

Lesson 3

Is 44:24-45:7

We can well imagine the trepidation with which the exiled people of Judah in Babylon would have viewed the advent of a conqueror powerful enough to sweep all before him and, in the end, enter mighty Babylon unopposed. 'Bad enough,' did they say, 'to be gripped by Babylon's power'? 'What price, the power of Babylon's conqueror?' And we often feel the same today — at the mercy of powerful forces in the present, and trembling at what enormities the future will bring. Isn't that why the Lord had, in grace, given them the message of Isaiah, spoken one hundred and fifty years in advance of Cyrus? To possess and read the Word of God is to be forewarned and forearmed. Oh, yes, Cyrus is on his way; and, yes, he is seemingly invincible, but — yes, also — he is in the hand of the Lord, called according to the Lord's purposes, and (note this specially) 'for the sake of the Lord's people. For our encouragement, we also know the end of the story: it was the greater conqueror, seeming to bring the threat of a more irreversible captivity, who proved to be the liberator who would send the people back home with his imperial mandate to rebuild the temple (Ezra 3). Isaiah put the message superbly in his own inimitable words: Whether it is light or darkness, prosperity or calamity, 'I Yahweh, do all these things.' We can never over-emphasize or over-exalt the sovereignty of God. Isaiah depicts him as in full, operational charge of his world and of its every circumstance. This is our security; it is the pillow on which we lay our heads; it is why Psalm 121:2 found a place of repose in the God 'who made heaven and earth', for, as the Bible reveals the Creator, he not only originates everything but also sustains, and controls everything, and directs everything to his appointed goal: a God who is God indeed!

1. Read Isaiah 44:1-5: How does God describe his servant (vss. 1-2)? Describe the imagery used in verses 3-4 and 5. What does this evoke (keep in mind the original audience)?

2. In Isaiah 44:6-20, we have one of the greatest passages in the Old Testament about the foolishness of idolatry. What is Isaiah's argument? In what ways do we become what we worship? Explain.

3. In 44:21-23 there are two imperatives. List them. How do they build on one another?

4. Read ahead to Isaiah 45:9-13. What is the essence of Israel's complaint to God? Why would it be offensive to them that God would use Cyrus as an agent of redemption? How does God respond to that?

5. What is the overall impact of this passage for the original audience? For you? What is the purpose of the continued repetition of God's redemptive plans and Israel's idolatry?