

Isaiah 44-45A

- We ended last week as God revealed that Israel would be restored on the basis of grace
 - Because the nation could not receive God's mercy on the basis of merit
 - Their fathers had sinned and their spokesmen had transgressed
 - So though grace was coming in a future day, judgment would come first
 - At the hands of the Babylonians
 - The final verse of chapter 43 alluded to that coming judgment

[Is. 43:28](#) "So I will pollute the princes of the sanctuary,
And I will consign Jacob to the ban and Israel to revilement.

- The meaning of v.28 is two-fold
 - The princes of the sanctuary are the priests who serve in the temple
 - They are polluted as the Babylonians destroyed the temple in 586 BC
 - And Jacob is consigned to the ban and revilement
 - They are reviled in the sense that they become captives of Babylon and are placed into slavery
- God continues to link mercy and redemption with judgment
 - Though he brings judgment upon Israel for its sins, God doesn't destroy the nation and will redeem it one day

[Is. 44:1](#) ¶ "But now listen, O Jacob, My servant,
And Israel, whom I have chosen:

[Is. 44:2](#) Thus says the LORD who made you
And formed you from the womb, who will help you,
' Do not fear, O Jacob My servant;
And you Jeshurun whom I have chosen.

[Is. 44:3](#) 'For I will pour out water on the thirsty land
And streams on the dry ground;
I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring
And My blessing on your descendants;

[Is. 44:4](#) And they will spring up among the grass
Like poplars by streams of water.'

[Is. 44:5](#) "This one will say, 'I am the LORD'S';
And that one will call on the name of Jacob;
And another will write on his hand, 'Belonging to the LORD,'
And will name Israel's name with honor.

- This passage follows unbroken from the discussion at the end of chapter 43
 - Having described the coming judgment, God now says "But..."
 - I've chosen you, formed you
 - So don't fear this judgment
 - And like water on the ground, I will pour my Spirit on your offspring
 - And my blessing on your descendants
 - And they will respond with faith and dedication to the Lord
 - A generation that returns to the Lord will come up after this generation
 - Remember, the Babylonian judgment came as a result of Judah's sins under the Old Covenant and was intended to put an end to idol worship in Israel
 - Removing idols from Israel was God the Father's way of making a straight path for His Son
 - Israel never worshipped idols again after the captivity in Babylon
 - Even the use of the term Jeshurun was intended to remind the nation of their covenant
 - This is an endearing term for Jacob, and it's used in only one other book of the Bible: Deuteronomy, the book that established the covenant
- This promise of restoration was fulfilled in 536 BC as the next generation of the nation was released from captivity by Cyrus
 - The descendants of this generation responded to the opportunity according to the leading of the Spirit, just as Isaiah spoke would happen

[Ezra 1:1](#) ¶ Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying:

[Ezra 1:2](#) ¶ "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

[Ezra 1:3](#) 'Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with him! Let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel; He is the God who is in Jerusalem.

[Ezra 1:4](#) 'Every survivor, at whatever place he may live, let the men of that place support him with silver and gold, with goods and cattle, together with a freewill offering for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.'"

[Ezra 1:5](#) ¶ Then the heads of fathers' households of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and the Levites arose, even everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up and rebuild the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem.

- The Spirit drove some number of Israel to return to their land and to rebuild the temple
- But some of Isaiah's descriptions are not consistent with that restoration from Babylon
 - Verse 4-5 describes a nation repopulating easily
 - And the entire nation calling on the Lord
 - And the name of Israel will become a name of honor
- These aren't descriptions consistent with the return from Babylon
 - So these details leave us to conclude that the true fulfillment of this passage awaits Israel's restoration from spiritual Babylon following Tribulation
 - When Babylon is defeated, the Spirit is poured out on Israel and the Millennium begins
 - In which case, we would see Israel's return from Babylon as prefiguring the future restoration of Tribulation
- God the Father now returns to emphasizing He is unrivaled in all creation

[Is. 44:6](#) ¶ "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:

I am the first and I am the last,
And there is no God besides Me.

[Is. 44:7](#) "Who is like Me? Let him proclaim and declare it;
Yes, let him recount it to Me in order,
From the time that I established the ancient nation.
And let them declare to them the things that are coming
And the events that are going to take place.

[Is. 44:8](#) "Do not tremble and do not be afraid;
Have I not long since announced it to you and declared it?
And you are My witnesses.
Is there any God besides Me,
Or is there any other Rock?
I know of none."

