
Observations from Isaiah

LESSON XXXVII : THE UNIVERSAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF ISRAEL'S SOVEREIGN GOD (45:1-4-25)

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)
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 - (1) The Creator is the Savior (45:14-19)
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c. God's superiority over the idols (45:14-46:13)

(1) The Creator is the Savior (45:14-19)

<i>This is what the LORD says: The products of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush, and those tall Sabeans — they will come over to you and will be yours; they will trudge behind you, coming over to you in chains. They will bow down before you and plead with you, saying, 'Surely God is with you, and there is no other; there is no other god.' Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God and Savior of Israel. All the makers of idols will be put to shame and disgraced; they will go off into disgrace together. But Israel</i>	<i>Thus saith the LORD, The labor of Egypt, and merchandise of Ethiopia and of the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over unto thee, and they shall be thine: they shall come after thee; in chains they shall come over, and they shall fall down unto thee, they shall make supplication unto thee, saying, Surely God is in thee; and there is none else, there is no God. Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Savior. They shall be ashamed, and also confounded, all of them: they shall go to confusion together</i>	<i>Thus said Jehovah, 'The labour of Egypt, And the merchandise of Cush, And of the Sebaim — men of measure, Unto thee pass over, and thine they are, After thee they go, in fetters they pass over, And unto thee they bow themselves, Unto thee they pray: Only in thee [is] God, And there is none else, no [other] God. Surely Thou [art] a God hiding Thyself, God of Israel — Saviour! They have been ashamed, And they have even blushed — all of them, Together gone in confusion have those carving images.</i>
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will be saved by the LORD with an everlasting salvation; you will never be put to shame or disgraced, to ages everlasting. For this is what the LORD 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 empty, but formed it to be inhabited — he says: I am the LORD, and there is no other. I have not spoken in secret, from somewhere in a land of darkness; I have not said to Jacob’s descendants, ‘Seek me in vain.’ I, the LORD, speak the truth; I declare what is right. (NIV)

that are makers of idols. But Israel shall be saved in the LORD with an everlasting salvation: ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end. For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else. I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain: I the LORD speak righteousness, I declare things that are right.

(KJV)

Israel hath been saved in Jehovah, A salvation age-during! Ye are not ashamed nor confounded Unto the ages of eternity! For thus said Jehovah, Creator of heaven, He is God, Former of earth, and its Maker, He established it — not empty He prepared it, For inhabiting He formed it: ‘I [am] Jehovah, and there is none else. Not in secret have I spoken, in a dark place of the earth, I have not said to the seed of Jacob, In vain seek ye Me, I [am] Jehovah, speaking righteousness, Declaring uprightness. (YLT)

“The themes [of this portion of Isaiah] are typical of those that have appeared already in the book: the uniqueness of the Lord, and his consequent superiority to the idols; his incomparable care for Israel; the absolute reliability of the predictions that he had given to Israel’s prophets in the past, and the challenge to have faith in him in the uncertain present. The one new emphasis in this part of the book — the promise that the idol makers will affirm that God is the Lord — does not provide the organizing theme of the materials. Rather, it seems to be offered as one more evidence for God’s absolute superiority.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

‘SUBMIT!’ – NOT TO THE GODS OF CYRUS BUT TO THE GOD OF ISRAEL — The Lord just revealed that His deliverance will be by His servant Cyrus. Isaiah continues here so there will be no misunderstanding as to the real Deliverer. This is not a reference to Cyrus for the last part of the verse states the people come because they recognize God as the only God, but 45:5 states Cyrus was not saved. The reference must be of Israel and Israel’s God. *“Hence, then, rather than being nations that have been conquered, these nations appear to be used as typical representatives of such things as the ends of the earth, great wealth, physical beauty, and so on (cf. Ps 68:31; 72:10; Isa 18:1,7). The day will come, Isaiah says, when all the nations will recognize that there is no other God than the Lord, no matter how far away they are, how wealthy they may be, or how regal in stature (men of measure evidently refers to the legendary tallness of the Ethiopians; cf. 18:2; also Num 13:32).”* [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

HISTORIC OR PROPHETIC? — *“Certainly these events did not happen in the immediate postexilic age.* But, as Calvin observes, Isaiah clearly telescopes the entire period between the return from exile and the coming of the Messiah. When that is borne in mind one can argue for a clear literal sense, especially as seen in the book of Acts.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] Since this cannot be purely historical, when is this fulfilled? I believe that while it might partially be fulfilled in our present church age when the Gentiles come to acknowledge the God of Israel (Jesus the Messiah), a more fuller and literal fulfilment is yet future.

