

The Road to Jesus: The Gospel According to Isaiah  
Proclamation of Deliverance and Restoration - Part 2  
Isaiah 43 - 45  
December 23, 2015

INTRODUCTION:

King Hezekiah reigned from 716-687 B. C. This might suggest that Isaiah preached into the 7th century. We do not know when Isaiah stopped preaching. In 722 B. C., the Assyrians had conquered northern Israel and that nation ceased to exist as a nation. Many people emigrated down into the southern tribes of Judah so there are no "lost tribes of Israel." It was around 700 B. C. when Assyria was knocking on the door of Jerusalem, as we studied from Isaiah 36-39.

Then the Babylonians come. Jerusalem does fall to Babylon, in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy to King Hezekiah, in 586 B. C., roughly 114 years after Isaiah predicted it. Then, 47 years later, 539 B. C., Babylon falls to Persia. The Persian King Cyrus allows the Jews to return to their homeland - 538 B. C. Seventy years from the initial deportation under Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar (586 B. C.), the second temple in Jerusalem was completed in 516 B. C., under the civic leadership of Ezra and the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah.

The exile and the return. These two events, along with the exodus out of Egypt, are the seminal events in the history of Israel that determine who she is and what she thinks of herself.

Isaiah's preaching guided the Israelites through most of those events. The power of Isaiah's preaching is not that it's *his* message; it is that the message is from *God*. And God's word is always "spirit and life" (John 6:63); it is always "living and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12).

Tonight, we pick up with Isaiah 43, as Isaiah looks past the Babylonian exile and into the time of the return under King Cyrus of Persia. He has already mentioned, but not by name, that Cyrus would do such a thing. In this passage, he will call Cyrus by name, some 161 years before Cyrus would actually do it.

ISRAEL'S RESTORATION - 43:1-7:

When we left off last week, we saw in 42:21-25 that Israel was suffering in exile because of her sin, because of her apathetic attitude toward the law of Moses. "But now," begins 43:1, a sharp contrast. Now, a promise of hope is offered.

"Do not fear," Isaiah calls on Israel (vs 1). God says, "I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine!" What a wonderful statement for mankind to hear!

Through various pictures, God assures the Jews that He will be with them (vs 2), just like He told Israel through Moses about seven centuries before! The pronouns "I" and "My" are found 17 times in this paragraph. God will exchange Egypt, Cush, and Seba as a ransom for Israel (vs 3). This is the first time in Isaiah that God calls Himself their "Savior." As Oswalt writes (138), "the consequence of belonging to God [is, p.h.]: preservation in the midst of trials."

Why? Because they are "precious" in God's sight (vs 4). Observe God says, "I love you." Again (vs 5), "do not fear; I am with you." God will gather the Jews from all the corners of the world (vs 6).

These Jews are a group of people who are called by God's name; indeed "Israel" has God's name in it, just as *Christian* has Christ's name in it. God created the Jews for His glory (vs 7), which means if He were to turn His back on them, it would dishonor *Him*. He formed them; He made them.

#### GOD'S POWER - 43:8-13:

In verses 8-9, Isaiah calls on the Israelites, as he has done recently, to contemplate God's omniscience and His omnipotence, in contrast to them and to their idols.

The Israelites themselves are *witnesses* (3 times in this paragraph; verse 10) of God's power and His wonderful acts. *They* were witnesses of all the things of which you and I have recorded in the Bible from Genesis through Isaiah. They had the same Bibles we have. Witnesses. God had chosen them so that they would: 1.) Know Him; and 2.) Believe Him; and 3.) Understand that He is the only God. There was none before and there will be none after.

Of course, Israel as a nation never lived up to that high ideal. All the more reason why God would have to be His own witness to the wonders of the miracle of the incarnation. As with the word "glory," the word "testify" - as in "serve as a witness" - is frequently used by the apostle John in His Gospel - 31 times! "Testimony" - 14 times! "And the Father who sent Me, He has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form" (John 5:37). The Suffering Servant will serve as His own witness. "But the testimony which I receive is not from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved" (John 5:34).

He is also the only *Savior* (vs 11). Consider what God has done in verse 12. God has existed throughout eternity (vs 13), in contrast with the idols and no one can escape His hand. Again, as with verses 1-7, in these verses (11-13), we have 29 Hebrew words and 12 of them are first person singular. God is in control.

#### GOD THE HOLY REDEEMER - 43:14-21:

God has said that He is Israel's redeemer in 41:14 and again in 43:14. From whose control will God redeem Israel? In this context, it is Babylon. Although Israel had not been faithful to her covenant with God, God would be faithful to His covenant with Israel. "This is the *hesed* of God, the passionate grace that finds its ultimate expression in the cross of Christ" (Oswalt, 153). The return from the exile, however, is only a type of the redemption true and spiritual redemption that will come through the Savior, Jesus Christ.