- God the Father contrasts Himself to idols in three ways
 - First He is the "first and last"
 - In other words, He is an eternal God
 - God the Father uses this term to describe Himself three times in Isaiah
 - And God the Son uses the same term three times to describe Himself in Revelation
 - The intersection of the Father and the Son as eternal together come together at the end of this section in chapter 48 - a clear OT teaching of the trinity
 - Secondly, in v.7 the Father is the God of all history
 - All the nations of the earth were established by God
 - And their history was written and dictated by God
 - Third, in vs.7-8 God is a God of the future, declaring prophecy
 - He says He declare what would happen
 - And He announced it long ago
 - All of these facets of God's sovereignty stand apart from idols, who can demonstrate none of these abilities

- Now the Father offers a longer passage explaining the futility and stupidity of idol worship

[Is. 44:9](#) ¶ Those who fashion a graven image are all of them futile, and their precious things are of no profit; even their own witnesses fail to see or know, so that they will be put to shame.

[Is. 44:10](#) Who has fashioned a god or cast an idol to no profit?

[Is. 44:11](#) Behold, all his companions will be put to shame, for the craftsmen themselves are mere men. Let them all assemble themselves, let them stand up, let them tremble, let them together be put to shame.

[Is. 44:12](#) ¶ The man shapes iron into a cutting tool and does his work over the coals, fashioning it with hammers and working it with his strong arm. He also gets hungry and his strength fails; he drinks no water and becomes weary.

[Is. 44:13](#) Another shapes wood, he extends a measuring line; he outlines it with red chalk. He works it with planes and outlines it with a compass, and makes it like the form of a man, like the beauty of man, so that it may sit in a house.

[Is. 44:14](#) Surely he cuts cedars for himself, and takes a cypress or an oak and raises it for himself among the trees of the forest. He plants a fir, and the rain makes it grow.

[Is. 44:15](#) Then it becomes something for a man to burn, so he takes one of them and warms himself; he also makes a fire to bake bread. He also makes a god and worships it; he makes it a graven image and falls down before it.

[Is. 44:16](#) Half of it he burns in the fire; over this half he eats meat as he roasts a roast and is satisfied. He also warms himself and says, "Aha! I am warm, I have seen the fire."

[Is. 44:17](#) But the rest of it he makes into a god, his graven image. He falls down before it and worships; he also prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you are my god."

[Is. 44:18](#) ¶ They do not know, nor do they understand, for He has smeared over their eyes so that they cannot see and their hearts so that they cannot comprehend.

[Is. 44:19](#) No one recalls, nor is there knowledge or understanding to say, "I have burned half of it in the fire and also have baked bread over its coals. I roast meat and eat it. Then I make the rest of it into an abomination, I fall down before a block of wood!"

[Is. 44:20](#) He feeds on ashes; a deceived heart has turned him aside. And he cannot deliver himself, nor say, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?"

- Hardly much of an explanation required here
 - God reveals the weaknesses of those who create idols
 - Suggesting that the creation must be even weaker than it's creator
 - And then the humor of how the idol creator ignores the contradictions of his behavior

- This is the reality of idol worship
 - From the same log, we burn wood for preparing a meal and save the rest to call our god
 - Be careful of calling any distraction from following God “an idol”
 - There are many unprofitable patterns but that doesn’t make them idols
 - And idol is any graven image we view to be god
 - Truly a substitute or replacement for God
 - Something we pray to and seek assistance from
- Again God offers mercy and grace...

[Is. 44:21](#) ¶ “ Remember these things, O Jacob,
 And Israel, for you are My servant;
 I have formed you, you are My servant,
 O Israel, you will not be forgotten by Me.

[Is. 44:22](#) “I have wiped out your transgressions like a thick cloud
 And your sins like a heavy mist.
 Return to Me, for I have redeemed you.”

- This continues the repetition of the theme of this section
 - Idol worship is foolish, it will be judged
 - But in it’s place, God will supply mercy and grace
- And the mere mention of that grace gives occasion for another cry of praise by Isaiah

[Is. 44:23](#) Shout for joy, O heavens, for the LORD has done it!
 Shout joyfully, you lower parts of the earth;
 Break forth into a shout of joy, you mountains,
 O forest, and every tree in it;
 For the LORD has redeemed Jacob
 And in Israel He shows forth His glory.

- Now the Lord declares how He intends to provide that redemption in the near term for those held in bondage in Babylon

[Is. 44:24](#) ¶ Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, and the one who formed you from the womb,

“I, the LORD, am the maker of all things,
Stretching out the heavens by Myself
And spreading out the earth all alone,

[Is. 44:25](#) Causing the omens of boasters to fail,
Making fools out of diviners,
Causing wise men to draw back
And turning their knowledge into foolishness,

[Is. 44:26](#) Confirming the word of His servant
And performing the purpose of His messengers.
It is I who says of Jerusalem, ‘She shall be inhabited!’
And of the cities of Judah, ‘They shall be built.’
And I will raise up her ruins again.