VOLUNTARY SUBMISSION — *“At first glance the reference to chains might suggest that this is not conversion but captivity and conquest. But the context shows a voluntary submission and a glad surrender.”* [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] “The chains in which they come over cannot be regarded, at least in this connection, where such emphasis is laid upon the voluntary character of the surrender, as placed upon them by Israel itself (as in Isa 60:11 and Ps 149:8). ***We must therefore suppose that they put chains upon themselves voluntarily, and of their own accord, and thus offer themselves spontaneously to the church, to be henceforth its subjects and slaves.... The voluntary character of the surrender is pointed out, not only in the expression ‘they will come over,’ but also in the confession with which this is accompanied.***” [K&D, *Isaiah*] “Despite their chains, the language suggests the people will voluntarily submit, and that for the best of reasons — recognition of Israel’s God and him alone. Young says, ‘Paul evidently reflects upon this language when he says, ... and declare that God of a truth is in you’ (1 Cor 14:25).” [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

CREATING A THIRST FOR GOD — a practical application from these verses is the heathen were converted when they truly saw God in His people! This speaks to the unbalance in many Christians today. Some believers are quick and bold to speak for the Lord, yet many times their lives do not match their testimony. On the other hand many hold only to a ‘life-style evangelism’ where how they live ‘speaks’ for the Lord (in other words they do not witness, they just live as obediently as possible for the Lord). ***Both of these are errors. The balance is to live for the Lord while being bold to speak a word when the Lord provides the opportunity.*** In response to the first error: God cannot truly use those who have sin in their lives, and many ‘bold witnesses’ for the Lord believe the Bible message is found in the Great Commission only. Unknowingly their Christian life could be summarized as ‘God overlooks sin in my life because I witness to others’. Often in such fervor to be witness, Bible study and prayer is neglected and the believer becomes blind to the sin in his life. That’s an error (note the Lord’s emphasis in the Sermon on the Mount: the first part of His sermon is the Beatitudes, as if to say ***He is more concerned with who we are rather than what we do!***). But the other error is just as wrong: to live for the Lord but never speak a word of witness. I have worked with Catholics, Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons and many others who lived impeccable lives. How are the unbelievers to know that we stand for Jesus just because of our lives? I often wonder if those who are unbalanced in this area recognize that by never speaking a word of witness, they are not glorifying the Lord but are rather glorifying themselves. They may live impeccable lives, but what do the lost say? ‘That person is a great worker, a wonderful family man / woman, a truly honest person.’ Who gets the glory? — not the Lord! So not all ‘lifestyle evangelism’ is evangelism! ***The proper balance is to be a bold witness while having a life that will attract attention to our message. By living correctly and speaking correctly, the unbeliever will have a desire to have what we have.***

“YOU ARE A GOD WHO HIDES HIMSELF” — There is a question here of who is speaking in this verse? Some take it to be the captives, others believe it to be Israel. Oswalt believes it is the captives, saying this is confusing if the comment is made by Israel, especially when in v19 it contradicts this statement. He states the verse makes best sense when considered as a continued statement from the nations coming to Israel for their God, a continuation of what began in v14. “Is it a mistaken statement by those who have rejected revelation? Is it an observation about the surprising fact that the Savior should come from little, insignificant Israel? Or is it in some sense an expression of theological truth? I suspect it is a combination of all three. ***Rom 1 and Ps 19:1-6 make plain that there is enough revelation in nature that all of us who do not seek on his terms are without excuse. Nevertheless, it is evident that nature alone is never enough so that the***

unaided human intellect can attain to an understanding of God (Rom 11:23; Prov 25:2). Furthermore, God's insistence on using the weak and foolish things of this world by which to reveal himself (cf. 1 Cor 1:21, 25-29) is, at the least, unexpected. Finally, there are times when, because of human unbelief, God does hide himself until frustration brings us to our knees and to a willingness to believe (Isa 8:17; 54:8). Thus if we say that there is no compelling evidence for the existence of a just God to whom we owe obedience, we are surely wrong. By contrast, if we admit that neither God's ways nor his thoughts are ours (54:8), and that unless he bridges the gulf between us we are forever lost, we speak nothing but the truth. Thus the nations are speaking at once of the ineffable transcendence of God, a God who hides himself, and of his revealed presence as Savior of the world, God of Israel, Savior." [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

There are those who differ with Oswalt and takes this to be an exclamation of praise: *"What follows in v. 15 is not a continuation of the words of the Gentiles, but a response of the church to their confession. The nations that have been idolatrous till now, bend in humble spontaneous worship before the church and its God; and at the sight of this, the church, from whose soul the prophet is speaking, bursts out into an exclamation of reverential amazement. V. 15. 'Verily Thou art a mysterious God, Thou God of Israel, Thou Saviour.' Literally, a God who hides Himself. The meaning is, a God who guides with marvelous strangeness the history of the nations of the earth, and by secret ways, which human eyes can never discern, conducts all to a glorious issue. The exclamation in Rom 11:33, 'O the depth of the riches,' etc., is a similar one."* [K&D, *Isaiah*]

THE GOD OF ETERNAL SALVATION — *Considering there are multitudes of idols in the world, it is surprising the Lord is not in at least one of them!* But proof that God is not in any of them is given by the fact that none of the idols can save the worshipers. They are not God at all. The worshipers will one day be shamed and disgraced because of their misplaced confidence. In contrast Israel will never be put to shame because of their confidence in the Lord. "Isaiah's promises are here put in the most absolutistic terms: it is an eternal salvation; Israel will not be humiliated forever and ever. But sincere believers in Israel and in the church have had their hopes dashed from time to time since the prophet penned these words. *Are these beautiful promises merely a flight of rhetoric? They are not; they continue to be true in at least two ways. On the one hand, Isaiah is maintaining that God's trustworthiness is of an eternal variety. There will never come a time when the God of Israel will suddenly cease to be trustworthy. On the other hand, the prophet is insisting that whatever may happen along the way, however we may suffer or be troubled, God will in the end deliver us — for all eternity.*" [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

THE GOD OF REVELATION — *His character is our confidence:* "What explains the failure of the idols and the eternal trustworthiness of God (vv. 16-17)? It is the nature and character of God, a God who longs to reveal himself to his people. In vv. 18-19 verbs for speaking occur four times. This is of utmost importance. How do we know the ineffably transcendent God? In only one way: if he communicates himself to us in ways that are intelligible to us.... *Israel did not discover God through manipulation of the spirits in secret places of darkness. Rather, God has initiated the conversation, speaking clearly in ways that can be clearly verified.*" [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]
 "Perhaps he does hide himself, for revelation is his sole prerogative; but when he does speak, his word is clear and true, enabling his people called to seek him — to find him in truth (v. 19)." [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

THE GOD OF CREATION — *“Who is this God who reveals himself to us? He is the sole Creator. Again this is underlined: four different verbs are used, and two of them are twice repeated, to make the point that the heavens and earth are the handiwork of God. He created, and formed, and made, and established them. Furthermore, he did it by himself. Thus it is no surprise if the idol-gods are always failing those who make them.* They have not set the earth in place or stretched out the heavens. They are not causal but derivative. Furthermore, since they did not make the world, they can hardly be expected to have a purpose for it. Since they lack both ultimate power and ultimate purpose, it is no wonder that one cannot depend upon them.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

CREATION OR EVOLUTION? — Tomorrow, April 22nd is ‘Earth Day’. While there is nothing improper with emphasizing man’s responsibility as a steward of this planet, the humanists take this as a day to worship our ‘Mother Earth’. The Bible gives a much different picture. *“The first parenthesis affirms that Jehovah is God in the fullest and most exclusive sense; the second that He has created the earth for man’s sake, not ‘as a desert’, i.e., not to be and continue to be a desert, but to be inhabited.* [K&D, *Isaiah*] One of the words used is the Heb word *bārā’* meaning ‘create’ with a special emphasis on bringing something into existence that has not existed before. God created *ex nihilo* meaning ‘a beginning and bringing out of nothing and not any mere fashioning of some pre-existent matter or pre-matter.’ God did not start with something and make the universe; greater than that: He started with nothing and even make the materials out of which the universe is made. “Chaos did not exist before God, and God did not bring a meaningless chaos into existence. Rather, the preexistent God created the cosmos specifically for human habitation. Since he is the only God, his purposes are the only normative explanation for existence. Furthermore, since the universe was created for the purpose of human habitation, it is incumbent on God to reveal that purpose to humans, and that is precisely what he has done.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

c. God’s superiority over the idols (45:14-46:13)

