

Universal Sovereign, Revealer, and Savior Isaiah 45

Introduction

God called Isaiah to be His prophet in the year that King Uzziah died (Isaiah 6). Uzziah had ruled the southern kingdom of Judah 52 years. He served the Lord and was an effective builder leader. His success seemed to have gone to his head when he tried to usurp the priest's office. God stopped him by striking him with leprosy. He was a leper till his death. His son Jotham succeeded him. He was a righteous king but reigned only 16 years. His son Ahaz succeeded him. He was wicked and weak, mixing the idolatry with Yahweh worship. Assyria was the great threat at the time. After a series of deportations, Assyria ended the northern kingdom of Israel and threatened Judah in the south.

So Isaiah lived in no ivory tower, sheltered from turbulent times. He endured the fickle loyalties of a people God had blessed but whose hearts were drifting away.

He watched as it were the death of a nation, prophesying that Judah would be conquered and taken captive as well, but not by Assyria. It would be Babylon. Thankfully, Isaiah got to see revival under King Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, but when Hezekiah died, his wicked son Manasseh reversed much of it. Tradition says

that Manasseh executed Isaiah by having him sawn in two.

With so much political turmoil and spiritual instability, Isaiah's prophecies call out the evil but also brim with gospel hope. Isaiah is called evangelist of the OT, and for good reason.

If there were ever a prophet for our times, Isaiah fits. We live in a nation that has without question enjoyed an extraordinary number of blessings from God. People flood our borders to get in not to get out. We are a nation with abundant access to the written Word of God and hundreds of thousands of our citizens believe it and trust in the Savior-King to which the Scriptures point. Yet we are also a nation in love with the idols of the age, often perverting our freedom into pursuing freedom from God, which inevitably leads to tyranny and trouble. Listen to Isaiah's message. It was for ancient Israel and the surrounding nations. It is for us.

¹ Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed: ² "I will go before you and level the exalted places, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron, ³ I will give you the treasures

of darkness and the hoards in secret places, that you may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who call you by your name. ⁴ For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know me. ⁵ I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, ⁶ that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other. ⁷ I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things. ⁸ "Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain down righteousness; let the earth open, that salvation and righteousness may bear fruit; let the earth cause them both to sprout; I the LORD have created it. ⁹ "Woe to him who strives with him who formed him, a pot among earthen pots! Does the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?' or 'Your work has no handles'? ¹⁰ Woe to him who says to a father, 'What are you begetting?' or to a woman, 'With what are you in labor?'" ¹¹ Thus says the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and the one who formed him: "Ask me of things to come; will you command me concerning my children and the work of my hands? ¹² I made the earth and created man on it; it was my hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded all their host. ¹³ I have stirred

him up in righteousness, and I will make all his ways level; he shall build my city and set my exiles free, not for price or reward," says the LORD of hosts. **14** Thus says the LORD: "The wealth of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush, and the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over to you and be yours; they shall follow you; they shall come over in chains and bow down to you. They will plead with you, saying: 'Surely God is in you, and there is no other, no god besides him.'" **15** Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior. **16** All of them are put to shame and confounded; the makers of idols go in confusion together. **17** But Israel is saved by the LORD with everlasting salvation; you shall not be put to shame or confounded to all eternity. **18** For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it empty, he formed it to be inhabited!): "I am the LORD, and there is no other. **19** I did not speak in secret, in a land of darkness; I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, 'Seek me in vain.' I the LORD speak the truth; I declare what is right. **20** "Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, you survivors of the nations! They have no knowledge who carry about their wooden idols, and keep on praying to a god that cannot save. **21** Declare and present your case; let them take counsel together! Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old?

Was it not I, the LORD? And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me. ²² "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. ²³ By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.' ²⁴ "Only in the LORD, it shall be said of me, are righteousness and strength; to him shall come and be ashamed all who were incensed against him. ²⁵ In the LORD all the offspring of Israel shall be justified and shall glory."