[Is. 44:27](#) “It is I who says to the depth of the sea, ‘Be dried up!’
And I will make your rivers dry.

[Is. 44:28](#) “It is I who says of Cyrus, ‘He is My shepherd!
And he will perform all My desire.’
And he declares of Jerusalem, ‘She will be built,’
And of the temple, ‘Your foundation will be laid.’”

- God the Father calls Himself Israel’s redeemer
 - God also declares He is the one making fools of diviners, turning the knowledge of wise men into foolishness
 - God is always working to show the fruitlessness of relying on men and the occult for power and wisdom
 - And to the main point, He declares 150 years in advance how He will redeem Israel
 - Remember, this is being written nearly 100 years before they even go into captivity
 - Long before the Medo-Persians rise to power
 - Long before Cyrus is even born
 - God names the man and declares what he will do for God
 - Give this passage careful thought and ask yourself what sovereignty means
 - Did God ask Cyrus what Cyrus wanted to do?

- No, God decided long before that Cyrus would be His instrument to accomplish a very specific purpose
- And if God declares it, it will happen
- Daniel, the prophet, was one of those in Israel taken into captivity by Babylon
 - And when Medo Persians conquered Babylon, Daniel eventually found his way into the court of Cyrus the King of Persia
 - The Jewish historian Josephus wrote in AD 75 that Daniel showed Cyrus this passage from Isaiah 44 where Cyrus' name was recorded
 - Imagine Cyrus' surprise when he saw his own name recorded in a text that was 150 years old
 - One that predicted perfectly His arrival and destruction
 - Josephus goes on to say that this event directly led to Cyrus allowing the Jews to return to Israel
 - Tribulation
- Do you think God might have expected Daniel to show this text to Cyrus?
 - And when Cyrus saw his own name in chapter 44, we would naturally expect Cyrus might ask Daniel what else does the text say
 - And then Daniel would lead Cyrus to the next chapter, where God speaks directly to Cyrus through Isaiah's words
- God gives Cyrus some specific instructions...

[Is. 45:1](#) ¶ Thus says the LORD to Cyrus His anointed,
Whom I have taken by the right hand,
To subdue nations before him
And to loose the loins of kings;
To open doors before him so that gates will not be shut:

[Is. 45:2](#) "I will go before you and make the rough places smooth;
I will shatter the doors of bronze and cut through their iron bars.

[Is. 45:3](#) "I will give you the treasures of darkness
And hidden wealth of secret places,
So that you may know that it is I,
The LORD, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name.

[Is. 45:4](#) "For the sake of Jacob My servant,
And Israel My chosen one,
I have also called you by your name;
I have given you a title of honor
Though you have not known Me.

[Is. 45:5](#) "I am the LORD, and there is no other;
Besides Me there is no God.
I will gird you, though you have not known Me;

[Is. 45:6](#) That men know from the rising to the setting of the sun
That there is no one besides Me.
I am the LORD, and there is no other,

[Is. 45:7](#) The One forming light and creating darkness,
Causing well-being and creating calamity;
I am the LORD who does all these.

- God addresses Cyrus as His anointed, taken by the hand by God to subdue the nations
 - The word for anointed is actually the Hebrew word for "messiah"
 - Cyrus isn't the actual messiah, of course, but he becomes a type for Christ in the way he leads Israel out of bondage
 - And Cyrus prefigures the redemption of Israel from Tribulation
 - God says He will make Cyrus powerful a invincible world power
 - And God goes before him to ensure he will be successful
 - Many of these details align perfectly with history
 - Cyrus was famous for the ease with which he conquered previously impregnable cities like Sargus and Babylon
 - Babylon itself was said to have over 100 gates in the city walls, each made of brass with iron bars
 - God says Cyrus will cut through those doors easily
 - God promises Cyrus great wealth in secret and dark places
 - When Cyrus invaded Lydian empire, he came upon the well-defended city Sargus
 - King Croesus was so famous for his riches, that he came to be known as the king with the golden touch