(2) God saves, not the idols (45:20-25)

<i>Gather together and come; assemble, you fugitives from the nations. Ignorant are those who carry about idols of wood, who pray to gods that cannot save. Declare what is to be, present it — let them take counsel together. Who foretold this long ago, who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, the LORD? And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me. Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. By myself I</i>	<i>Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, ye that are escaped of the nations: they have no knowledge that set up the wood of their graven image, and pray unto a God that cannot save. Tell ye, and bring them near; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have not I the LORD? and there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Savior; there is none beside me. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. I</i>	<i>Be gathered, and come in, Come nigh together, ye escaped of the nations, They have not known, Who are lifting up the wood of their graven image, And praying unto a god [that] saveth not. Declare ye, and bring near, Yea, they take counsel together, Who hath proclaimed this from of old? From that time hath declared it? Is it not I — Jehovah? And there is no other god besides Me, A God righteous and saving, there is none save Me. Turn to Me, and be saved, all ends of the earth, For I [am] God, and there is</i>
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have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. They will say of me, 'In the LORD alone are righteousness and strength.' All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame. But in the LORD all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous and will exult. (NIV)

have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. Surely, shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed. In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory. (KJV)

none else. By Myself I have sworn, Gone out from my mouth in righteousness hath a word, And it turneth not back, That to Me, bow doth every knee, every tongue swear. Only in Jehovah, said hath one, Have I righteousness and strength, Unto Him he cometh in, And ashamed are all those displeased with Him. In Jehovah are all the seed of Israel justified, And they boast themselves.' (YLT)

THE TRUE GOD REGARDLESS OF PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES — “This is the second of four parts in a unit (45:14-46:13) that describes God’s unique ability to save his people, especially as compared with the Babylonian idols. *The daring approach here deserves to be underlined. Throughout chs. 40-55, the people of Israel are envisioned as being in bondage in Babylon. This situation has raised a serious question: Has not the God of Israel been thoroughly discredited? Should not Israel adopt the gods of her captors? One reasonable approach would be to admit the claims of the Babylonians gods, but to try to carve out a niche — much reduced, to be sure — for the Lord. But Isaiah is not content with such an approach. Instead, he insists that it is the captors, the Babylonians, who need to look to their deliverance. Far from Israel being concerned over whether their God can deliver them from Babylon, it is the mighty Babylonians who should be worrying over whether the gods whom they have served can deliver them!* Then the prophet moves to his astounding climax. If Babylon wishes to be delivered from its fate, it must look to the God of the captives, the God of Israel. It is not that God will somehow pull off a coup and spirit his people away from the great gods of Babylon. It is that the gods of Babylon will fail utterly, prompting the Babylonians to seek the help of the one whom they had previously mocked.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

Believers in America may feel as Israel did in the days of her captivity. God is increasingly legislated out of open society. Mention of Him in public is ridiculed at best (at least the true and living God; other gods are permitted to flourish). Churches are weak, lacking in prayer and Bible-centered teaching. Emotions, rock music and chanting are replacing worship. Revival is desperately needed but not even a small cloud can be seen on the horizon. Is God beaten? Should believers “drop this nonsense” and turn to the gods of the world? Have they won? We need to once again hear the words of Isaiah: God is still in control of history. It is not we who have lost; not when victory was won at the cross. Today’s “winners” are the ones who need warned of their erroneous ways. They too must seek the God they so readily mock before it is too late; for when He moves, the gods of this world will not help them. God will once again deliver His people. “*Even so come, Lord Jesus.*”

CHALLENGE TO EVALUATE WHO IS GOD — *God calls the people of the world together to come and evaluate who is the true God.* Refugees of the nations = looks forward to the time when the judgment brought forth by Cyrus have already occurred. Those remaining after the destruction are challenged to consider what all that meant. They are described as departing hauling

their “gods” behind them. ***God confronts them: “of what good were your gods? Who now do you say is God?”*** cp Ps 2:2 where the rulers of the earth gather themselves together to fight God. “Hence this summons to listen to the self-assertion of the God of revelation is addressed to the escaped of the heathen, who are not therefore the converted, but those who are susceptible of salvation, and therefore spared.... ***The heathen who have been preserved will assemble together; and from the fact that Jehovah proves Himself the sole foreteller of the events that are now unfolding themselves, they will be brought to the conviction that He is the only God.***” [K&D, *Isaiah*]

