

EXPOSITION OF ISAIAH

Message #66

Isaiah 45:1-7

There is a song that says, “I know who holds the future and I know He holds my hand,” with God things don’t just happen, everything by Him is planned. So as I face tomorrow with its problems large and small, I’ll trust the God of miracles and give to Him my all.” If ever you want to see this song worked out theologically, literally and practically it is in this text right here in Isaiah.

You and I live in a world in which a weatherman, who is watching radar, cannot even accurately predict the weather. They can see weather heading this way, but they do not know for sure if it will actually arrive and they certainly cannot tell you the exact moment.

In this text, God looks into the future and makes a remarkable prediction, because this passage specifically names a man who would not be born for about another 150 years. God looks into the future and informs His people who He is going to bring into existence and who He intends to use; **a man named Cyrus** .

This is a text that causes liberals to say it could not possibly have been written by the same Isaiah who wrote the first part of the book. **The fact is, this text proves the Bible is inspired by God.**

Why would God go to all the trouble to reveal this specific prophecy about this one man?

- 1) To identify the man He would specifically use so there would be no misunderstanding.
- 2) To show that if Isaiah is accurate in this prediction just a few years away, then all of his other amazing futuristic predictions would also be accurate and literally fulfilled.
- 3) To show the sovereignty of God in controlling everything.

Last time we were together, we saw that God said that He would direct Cyrus to release His people from captivity and permit them to return to the Promised Land, rebuild cities, rebuild Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. This is an amazing prediction, because at the time Isaiah made this prediction, the people were still living in the Judean cities and in Jerusalem and were still worshipping at the temple. They were still a little over 100 years from the Babylonian captivity and they would have had no thought of a man from Persia named Cyrus who would become their ally. The point we see is that:

GOD’S PEOPLE MAY BE COMFORTED IN KNOWING THAT GOD IS A SOVEREIGN GOD IN CONTROL OF EVERYTHING THAT IS CONNECTED TO HIS PEOPLE AND EVERYTHING CONNECTED TO THOSE WHO ARE NOT HIS PEOPLE, AND ONE OF THE GREAT EVIDENCES OF THIS IS HIS ABILITY TO DIRECT AND CONTROL THE FUTURE .

Isaiah 45 is one of my favorite chapters in the book of Isaiah. In fact, it was one verse from this chapter (45:22) that was used by God in a little church to save the soul of Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

The man who was used by God to take over Jerusalem about 140 years after Isaiah made this prediction was a man named Nebuchadnezzar. In 586 B.C., he and his forces conquered Jerusalem. They burned houses and the temple and they took many captives into exile. About 27 years later (559 B.C.), a man named Cyrus founded what would become the Persian Empire. In 549 B.C. he conquered the Medes and became the ruler of the combined Persian and Median Empires. In 539 B.C., he conquered Babylon and the next year he issued a decree that the Jews could return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.

In this passage, God is specifically informing His people that this is what would happen some 172 years before it did happen. If Isaiah makes this prediction about 710 B.C. and Cyrus released Israel in 538 B.C., then God is controlling things that would happen in 172 years.

In this text of Scripture, God shows how He sovereignly uses heathen political leaders for His own purposes, including avenging the nations who have wronged Him and His people.

SOVEREIGN POINT #1 – God reveals what He will do for Cyrus. **45:1-3**

Fact #1 - His name is Cyrus . **45:1a**

The ancient historian Josephus claims that Cyrus was actually convicted by God in his mind to allow the Jews to return to her land after he specifically read these prophecies written by Isaiah. Josephus said that when he read about how the temple would be destroyed and then saw his name in Scriptures as being the one who would permit it to be rebuilt, “an earnest desire and ambition seized upon him to fulfill what was so written” (*The Complete Works of Josephus*, p. 228).

What is so sad about this is that Cyrus, a heathen king, had more of an interest in the prophetic Word of God than some of God’s own people and leaders. Truth is, it has always been a small minority who are actually serious about carefully and accurately understanding God’s written Word.

In 1879, a clay cylinder was discovered in Babylon, which has been called the “Cyrus Cylinder” and on the cylinder Cyrus is given the title “King of the World, Great King, King of Babylon, King of the Four Quarters of the Earth” (Edwin Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible*, p. 89). You cannot read these inscriptions or look at the tomb of Cyrus, which still stands, without realizing this man, **Cyrus, existed and accomplished so many remarkable things by the sovereignty of God.** On his tomb are these words, “Mortal! I am Cyrus, son of Cambyses, who founded the Persian Empire, and was lord of Asia. Grudge me not, then, my monument.”