Incidentally, the "Chaldeans" were an ethnic clan in the south of Mesopotamia who came to dominate what was known as the Babylonian Empire. Thus, "Chaldean" and "Babylon" are, for practical purposes, synonyms.

God will make Babylon into fugitives and slaves (vs 14). In verse 15, God again reminds Israel of *Who He* is. God is not saving Israel because of who *they* are; He's saving them because of *Who He* is. God is King, from the very beginning of Isaiah when He saw God sitting on His throne. Thus, we understand the emphasis in the book of Matthew who cites the Messianic prophet Isaiah so frequently about the King of the Jews. Here, God is in control of nature and human destiny (vss 16-17). Verse 17 echoes the destruction of the Egyptian army, here referring to Babylon. Don't fret about the past; look to the future (vs 18).

God is going to do something new - the return from exile (vs 19). The blessings God will bring on the Jews is portrayed in physical terms in verses 19-20. The end result of these blessings will be worship - vs 21. This verse 21 also defines the *raison d'être* of the church:

Luke 1:74-75; Eph. 1:4-6; 1 Peter 2:9: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for *God's* own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

#### ISRAEL THE TRANSGRESSOR - 43:22-24:

But, Judah, as a whole, has still not responded with the type of heart-felt repentance that is needed in order to truly return to God and be faithful to Him. Notice, their error is "sins" and "iniquities" (vs 24). "What God rejected was the sacrifices of people who did not turn from their sins. Their sacrifices were meaningless and a wearisome burden for him to bear (1:10-15)" (Smith, 214).

When you do not keep your heart committed and devoted to the Lord, the worship He prescribes becomes a labor, a bore, and a chore. You start going through it as a ritual and then, you change the worship altogether to please your own heart. Christians are not immune to this temptation.

#### GOD THE JUDGE - 43:25-28:

But the "Holy One of Israel" cannot ignore sin; it's what keeps man out of God's presence. Sin must be punished. God is the one who will initiate the whole plan of salvation. He is the one who will wipe out transgressions and chooses not to remember sins (vs 25). "The sacrificial system was designed to encourage people to confess their sins and be forgiven. Only then would God not be burdened by their sins but could forget them and bury them in the deepest sea (Mic 7:18-19)" (Smith, 215).

From the very beginning, all the way back to Adam, if not Abraham, the "forefather" had sinned (vs 27) so all sin has to be judged (vs 28). "There was a sorry record of disobedience" (Jackson, 85) among the Israelites. Smith writes (217): "This passage demonstrates that unacceptable worship and forgiveness are life and death issues."

#### GOD - EVER GRACIOUS - 44:1-8:

Notice the sharp contrast again in 44:1 - "But now" - another word of hope, another word of grace. God reminds them again of what He has done for them (vs 1-2) and calls on them *Do not fear*. "Jeshurun" (vs 2) is a cognate word for "upright," which portrays Israel as a holy, upright people.

God will bless them. He will pour out water on a thirsty land, better still, He will pour out the Spirit and bless the Jews and their descendants. That promise, of course, was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Picturing the seed of the Jews as grass, in verse 4, Isaiah says they will "spring up by streams of water."

Then, they will respond favorably to Jehovah God (vs 5), as they should have been doing all along. Please observe in verse 6 that we have two individuals denoted by the term "Jehovah:" we have "the Lord, the King of Israel" and we have "His Redeemer, the Lord of Hosts." In fact, this expression, "I am the first, I am the last" is applied to Jesus four times in the book of Revelation (1:17; 2:8; 21:6; 2:13), showing that Jesus is "Yahweh incarnate" (Oswalt, 171).

Again, who is like God who can control history and even predict what He is going to do (vs 7)?

Thus, Isaiah again calls on Israel not to be afraid: Do not tremble and do not be afraid! (vs 8). They need to wait on the Lord and let Him accomplish what He is going to accomplish. This is solely to test our faith, to test our love, to test our loyalty, our resolve to love God supremely. God promised Abraham he would have a son 25 years before God fulfilled that promise. That account was recorded in the book of Genesis for all Israel to read and know. Now, God puts them to the test again. Stay faithful to God and see what He will do. "Is there any God besides Me, or is there any other Rock?" God asks. "I know of none."

If you are not going to trust God, in what/whom are you going to trust?

#### THE FUTILITY OF IDOLATRY - 44:9-20:

In this long section, Isaiah speaks sarcastically of idol worship and mocks the very practice itself.