PROPHECY IS PROOF OF THE DEITY OF ISRAEL’S GOD — At the heart of this is God’s ability to predict the future and providentially bring to pass those predictions. It is not now a question of God’s power: “Look and see what I can do with my awful, majestic power!” Many things can happen which one can attribute to their god. ***But here God predicts and then when it comes to pass says “See, it is I who did these things.”*** The Lord uses this as proof of His deity.

Where did the Lord predict this would come to pass? Oswalt believes the best answer to that question is in the passage before us. Isaiah is predicting the future deliverance of Israel by Cyrus, then using this prediction so that 150 years later when it comes to pass, the Israelites can look back and see it was the hand of God that brought this about, not fate nor luck.

GOD IS AN EXCLUSIVE GOD — Isaiah speaks of God as the only Savior, the only true and living God. That teaching is anathema in our American pluralistic society! ... but it is the Bible’s teaching! Jesus is the only way, the only truth, and the exclusive life (John 14:7). This always brings the question of the heathen to mind: what about those who have never heard? Are they lost? The scriptural answer to that is yes, anyone without Christ is lost. The heathen will not be judged as we are since we have the light of the word of God, but they will be judged according to the revelation God has given them (Rom 1,2). ***To illustrate this: suppose two people had the same disease. This disease would be fatal if not treated. One of these men live on a deserted island without hospitals nor doctors, the other lived in an affluent society. While the man living in the city had the means to seek medical help, he did not consider the disease to be a threat so did not go to the doctor. In time both men died. Why did they die? Not because one had the means to get help but did not, nor because the other could not get help. They both died because they had the same fatal disease. In like manner all men are sinners. Without coming to repentance and a saving knowledge of Christ, all men will perish eternally. It is not because one had the means to go to church and read the scriptures but rejected that means, while another person may never hear the name of Jesus. Rather men die lost because of sin. The only remedy is Christ, whether He’s made known to them or not!***

GOD IS A RIGHTEOUS GOD — the righteous God = could refer to several things. In the Heb it is *el-saddiq* which is found only here in the Bible. The closest equivalent is Ps 7:9 where the Heb is *elohim-saddiq*. ***“The general sense is of a God who is and does what is right. This has been an important point throughout this chapter. God was right to call Cyrus (v. 13). The words that the Lord speaks are correct (vv. 9,23). He will do the right thing for his people, that is, save them (v. 8). All this is in contrast to the gods, whose adherents are unable to show that their gods have ever been right in what they have said or done (43:9). But the Israelites who have trusted in God to do right (v. 24) will be shown to have been right in that trust (v. 25).”*** [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

GOD IS A SAVING GOD — This segment is about the salvation of the world. “By virtue of his uniqueness and his sole creatorship, God is the only one to whom the peoples of the world may look. He is not the savior of Israel because he is Israel’s God. He is savior of Israel because he is

the savior of the world. This is the audacity of Isaiah's argument. But it is also the inexorable logic of that argument. *If he is not the creator of the world, if he is not other than the world, then history is as much a puzzle to him as it is to the rest of the gods, and he cannot save anyone, just as the gods cannot. But if he is the creator, if he is transcendent, then he is not one of the gods, he is not part of the cosmos, and he can deliver his own from anything in the cosmos. This argument is as radical today, and as distasteful to some, as it was twenty-seven hundred years ago. This is a radically exclusivist message. There is only one God, and only one savior, and he is the God of Israel. This is the biblical message. If this message is correct, then there is only one response: surrender and worship. If the message is incorrect, then the Bible cannot be salvaged. Its central view of existence, its fundamental premise, is wrong, and everything that flows from that premise is wrong too. Isaiah's challenge is perennial: you must accept my word or deny it; what you cannot do is modify it.* [Oswalt, Isaiah]