1. Universal Sovereign
2. Universal Revealer
3. Universal Savior

1. Universal Sovereign

¹ Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed: ² "I will go before you and level the exalted places, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron, ³ I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places, that you may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who call you by your name.

⁴ For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I name

you, though you do not know me. ⁵ I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, ⁶ that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other. ⁷ I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things.

If there was ever any doubt about how in control of everything God actually is, this chapter makes it clear. God addresses these words to a pagan king who has not even been born yet. He calls him by name. God calls Cyrus "my shepherd" in Isaiah 44, and "my anointed" in chapter 45. Had to be shocking to the Israelites of Isaiah's day. Prophets, priests, and kings were anointed ones, set apart by God to a task and anointed, symbolic of God's Spirit empowering them for it. The nation of Israel is called God's anointed. And then there is the ultimate Anointed One, the Messiah in Hebrew, the Christ in Greek, who will be the Savior-King who rescues His people from sin and death and grants to them an inheritance in His eternal kingdom.

Here the anointed is Cyrus, the Persian king who a century and a half after God predicted it through Isaiah, would overthrow the Babylonian Empire and thereafter set the

Jewish captives free to return to their land. God will put him in place to fulfill God's promise to his people that that captivity would last only 70 years and that, impossible as it might seem, they would indeed return to their homeland.

God is sovereign not just over His own people. He is sovereign over those who don't even know Him. He does not need their permission or their faith. He calls them by name before they even exist. He equips them. He holds their hand, equipping them for their part in His purposes. He goes before them. He breaks through the bars. He gives them the treasures. They may think they themselves are responsible for these successes. But God is the One making it happen. And to make absolutely clear to us how in control He is, God declares what will happen long before it does. He does this repeatedly through the Scriptures. It is the very nature of predictive prophecy. The very term "promise" carries a future orientation. Our faith is in God's full integrity and God's sovereign ability to fulfill what He promises.

Sometimes we seem to think the only way God can save a people is through a good king who believes in Him. Not so. Cyrus did not even know God. But God knew him and used him to free his people.

We tend to fixate on the quality of the leaders of the land, or the lack thereof, as if God is powerless to do anything if there are bad people in power. Can we step back and confess that there have always been bad people in power? It's just a matter of degree. *Even the best of rulers sin and falter and fail. Even the best attempts to establish righteous human laws are shot through with flaws. Even the most God-aware nations on the planet have reason to confess and repent from the wrongs they have done, for they are made up of individuals who are sinners by birth and by choice. And even the worst of nations enjoy traces of common grace as human beings made in God's image and in need of His redemption. Our hope is not in ourselves but in the Lord who made heaven and earth and sustains every living thing.*

We serve the sovereign Lord of history. That should be a great comfort to us, but it can also be a great frustration. He does not do things the way we expect Him to or want Him to.

8 "Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain down righteousness; let the earth open, that salvation and righteousness may bear fruit; let the earth cause them both to sprout; I the LORD have created it. **9** "Woe to him who strives with him who formed him, a pot among earthen pots!

Does the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?' or 'Your work has no handles'? ¹⁰ Woe to him who says to a father, 'What are you begetting?' or to a woman, 'With what are you in labor?'" ¹¹ Thus says the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and the one who formed him: "Ask me of things to come; will you command me concerning my children and the work of my hands? ¹² I made the earth and created man on it; it was my hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded all their host. ¹³ I have stirred him up in righteousness, and I will make all his ways level; he shall build my city and set my exiles free, not for price or reward," says the LORD of hosts.

God points us to the daily fruitfulness of the earth as He created it. He created the earth and all its ecosystems. Beware all those who declare He did not do so! He stretched out the heavens from the atmosphere surrounding the earth where birds fly, to the distant planets, stars, and galaxies. And He sustains it all. We practically drown in the vastness of it all. We are still making discoveries, whether from the depths of the deepest seas or in the incomprehensible expanse of the universe.