Any political leader who purposes in any way to understand God’s Word, will be greatly used by God.

Fact #2 - He is God's anointed . **45:1b**

This is an amazing thing. **When God used this term “anointed” in regard to a political leader, it was typically a reference to one of His own special kings.** For example, King Saul was called God's anointed (I Samuel 10:1), as was King David (I Samuel 16:6) and this term is used to refer to God's own Messiah and King of Kings, Jesus Christ (Psalm 2:2). **God would use Cyrus as His own anointed to redeem His people.**

What is so remarkable here is that God would sovereignly single out a heathen political leader and use him for His purposes to the point that God could say, He is My anointed. God used Cyrus to carry out His will. He was a human instrument that God used for conquest.

Fact #3 - God would take him by His right hand. **45:1c**

The right hand is a hand of special favor. Cyrus would be carefully led and protected and directed by God. This is staggering to think that God was doing this with a man who is an idolator. God was leading him, guiding him, protecting him, and using him.

Fact #4 - God would use him to subdue nations. **45:1d**

According to historical records, Cyrus had major conquests over the Medes, Lydia, the entire Asian East and Babylon (*Ibid.*, pp. 80-87). Cyrus would easily and speedily conquer the nations because God was causing it.

It was God who was giving him his victories and most of the time he didn't even know it. There is a text found on the “Cyrus Cylinder” which states, after Cyrus conquered Babylon, he was so amazed with the success that he worshipped a false god named “Marduk” who he thought was the great god who had caused it (*Ibid.*, p. 87). It was the God of the Bible who was giving him his success and he didn't even get it.

Actually, Cyrus would be used by God in two major ways: 1) To free His own people; 2) To punish the nations who had demeaned Him and His people. Even though he didn't understand what God was actually doing, it was God who was permitting him to subdue all the nations.

Fact #5 - God would open doors of successful military accomplishment. **45:1e-3**

There are three main successful accomplishments God would permit:

(Successful Accomplishment #1) - God would make the rough places smooth . **45:2a**

God would actually allow Cyrus to conquer places in a smooth way. There is a text that claims that when Cyrus went to conquer the Medes, he was aided by the fact that many of the Medes defected and surrendered (*Ibid.*, p. 81). When he came into the plain of Sardis, the Lydian horses became unsettled by the camels ridden by the Persians, which made for an easy victory.

When Cyrus went to conquer Sardis, the capital of Lydia, the Persians held up wooden manikins dressed like soldiers and the city surrendered (*Ibid.*, pp. 82-83). According to Herodotus, when Cyrus went to take Babylon, the Euphrates was very low, making it easy to cross (*Ibid.*, p. 86). The Cyrus Cylinder says that when Cyrus took Babylon and actually entered the royal palace, the people were happy and jubilant and rejoicing (*Ibid.*, p. 87). God caused things to happen in the military world, the animal world, the physical world and the domestic world. He turned minds of soldiers and animals and ordinary people to give up and give in to Cyrus. Truly God did do exactly what He predicted; He made his ways smooth.

(Successful Accomplishment #2) - God shatters secure doors. 45:2b

No fortress would be able to stop Cyrus because of the sovereign hand of God. When Cyrus took Babylon, it was a very secure city, yet Herodotus claims that the water levels of the Euphrates were so low that the Persian army could actually enter the city through the water channels (*Ibid.*, p. 86). He also said that Babylon was a city that had a hundred gates all of bronze with bronze bars (Geoffrey Grogan, *Isaiah*, p. 270). It is recorded that when Cyrus started his campaign against the Medes, Princess Amytis tried to secure King Astyages and hide him in the palace in Ecbatana, the Median capital. But he was easily discovered and captured (*Persia and the Bible*, p. 81). It was as if God had literally opened secret doors.

There were many secure doors which locked in God's people and God used Cyrus to open those doors and set His people free.

(Successful Accomplishment #3) - God would give him great treasures . 45:3

God gave Cyrus all the spoils of war. It is said that after he conquered Media, he "carried its treasures back to the region" (*Persia and the Bible*, p. 81). In the battle with Lydia, there is a text that says "... Cyrus, king of Persia, called up his army and crossed the Tigris ... marched against Lydia ... took his (king's) possessions" (*Ibid.*, p. 83). We know he also had some of the treasures that Babylon had taken from Jerusalem.