GOD IS A FORGIVING GOD — If Isaiah were speaking merely as a human, this verse might resound with ridicule and mocking in return for the abuse the Babylonians gave to Israel. Instead, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Isaiah writes of the appeal of God for the lost to come. *"Surely the ringing affirmations of the previous verses should now give rise to a scornful call to the idolatrous world to prepare for destruction. Their gods have failed them, and the true God whom Israel serves will now visit the results of that failure on them. But instead, there is a call to experience the same salvation that the Israelites have experienced. To be sure, that experience is predicated on a turning around and looking to the Lord in trust. In many OT texts the unrepentant and unbelieving world has destruction meted out on it. But the point here is that salvation is not the sole preserve of the Israelites whose God the Lord is."* [Oswalt, Isaiah]

GOD IS A SOVEREIGN GOD — Isaiah continues his point of the entire section: there is only one true God of heaven and earth, the God of Israel. But regardless of the outcome of the offer of salvation, the world universal will bow the knee one day to the God of Israel. *This is quoted twice by Paul to show not only that all will be judged by God (Rom 14:10-12) but that Jesus will be exalted over all as well (Phil 2:9-11). The bowing down will be the act of a condemned criminal or of a pardoned worshiper, but all will bow. "The only hope for Israel and the world is in the Lord. It is not in the religion of Israel, nor in the might and glory of the nations; it is in the Lord."* [Oswalt, Isaiah] "A word has gone forth from this mouth of righteousness; and after it has once gone forth, it does not return without accomplishing its object (Isa 55:11). *What follows is not so much a promising prediction (that every knee will bend to me), as a definitive declaration of will (that it shall or must bend to me).*" [K&D, Isaiah]

GOD IS A TRIUNE GOD — This is a repeated observation but one cannot help but notice how the NT picks up on these themes of God's deity and apply them to Jesus. The only answer to these cross-references is either the scripture is in error (which cannot be) or God is a three-in-one Deity, the Trinity. *"God's great decree has been announced that all humanity shall come to acknowledge his sovereignty (v. 23). There are definite echoes of v. 23 in Philippians 2:10-11, with implications concerning the deity of Jesus all the more impressive because of the emphatic monotheism of the context here. All will not be saved, but all must acknowledge the Lord as God alone (v. 24). Under his ultimate sovereignty there will be both judgment for the rebel and salvation for God's people."* [Grogan, Isaiah]

c. God's superiority over the idols (45:14-46:13)

(3) Idols do not carry but are carried (46:1-7)

Bel bows down, Nebo stoops low; their idols are borne by beasts of burden. The images that are carried about are burdensome, a burden for the weary. They stoop and bow down together; unable to rescue the burden, they themselves go off into captivity. Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all you who remain of the house of Israel, you whom I have upheld since you were conceived, and have carried since your birth. Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you. To whom will you compare me or count me equal? To whom will you liken me that we may be compared? Some pour out gold from their bags and weigh out silver on the scales; they hire a goldsmith to make it into a god, and they bow down and worship it. They lift it to their shoulders and carry it; they set it up in its place, and there it stands. From that spot it cannot move. Though one cries out to it, it does not answer; it cannot save him from his troubles. (NIV)

Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth, their idols were upon the beasts, and upon the cattle: your carriages were heavy loaden; they are a burden to the weary beast. They stoop, they bow down together; they could not deliver the burden, but themselves are gone into captivity. Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which are born by me from the belly, which are carried from the womb: And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you. To whom will ye liken me, and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be like? They lavish gold out of the bag, and weigh silver in the balance, and hire a goldsmith; and he maketh it a God: they fall down, yea, they worship. They bear him upon the shoulder, they carry him, and set him in his place, and he standeth; from his place shall he not remove: yea, one shall cry unto him, yet can he not answer, nor save him out of his trouble. (KJV)

Bowed down hath Bel, stooping is Nebo, Their idols have been for the beast and for cattle, Your burdens are loaded, a burden to the weary. They have stooped, they have bowed together, They have not been able to deliver the burden, And themselves into captivity have gone. Hearken unto Me, O house of Jacob, And all the remnant of Israel, Who are borne from the belly, Who are carried from the womb, Even to old age I [am] He, and to grey hairs I carry, I made, and I bear, yea, I carry and deliver. To whom do ye liken Me, and make equal? And compare Me, that we may be like? — They are pouring out gold from a bag, And silver on the beam they weigh, They hire a refiner, and he maketh it a god, They fall down, yea, they bow themselves. They lift him up on the shoulder, They carry him, and cause him to rest in his place, And he standeth, from his place he moveth not, Yea, one crieth unto him, and he answereth not, From his adversity he saveth him not. (YLT)

This third unit serves to sum up the arguments that God is superior to the pagan gods in all ways, especially in the ability to deliver from the tragedies of life.