So how much sense does it make for us to pass judgment on God and His ways? You and I have neither the power or the wisdom to make such judgments. It is like a clay pot

telling the potter what to do. It is like a child commanding a parent. It is unnatural and foolish.

The God who creates and controls the universe with a voice of command has no trouble creating human beings with a purpose at the national, international, and personal level. He directs the course of history. He makes a way where there is no way. He superintends the building and rebuilding of cities. He sets His exiles free. And He uses anybody He wants to do it.

That was bothersome to Israel. It was humiliating to His chosen people the Jews to be subjected to captivity in a pagan land. And to have a pagan ruler free them? It seemed backwards. But God was working His plan of salvation not just for Israel but for the world. Their captivity and dispersion meant that pagan lands learned of the true God who judges in righteousness. Their return revealed He forgives and restores with steadfast love for His people.

How could God use a pagan as the deliverer? The same way God would use the offspring the woman to crush the serpent's head, the offspring of a childless patriarch and his wife to bless all the families of the earth, a baby wrapped in rags to rule all the earth, a child on whom the government of the universe

would rest, a Savior who grew up in the despised backwater town of Nazareth, a crucified King to break the tyranny of sin and death. God accomplishes His purposes His way. That is His m.o. So why would you fret when you don't understand what He's doing at the present in the tangle of life we are experiencing. It is enough to know that He knows what He's doing and He does anything He pleases. And that it is right and good.

Stop trying to make God in your image. You are made in His. He is Sovereign. Bow the knee and worship Him alone.

He knows what He's doing—and it is good. Created. Sustains. Rules. What is causing you to question Him? Will you not yield and turn it over to the Universal Sovereign? "Be still"—stop striving—"and know that He alone is God."

2. Universal Revealer

We have trouble figuring God out, but that does not mean He has left us in the dark.

God not only controls all things. He wants us to know that He does. It is part of revealing to us who He is. He talks directly to Cyrus. The whole chapter is addressed to him.

¹ Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus

3 that you may know that it is I, the LORD

6 that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other.

LORD—Yahweh; He is. I am that I am.

Yahweh is the only God there is, and He creates and sustains the universe, including human history, in the way He does so that we may know Him.

14 Thus says the LORD: "The wealth of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush, and the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over to you and be yours; they shall follow you; they shall come over in chains and bow down to you. They will plead with you, saying: 'Surely God is in you, and there is no other, no god besides him.'" **15** Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior.

16 All of them are put to shame and confounded; the makers of idols go in confusion together.

Because God is infinite and transcendent, it would stand to reason that He is hidden. All the idols humanity has created are in part an effort to make Him tangible and knowable. But the idols are ungod. They are more

limited than humans are. How can they be gods?

Choosing idols to worship instead of God is utter folly. Worshiping images that cannot hear, taste, see, talk, or walk? Dumber than humans and weaker too? Why would we reduce ourselves that way?

The insufficiency of our idols drives us to seek after the true God. And because He is alive and real and desires for us to know Him, He has made Himself known.

Here's the beauty of what God is doing. He will bring idol worshippers from all over the world, and has done so, who will turn and worship Him instead as the only true and living God. He is the revealer.

19 I did not speak in secret, in a land of darkness; I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, 'Seek me in vain.' I the LORD speak the truth; I declare what is right.

People charge that God is hidden. If they think atheism too absolute in its claims, they retreat to agnosticism, declaring we just can't know for sure if God even exists. They're right, but only if you throw out all the self-revelation He has given us. From the incredible beauty and design all around us, whether you look through a microscope or a

telescope or everything in between, to the universal consciousness of right and wrong and the universal experience of intangibles like love and courage, and then finally to the vast library that records God's words to human beings in the holy Scriptures—there is no honest room left for agnosticism, let alone atheism.

21 Declare and present your case; let them take counsel together! Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the LORD? And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me.