- Another name for King Croesus was King Midas
- He hid most of his gold in underground vaults and tunnels in the city
- When Cyrus invaded, God ensured that CYrus' men would learn the location of the gold, making Cyrus easily the richest man in the world in his day
- Why does God allow Cyrus this success?
 - Cyrus was raised up for two purposes
 - In v.4 Isaiah says it will happen for the sake of Jacob
 - God intends to use Cyrus to free Israel from Babylon
 - And as we know, Cyrus was so impressed to learn all this through Daniel, that he follows through and frees Israel as we saw in Ezra
 - Notice in that same verse God says I have called Cyrus for these things though he has not known me
 - Again in v.5, God has girded or equipped Cyrus even though he wasn't aware of God
 - Cyrus was an evil, destructive force in the world
 - And that destructive force was made stronger by God's hand but ultimately for good purposes according to God's plan
 - That leads to the second reason God did this for Cyrus – that the world might know that the God of Israel is the true God
 - The way God carried through on these prophecies proves He is the one and only true God
 - V.7 makes the point succinctly...God is both the one creating light and darkness
 - All things in creation come from God's decree and according to His purpose
 - A powerful verse to contend with those who see God as only half a God, only in control of "half" of creation

[Is. 45:8](#) ¶ “ Drip down, O heavens, from above,
 And let the clouds pour down righteousness;
 Let the earth open up and salvation bear fruit,
 And righteousness spring up with it.
 I, the LORD, have created it.

[Is. 45:9](#) ¶ “Woe to the one who quarrels with his Maker —
 An earthenware vessel among the vessels of earth!
 Will the clay say to the potter, ‘What are you doing?’
 Or the thing you are making say, ‘He has no hands?’

[Is. 45:10](#) “Woe to him who says to a father, ‘What are you begetting?’
 Or to a woman, ‘To what are you giving birth?’”

[Is. 45:11](#) ¶ Thus says the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker:
 “ Ask Me about the things to come concerning My sons,
 And you shall commit to Me the work of My hands.

[Is. 45:12](#) “It is I who made the earth, and created man upon it.
 I stretched out the heavens with My hands
 And I ordained all their host.

[Is. 45:13](#) “I have aroused him in righteousness
 And I will make all his ways smooth;
 He will build My city and will let My exiles go free,
 Without any payment or reward,” says the LORD of hosts.

- Isaiah inserts another one-verse song of praise in v.8
- Then in vs.9-13, for those who read the previous section and scoff at the idea of God causing calamity or working through pagan men who do not know Him
 - God prepares this wake up call
 - He says there will be woe to those who quarrel with his Maker
 - What kind of quarrel is He talking about?
 - Isaiah defines questioning God’s way of working in creation as a quarrel
 - The best captured in the found at the end of v.9
 - The one being formed by the Maker will look up at the Maker and declare, “You have no hands.”
 - If the one forming you by his hands doesn’t have hands, then you don’t exist
 - Likewise, if you believe that God observes some kind of boundary or restraint in how far He influences His creation, you are arguing against your own existence

- More importantly, you are quarreling with God
 - It must be that God can call it a quarrel to question His right to do what He will in creation because you refuse to accept the counsel of Scripture on the matter
- For example, to the issue of Cyrus and his suitability as an instrument of God
 - God chose the man, equipped him and called him to a task...THOUGH HE DIDN'T KNOW GOD
 - In other words, Cyrus' will and knowledge was irrelevant to God
 - God was perfectly capable of causing Cyrus to do exactly as God wishes without Cyrus' awareness, much less his agreement
 - What does this say about "free will"
 - Is there such a thing in the traditional sense of those words?
 - Does man have a will in the face of God's decrees and purposes
 - Now consider the next time in the Bible this same passage is used
 - We find it in Romans 9:

[Rom. 9:16](#) So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

[Rom. 9:17](#) For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH."

[Rom. 9:18](#) So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

[Rom. 9:19](#) ¶ You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?"

[Rom. 9:20](#) On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it?

[Rom. 9:21](#) Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?

[Rom. 9:22](#) What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?

[Rom. 9:23](#) And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory,

- Paul references the same verses from Isaiah to make the same point
 - As God decides, some men are set on a path to destruction while others are set on a path to glory
 - This is the right of the creator, and when we doubt His authority and work in this way, we are quarreling with God
 - And this quarrel will bring us woe, Isaiah says
 - Just like the child who might question his earthly father or mother concerning how they gave birth to a child
 - Remember, understanding it is not a prerequisite to accepting it
 - God's word declares it to be so
 - And the example of Cyrus proves that this is how God chooses to work in His creation
- Returning to Isaiah, look at vs.11
 - He says if you ask me about what will happen to my sons
 - And once God tells us what will happen, we will have committed God to carry it through because He never fails to keep His word
 - God calls the future itself, the "work of My hands"
 - God is at work creating the future as He prefers it to be
 - Finally, God reasserts His authority to work through Cyrus
 - He created all things
 - And He will work through Cyrus "in righteousness" to make him conquer
 - So that his decree and wealth will lead to the city being rebuilt
 - And the Jewish people set free
 - And these things will happen without any payment or ransom being paid for Israel
 - God will have provided the way alone