Note especially these verses: 11, 14-15, 19. The Israelites "were blindly following accepted cultural patterns of behavior and did not spend the time to meditate or consider the implications of what they were doing (44:19)" (Smith, 235).

#### GOD'S SOVEREIGN CONTROL OVER CYRUS - 44:21-28:

Israel had forgotten God (1:2-3) but God would not forget Israel (vs 21). God will wipe away their transgressions and their sins (vs 22). But, they must *return* (repent) to Him. *He* is the Redeemer. Oswalt writes (187): "life is to be lived on the basis of reflection on the character of God as revealed in his treatment of his people in their historical experience."

In verse 23, He calls on Israel and everyone else to sing, to shout for joy for the great salvation from sins that God is offering and providing for them.

God is in control (vss 24-25) even over Jerusalem (vs 26). He controls the sea (vs 27) and He controls King Cyrus (vs 28), whom He calls His "shepherd." It will be King Cyrus who will give the announcement for the foundation of the temple to be laid again. This promise is fulfilled in Ezra 1. It is interesting that at the time Isaiah preaches, the temple is not even destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar yet!

#### 45:1-8:

Moving on in to chapter 45, Isaiah continues to talk about Cyrus...

Observe in 45:1 that God calls Cyrus His "anointed," or "messiah," a term that normally refers to Jesus. Here, it serves to designate Cyrus as a specially anointed servant of God to lead Israel out of exile and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, a type of the Spiritual Messiah who would lead Israel out of the exile of sin and build the spiritual temple in Jerusalem, the church of Christ.

God works behind and through King Cyrus (vs 2-3), even though Cyrus does not know God, that is, he does not have a relationship with God. There are three reasons given here why God is using Cyrus, identified by the phrase "so that..." or "for..." or "that..." But, God does this for the sake of Jerusalem, His people. All that God does, He does so that mankind can come to know Him, if they will look at the evidence and draw the proper conclusions based on that evidence (vs 6).

"So long as we continue to make God in our image, so long as we continue to believe that we can insure our own security and comfort by manipulating the psycho-socio-physical

world without the surrender of our own autonomy, just so long we will continue in darkness, destruction, and despair” (Oswalt, 203).

God creates light and darkness (vs 7). God causes good to come and calamity. The word translated “evil” (640 times; 275 refers to trouble or calamity; Motyer, 323) in the KJV can also be translated by a word with less moral connotations, like calamity, such as the Babylonian exile would be. We use the word “bad” in the same way; Hitler is “bad” and “I’m having a bad day.” But, we do not use the word “evil” with that type of ambiguity. Here, this word is in contrast with “peace” (“well-being”) or “shalom,” not “righteousness” which would be the opposite of “evil.”

God is going to bring salvation and righteousness and if there is ever any salvation and righteousness on the earth, it will have to come from heaven (vs 8)!

Can you imagine how the Jews reacted when they heard the news that a Gentile king was going to continue dominating them, yet at the same time he would let them return home and rebuild their temple? How can that be?

#### GOD’S CONTROL OVER ALL - 45:9-25:

Yet again, God emphasizes that He is in control of all things; that’s why you trust Him. Clay does not argue with the potter; children do not argue with parents about their birth. Israel cannot / should not argue with the God of heaven.

Verse 13 makes another reference to what God is doing through King Cyrus. When mankind sees what God is doing, they - the Gentiles - will be attracted to God and will join the Jews in worship to Him (vs 14).

Those who stand up against God, especially those who worship idols, will be ashamed, while those who trusted and obeyed will not be ashamed (vs 16-17). Paul quotes Isaiah 45:17 in Romans 9:33 and 10:11.

God has not hidden His plans from mankind. He has always spoken openly, forthrightly, and righteousness (vs 19). “God is saying that His communication of Himself, his will, and his plans were not imperceptible, inaudible, unrecognizable, or impossible to understand” (Smith, 276). The same is true today.

In verses 20-21, Isaiah again criticizes the idols, their makers, and their worshipers. What good are they?

In verse 22, God calls on Israel to turn, to “repent,” and be saved. God has sworn that He will save them, if they will respond to Him in loving obedience. His word has gone out of His mouth in righteousness and it will not fail or turn back (vs 23). Every knee will bow to Him and every tongue will confess Him, a passage quoted by Paul in Romans 14:10 and Philipians 2:10. Paul shows that this verse is universal in its application.

When both Jews and Gentiles respond to God, they will see that He is righteous and strong (vs 24). The naysayers will be ashamed (vs 24) but the faithful will be justified (proven right) and will glory in God (vs 25).

Finally, in chapters 46-47, Isaiah will turn his attention to Babylon and her ultimate overthrow...