

Is.41:1-4 (WCF 5:1-4) “God Disposes”

For the Children: Why do people do bad things? Because they want to! But there is another reason: because even though the Lord does not want people to do evil, He does want to use their evil to carry out His good purposes. This is what He did with the Lord Jesus. God hates the evil that Jesus’ enemies did in crucifying Him. But God planned it for the salvation of sinners. He planned it and He made sure that it happened. When you are tempted to do bad things, you should never blame God and say He made you do it. But you should never think that the Lord has lost control of your situation. **Questions:** How does this passage show us that God is in control of the decisions that leaders and nations make? How should unbelieving people respond to this truth that God is in charge? How should His people respond?

Introduction:

First Point: Who Directs the Nations

- 1) The Lord Directs the Nations: The text speaks of the Lord “arousing one from the east” (Cyrus); subduing kings and delivering up nations before him; pursuing and destroying one nation, enabling him to press on to places he had not been before (v.3); in fact, it is the Lord who called the nations into being and enabled them to have successive generations. See Acts 17:26.
- 2) Governing All Things: For the Lord to direct kings and nations in this way, He must be the One who “upholds, directs, disposes and governs all creatures, actions and things” (WCF 5:1). This is a good definition of Providence.
- 3) The Lord, the First and the Last: The Name “Yahweh” means that God is the eternal, immutable, independent, Self-existent God. He was there before Creation and will be there at the end. See Rev. 22:13 for similar language about Christ. He does not depend on creatures, circumstances present or future, nations or kings. He is the God of Providence..

Second Point: His Use of Means

- 1) Secondary Means: God uses creatures and circumstances to carry out His eternal, unchanging purposes, under His overarching governance. See WCF 5:2. This is obvious from His use of the Babylonians to chastise and Cyrus to free Israel. They acted as they wished, for their own purposes, but the Lord’s purpose is the one that ultimately governs the situation. The Lord is also free to act without, above or against these means (WCF 5:3).
- 2) Many question God’s goodness in governing evil. V.2 simply states that the Lord called Cyrus to His feet “in righteousness.” WCF 5:4 answers by simply stating that God is not the Author or Approver of evil. The article does not encourage the view of a weak “permissive will” of God as the answer. It insists that His “permission” is always connected to His predestination, and His Providential “bounding, governing and ordering” of His creatures. We may add that since evil is defined by opposing God’s glory, the Lord’s predestination, commanding, and bringing of final outcomes in His providence is never evil – for it is always for His glory.

Third Point: How the Nations Should Respond

- 1) They Should Listen to the Lord’s Warning: The Lord calls the Gentile nations to listen in reverential silence to His warning about Cyrus. They should prepare to face Cyrus. But the Lord warns that He will send Cyrus against them to punish them for their idolatry. The God of Providence will one day gather them for a final judgment. They should bow before this Ruling God.
- 2) An Encouragement for Israel: Israel was also going to be chastised for idolatry. But God would use Cyrus to free them (vss.8f.) . One day, He would use His Son to bring a greater freedom from sin. He could be guaranteed to keep this promise, because He is the God who governs all creatures, actions and things.

Conclusion: