

Handout: Isaiah Lesson 17

Yahweh roused the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia to issue a proclamation and to have it publicly displayed throughout his kingdom: "Cyrus king of Persia says this, 'Yahweh, the God of Heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and has appointed me to build him a Temple in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all his people, may his God be with him! Let him go up.'"

2 Chronicles 36:22-23

God chose to act through the Persian King Cyrus for three reasons:

1. God acted through Cyrus, summoning him by name and working through him despite the fact that Cyrus did not know him because he wanted Cyrus and all Gentiles to know of His power and that Yahweh is the One True God.
2. God acted through Cyrus for the sake of His servant Israel, demonstrating God's faithfulness to Israel despite Israel's disloyalty.
3. God acted through Cyrus to return covenant people to their homeland because Israel has a part to play in salvation history that requires their return to the Promised Land when God would call forth another Messiah to redeem Israel and all mankind.

In Isaiah 45:9-25 Isaiah emphasizes three things:

1. He pronounces a curse judgment (a "woe") against the rebellious and defiant (45:9-13).
2. He announces the deliverance of God's covenant people from foreigners and their idols and the conversion of the Gentile nations (45:14-19).
3. He proclaims God's uniqueness as the Lord of the universe who calls all nations to conversion (45:20-25).

In 45:13 Cyrus is the man God has "raised in righteousness" and he is:

1. God's agent of liberation.
2. He will return the exiled covenant people to Jerusalem.
3. He will rebuild the city.
4. He will do this without collecting a ransom or any sort of financial burden for the people.
5. He will do all this through God's direct intervention.

45:14-19 = the promise of a future universal salvation. The concept of the nations of the world coming to salvation is one of the key themes of the Book of Consolation that began in Isaiah 42:1-4, 6; 45:14-16, 20-25 and which will be revisited in Isaiah 49:6; 55:3-5; in chapter 60; and in the conclusion of the Book of Isaiah in 66:18-24. The post exile prophet Zechariah will also write about the future conversion of the Gentiles in Zechariah 2:15; 8:20-23; 14:9 and 16.

In 46:1-47:15 Isaiah presents God's condemnation against the Babylonian's idols and all false gods (46:1-13), and also Yahweh's lament for the fate of the Babylonian people and their empire (47:1-15).

→over

The focus of Isaiah 46:1-13 is God versus the Babylonian false gods. Isaiah presents this section in four parts:

1. The false idols of Babylon are humiliated (46:1-2).
2. God gives His assurance to Israel (46:3-4).
3. The futility of all idols everywhere is repeated (46:5-7).
4. The account of Yahweh's uniqueness is repeated (46:8-13).

In 46:10-11 Isaiah announces what three demonstrations of God's sovereignty over human history and His supremacy over all false gods?

1. He announces what will happen in the end from the beginning in foretelling the future. God challenges the false gods to prove they can do the same.
2. He establishes the reasons He plans as He does and then makes those plans come about.
3. He called Cyrus "a bird of prey" who is intent on his mission and predestined to accomplish God's divine plan for Judah and her people.

In this section Isaiah presents God's condemnation of the Babylonian's idols and all false gods (46:1-13), and also Yahweh's lament for the fate of the Babylonian people and their empire (47:1-15).

In chapter 47:

1. God will expose the shame of Babylon (47:1-3).
2. Babylon will face divine judgment because of her failure to show mercy to others and her opposition to God's divine plan (47:4-7).
3. Babylon's overconfidence will result in disaster and despair (47:8-15).

In 47:3-6 Babylon is personified as a sinful woman. This is God's judgment on the "whore of Babylon":

1. For her wantonness (verse 3)
2. For her merciless cruelty (verse 6)
3. For her arrogant pride (verses 7-8)
4. For her sorcery (verse 9)

"Babylon" will become a symbolic title for any city and its people that stand in opposition to God and persecute His elect. St. Peter will refer to the city of Rome as "Babylon" in 1 Peter 5:13 during a period of intense persecution of Christians prior to his martyrdom in 67 AD. And in the Book of Revelation "Babylon" becomes a symbolic name for the city of Jerusalem that persecuted the Church and rejected the Messiah in prophecies of Jerusalem's judgment shortly prior to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman army in 70 AD (Rev 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21).

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