23 By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.'

God has made His sovereignty universally known. He is the universal Revealer. He uses His Word. Ban the Bible and He still preaches from the stars right town to the genetic code that makes you who you are. He speaks through dreams, visions, conscience. He uses happenchance and the strategic gamesmanship of nations as they rise and fall. All so that you will seek Him (Acts 17). You cannot shut Him out. The Universal Sovereign is also the Universal Revealer. Seek Him. Listen to Him and learn.

Are you paying attention to what God has revealed? Open your eyes. Focus. Meditate. Hold it fast. Let it shape your thinking and your ways. Reject whatever so-called knowledge or pretended wisdom contradicts it. Such substitutes are nothing but lies.

3. Universal Savior

Early on in the chapter God reveals His heart as Savior. Cyrus is a tool in His hand for the sake of His chosen people.

⁴ For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know me.

But Israel is not the only nation He chooses to save.

²⁰ "Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, you survivors of the nations! They have no knowledge who carry about their wooden idols, and keep on praying to a god that cannot save. ²¹ Declare and present your case; let them take counsel together! Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the LORD? And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me. ²² "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.

Make your case in court. How does any idol compare to the living God who declares what will be in the future and then makes sure it happens?

Once you come to the realization that all your substitutions for God cannot fill the void He alone can fill, you're finally in a good spot. As long as you think more money will make your life matter, more friends, more power, a bigger home, a second home, another car, a marriage, a better marriage, a child, a promotion, deliverance from some physical malady or some emotional crisis—none of these or all of them together is not enough to take the place of the God who is Sovereign, Revealer, and Savior.

Turn to me—repentance and faith
All the ends of the earth—every nation, every people, they all need the one God as their Savior.

²³ By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.'²⁴ "Only in the LORD, it shall be said of me, are righteousness and strength; to him shall come and be ashamed all who were incensed against him. ²⁵ In the LORD all the offspring of Israel shall be justified and shall glory."

What God did through Cyrus to preserve the chosen people made way for the Savior of the world to come—the ultimate Messiah, Jesus Christ, Savior-King.

You recognize the words because Paul quotes them in Philippians 2:8-11

8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. **9** Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, **10** so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, **11** and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Universal Savior. Turn to Him. Call on Him. Rest in Him. He alone is your ultimate safe place.

What do you love/trust/fear to lose more than God? Let those idols drop from your hands. Let them lie shattered at your feet. Pry them loose from your heart. Find your righteousness, strength, and glory in Him alone.

Conclusion

Universal Sovereign—Bow in worship.
Universal Revealer—Listen and learn.
Universal Savior. Turn to Him. Call on Him.
Rest in Him. This is His invitation to all

nations, including our own. Christ has suffered the death we deserve to make it possible for us to be free from sin and death. You and I who know Him, are, like Isaiah, ambassadors for Him, calling out to our communities, our country, and to all the world this good news.

Discussion Questions

1. How is it helpful to know that Isaiah lived no sheltered life but ministered to a nation headed toward judgment when you read the prophecy he penned in Isaiah 45 about God as Universal Sovereign, Universal Revealer, and Universal Savior?
2. What is the significance of God's calling the pagan king Cyrus, yet to be born, His anointed one, who would set His people free?
3. What are similarities and contrasts between Cyrus the messiah (anointed one) and Jesus the Messiah?
4. Since God ties His power to predict and control history to His having created the earth and stretched out the heavens, what difference does it

make if we abandon creationism in favor of "science"?

5. What are common idols for us, and how can even our idols move us to search for the true God?
6. What are some key ways God has made Himself known to all the world (Universal Revealer)?
7. Given what Isaiah 45 teaches, why is atheism (no god) illogical and agnosticism (no way to know) dishonest?
8. What are some ways that help you focus on God's self-revelation in your daily life?
9. What does God's invitation to all the world to turn to Him and be saved tell you about the nature of humanity's heart and the nature of God's heart toward humanity?