BEL AND NEBO — “*Bel and Nebo are two of the chief gods of Babylon.* Bel, or ‘lord,’ was a title originally given to Enlil, the so-called father of the gods whose center was at Nippur. But Marduk, the city god of Babylon and hero of *Enuma Elish* (the Babylonian creation epic), eventually became the chief god of southern Mesopotamia, and the title became his. Marduk’s son

Nebo (or *Nabu*), the god of the scribe and of intellectual pursuits, had his seat at Borsippa, some 10 miles south of Babylon. In view of the prominence of *Nabu* in the names of the key figures in the Neo-Babylonian Empire (*Nabopolassar*, *Nebuchadnezzar*, *Nabonidus*), it is likely that *Nabu* was the titular god of that empire and its rulers.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

CREATED GODS CANNOT SAVE — “These were not only the most prominent of the Babylonian gods but also especially appropriate for the prophet’s diatribe because their images were carried in the annual New Year’s Festival procession in Babylon.... The point that the prophet is making is that any god who is so much a part of creation that its representation has to be carried by humans is going to be of no help when those humans are herded off into captivity. ***As they have been carried by creatures in honor, they will be carried by creatures in dishonor.*** That this was the regular course of affairs would have been well known to readers of the book at any time, before or after the fall of Babylon, and would have served to illustrate the basic point effectively. Were mighty *Bel* and *Nebo* different from any of the other gods? No. Like them, *Bel* and *Nebo* were merely personalized forces of the creation, no more free than any other, without consistent purpose or direction, and thus unable to rise above anything that might be happening in the course of creation or historical events.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] ***“How different is the Lord’s relationship to his people! No contrast could be greater. His people do not carry him; rather he bears them, and moreover he always has done so and always will. This passage is an inspired affirmation of the only worthy concept of deity, that of the true eternal God, over against the gross inadequacies and irreverences of paganism.*** The verbs used here — repeating and underlining over and over again the fact that he is the God who carries his people — give place suddenly and dramatically at the end of v. 4 to a new one. The God of their history promises to rescue them. The work of *Cyrus* was to be viewed as God’s great work of deliverance.... *Isaiah* has already proclaimed the Lord’s uniqueness in ringing rhetorical questions (cf. 40:18, 25); and he repeats this, most aptly here (v. 5), for that uniqueness has been singularly demonstrated in the overthrow of Babylon’s gods. Not in their downfall alone, but at every point in their history, the idols’ paltry character vividly contrasts with the Lord’s unique majesty. The poor values of man determine their idols’ materials. The whole process, from the preparation through the commissioning of the workmen and the transportation of the idols to their eventual worship, is quite unavailing; for they are powerless to hear, to speak, or to save. [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

GOD CARRIES HIS OWN — The Lord now turns the tables and addresses Israel. When did they ever have to carry God? From the very beginning of their existence God had been carrying them! Three images are involved here: a father carrying a child (*Deut* 1:31), a shepherd carrying his lamb (*Psalms* 28:9), and an eagle carrying its eaglets (*Exodus* 19:4; *Deut* 32:11). There is a point in which the analogies break-down however. ***All creatures and children grow to the point of not having to be carried, but no human ever grows to the point of not having depend upon the Lord. In fact, one of the greatest sins among believers is not depending upon the Lord.*** “What the exiles of both houses were to hear was the question in v. 5, which called upon them to consider the incomparable nature of their God, as deduced from what *Jehovah* could say of Himself in relation to all Israel.... ***Babylon carried its idols, but all in vain: they were carried forth, without being able to save themselves; but Jehovah carried His people, and saved them.*** The expressions, ‘from the womb, and from the mother’s lap,’ point back to the time when the nation which had been in process of formation from the time of *Abraham* onwards came out of *Egypt*, and was born, as it were, into the light of the world. From this time forward it had lain upon *Jehovah* like a willingly adopted burden, and He had carried it as a nurse carries a suckling (*Num* 11:12), and an eagle its young (*Deut* 32:11). In v. 4 the attributes of the people are carried on in direct (not relative) self-

assertions on the part of Jehovah..... As He has acted in the past, so will He act at all times—supporting and saving His people. Hence He could properly ask, Whom could you place by the side of me, so that we should be equal?” [K&D, Isaiah] *The logical conclusion in the contrast between the Lord and the gods of this world is that there is no comparison between them.*

c. God's superiority over the idols (45:14-46:13)

