEREIGN CONTROL (v. 9,10) AGAINST ISRAEL’S OBJECTIONS TO THE USE OF CYRUS (v 11-13) — the Lord uses two illustrations of His sovereignty over creation: a lump of clay with the potter and a child to his / her progenitor. In each case the argument is the lack of basis for mankind to object to the Lord’s providence. The Lord then makes the obvious application: *‘On what basis do you question My actions?’* The Lord works as it pleases Him. *“Cyrus did not arise by accident, nor by his own choice. He rose up because I called him.... History is solely in the hands of the Creator. The great Persian emperor, like the earth and the stars, exists and comes forth at the command of God alone.” [Oswalt, Isaiah]*

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

— Isaiah 45:7 NIV

APPENDIX: THE CYRUS CYLINDER

[from <http://www.library.yale.edu/judaica/exhibits/webarch/front/BabylonianCollection.html#cylinderone>]

When Cyrus captured Babylon in 538 B.C., he decreed: ‘All the kingdoms of the earth has the Lord, the God of the heavens given to me, and he has appointed me to rebuild for Him a temple in Jerusalem which is Judaea — whoever among you from all His people — the Lord his God is with him and he may go up’ (II Chronicles 36:23; cf. Ezra 1:2-3). Thus, his own inscription confirms the Biblical record, proclaiming: ‘I returned to the sacred cities ... the sanctuaries of which have been in ruins for a long time, the images which used to live therein and established for them permanent sanctuaries. I gathered all their (former) inhabitants and returned (to them) their habitations.’ The text is still incomplete, but composed of two fragments, the larger one belonging to the British Museum, the smaller one to the Yale Babylonian Collection. The two are joined together in this plaster cast.

[from <http://www.oznet.net/cyrus/cyframe.htm>]

The First Declaration of Human Rights by Cyrus II

At the time of the Conquest of Babylon, Cyrus issued a decree on his aims and policy, later hailed as the first Charter of Human Rights. This document was part of the doctrine which Cyrus sought to put into practice with a view to bringing peace to mankind.

The following is a translation of the cuneiform script written on the original cylinder. Although sections of the cylinder have been destroyed through time, the principal message of Cyrus' Declaration is readily apparent. The Cylinder is housed at the British Museum.

So Said Cyrus

“I am Cyrus, king of the world, great king, mighty king, king of Babylon, king of the land of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four quarters, son of Cambyeses, great king, king of Anshan, grandson of Cyrus, great king, king of Anshan, descendant of Teispes, great king, king of Anshan, progeny of an unending royal line, whose rule Bel and Nabu cherish, whose kingship they desire for their

hearts' pleasures.

When I, well-disposed, entered Babylon, I established the seat of government in the royal palace amidst jubilation and rejoicing. Marduk, the great God, caused the big-hearted inhabitants of Babylon to...me. I sought daily to worship him. My numerous troops moved about undisturbed in the midst of Babylon.

I did not allow any to terrorize the land of Sumer and Akkad. I kept in view the needs of Babylon and all its sanctuaries to promote their well being. The citizens of Babylon... I lifted their unbecoming yoke. Their dilapidated dwellings I restored. I put an end to their misfortunes.

At my deeds Marduk, the great Lord, rejoiced, and to me, Cyrus, the king who worshipped, and to Cambyses, my son, the offspring of my loins, and to all my troops, he graciously gave his blessing, and in good spirit is before him we glorified/exceedingly his high divinity.

All the kings who sat in the throne rooms, throughout the four quarters, from the Upper to the Lower Sea, those who dwelt in ... all the kings of the West Country who dwelt in tents, brought me their heavy tribute and kissed my feet in Babylon. From ... to the cities of Ashur and Susa, Agade, Eshnuna, the cities of Zamban, Meurnu, Der, as far as the region of the land of Gutium, the holy cities beyond the Tigris whose sanctuaries had been in ruins over a long period, the Gods whose abode is in the midst of them. I returned to the places and housed them in lasting abodes. I gathered together all their inhabitants and restored to them their dwellings. The Gods of Sumer and Akkad whom Nabonidus had, to the anger of the Lord of the Gods, brought into Babylon, I at the bidding of Marduk, the great Lord made to dwell in peace in their habitations, delightful abodes.

May all the gods whom I have placed within their sanctuaries address a daily prayer in my favour before Bel and Nabu, that my days may long, and may they say to Marduk my Lord, May Cyrus the King who reveres thee, and Cambyses his son ...”