When God says He would give him "treasures of darkness" and "hidden wealth," He means that even those well-hidden and concealed treasures would be discovered and turned over to Cyrus.

In fact, God says that He would bless Cyrus so that he would know that it was God who called him by name and gave him these blessings.

There is an amazing text in John 10:3 in which Jesus Christ says He calls all of His sheep by name and knows every one of them. God's blessings should cause each of us to realize that He knows us by name and He cares for us and uses us individually.

SOVEREIGN POINT #2 – God reveals why He will do these things for Cyrus. **45:4-7**

Notice the repeated emphasis on the fact that Cyrus did not know God (45:4, 5). Cyrus was an idolator, but this was the one God chose to use. He chose Cyrus long before Cyrus knew a thing about Him and He used him for His purposes. The question is why? God gives us four reasons why:

(Reason #1) - God would do this so He would know that He is the God of Israel. **45:4a**

John Calvin said, “This ought to be carefully observed” (*Isaiah*, p. 398). Do not miss this point; **at the center of the entire plan of God in this earth is Israel**. Nothing will stop Israel. Any political leader who realizes God is Israel’s God, and who is favorable to Israel because of it, is one who will be blessed by God. God raised up Cyrus for the sake of His people. This was not about doing something nice for a God-mocker; this was about raising up someone so He could free His people.

This is also a real encouragement to us. God is looking out for our welfare as His people. He does things with heathens in order to care for His people.

(Reason #2) - God would do these things for Cyrus to prove He has Sovereign power to accomplish things for those who do not even know Him. **45:4b**

If I were a political leader, I would take a serious look at this text. God brought the political leader into existence and He will use him for His purposes. If you don’t know God or care about His Word, you ought to be very scared about what God’s purposes actually are. Every political leader would be very wise to bow before God and ask God to give him/her wisdom to know and do His will.

(Reason #3) - God would do these things so all would know He is the Sovereign God. **45:5-6**

There are three Sovereign realities that God reveals here:

(Sovereign Reality #1) - He is the LORD. **45:5a**

God is the “I am” LORD, Jehovah, the Covenant God of Israel who can do whatever He wants to do. He is sovereign and He is sacred.

(Sovereign Reality #2) - He is the only God. **45:5b**

There is no other God but the God of the Bible!

(Sovereign Reality #3) - He does what He wants with those who do not know Him. **45:5c-6**

God arms those who don’t even know Him and does what He wants with them so that people may know that there is no one like God. He may permit His people to experience some major setbacks and then He’ll turn things around. He will raise up someone to do things that He wants done even if the person does not know God.

(Reason #4) - God would do this so all would know He is in charge of everything . **45:7**

Nothing in this world is operating by random chance. God is in total charge. God is a sovereign God over “all things.” **He is the only God who does whatever He wants to do. No other being has this Sovereign freedom.** He can cause calamity. He can cause difficulty and He can cause tragedy. God is a God who controls light and darkness, peace and war, prosperity and poverty, life and death, feasting and famine, deliverance and disaster. God can and does do whatever He wants - good or bad, positive or negative, blessing or cursing. God does not cause people to do the evil; they do that on their own, but He can raise up someone and use them and their evil for His purposes. **It is not that God is just permitting these things; He causes these things and He orchestrates them.**

God is the sovereign God over everything in your world. There is not a sorrow or sickness or setback or distress or loss that is not in our lives except by Divine Sovereign permission and action. God is the One who gives life and God is the One who takes life. God is a Sovereign God and wise are those who bow before Him.

As a postscript to all of this, years later Cyrus came to realize that God had done these things. According to Ezra, he did realize that much of his success had come from the God of heaven and it was this reality that caused him to release the Jews so they could rebuild Jerusalem and the temple (Ezra 1:2-4). Also as a postscript, according to Herodotus, when Cyrus was about age 70, he went to conquer a distant northeast portion of his kingdom and was killed (*Ibid.*, p. 92).

When God finished using Cyrus for His purposes, He took him out.

What God wants His people to realize is that He is in sovereign control of everything and if people will turn to Him, they will be saved and they will be blessed.