(4) God's righteous purpose in Cyrus (46:8-13)

Remember this, fix it in mind, take it to heart, you rebels. Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose. What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do. Listen to me, you stubborn-hearted, you who are far from righteousness. I am bringing my righteousness near, it is not far away; and my salvation will not be delayed. I will grant salvation to Zion, my splendor to Israel. (NIV)

Remember this, and shew yourselves men: bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors. Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it. Harken unto me, ye stout-hearted, that are far from righteousness: I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry: and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory. (KJV)

Remember this, and shew yourselves men, Turn [it] back, O transgressors, to the heart. Remember former things of old, For I [am] Mighty, and there is none else, God — and there is none like Me. Declaring from the beginning the latter end, And from of old that which hath not been done, Saying, ‘My counsel doth stand, And all My delight I do.’ Calling from the east a ravenous bird, From a far land the man of My counsel, Yea, I have spoken, yea, I bring it in, I have formed [it], yea, I do it. Harken unto Me, ye mighty in heart, Who are far from righteousness. I have brought near My righteousness, It is not far off, And My salvation — it doth not tarry, And I have given in Zion salvation, To Israel My glory! (YLT)

note God's sovereignty over nations – cp today and Middle East

PROPHECY FULFILLED IN CYRUS — *“This section is in many ways a summing up of the argument not only of 44:23-46:7 but also of 40:1-46:7. The Israel that feels itself both helpless and hopeless is called to remember that there is only one God — theirs. He has demonstrated the truth of this proposition in their history, not only by what he has done but also by his ability through the prophets to announce what he would do in advance. He can act because he stands outside history and is all-powerful; he can tell the future because all things unfold according to his purposes. Now he proposes to act in yet another confirmation of a prophetic word, this time through the coming of Cyrus. The only real question is: Given the stupendous nature of his claims and the unprecedented nature of this particular promise, will Israel believe God? Or will they remain stubborn and rebellious, able to focus only on the reality of their terrible misfortune?” [Oswalt, Isaiah]*

A GOOD MEMORY AIDS FAITH — Isaiah brings forth an aid to help Israel to believe: their memories. Remembering the past actions of God helps us through the present difficulties. How far back should they remember? *“Specifically, the prophet wants his people to reflect on all that they know of God as far back as they can go — from eternity.... It is not just the exodus events that are in mind here. It is all the former things that have been recorded for Israel’s memory, including creation and the flood, the patriarchs, the exodus, the conquest, the judges, David and Solomon, and on and on. Remember these things, because their testimony is unanimous: only the Being who did all that has the right to be called God; there is no other.”* [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

“This part of Isaiah concentrates largely on consolation and encouragement, but the prophet was a realist and knew from experience that there was much unbelief among the people. They approached the prophecies of Cyrus and his work with skepticism. The Lord calls them to consider the history of his relationship with his people (vv. 8-9). *This illustrates the important fact that faith has objective reference and so is a response to revelation, to truth about God declared by God himself.* The people’s whole history had demonstrated his sole deity and especially his power to predict (v. 10). He asserts it again: from the east (v. 11; cf. 41:2), Cyrus will swoop on his victims, as suddenly as the descent of an eagle or a falcon from the sky. Whether they believe it or not (v. 12), it will happen; for in this way the Lord would fulfill his saving purpose for Israel. The term ‘Zion’ here (v. 13) should be noted; it is a reminder of the promises of 44:26-28.” [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

FROM WAVERING FAITH TO WILLFUL UNBELIEF — *“These two verses represent a call to accept the conclusions that the preceding arguments lead to: that God can and will deliver his people. To continue to question this is no longer an absence of faith but a willful refusal to believe. It is to manifest that hard-hearted attitude that produced the disaster at Kadesh-barnea (Num 14:1-10). We often consider hard-heartedness the result of arrogance, the attitude of those who do not think they need deliverance. But it may be just as much, as here, the response of those who recognize their need but cannot believe that God can meet it.”* [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

“But Israel will be saved by the LORD with an everlasting salvation; you will never be put to shame or disgraced, to ages everlasting.”

— Isaiah 45:17 NIV