

## Lesson 27 Isaiah 45:9-25 God's Plan for Obstinate Israel 1

### Introduction

Isaiah		
"He will lift up a standard for the nations...he will set a sign among the peoples."		
Book of the Servant 40-55		
The Great Deliverance 44:24-48:22		
Cyrus 44:24-45:8	Israel 45:9-46:13	Babylon 47:1-48:22
A The rebuilders of Zion (44:24-28) B The irresistible conqueror (45:1-8)	A The Lord asserts his sovereignty over Israel (45:9-13) B Israel still at the center of the Lord's world-wide plans (45:14-25) C The Lord asserts his care over Israel (46:1-13)	A Babylon conquered (47:1-15) B The captives liberated (48:1-22)

Alec Motyer. *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (InterVarsity Press, 1996).

Let's start with a recap of where we are in our structure of Isaiah. We've divided Isaiah into three books, The Book of the King; the book of the Servant; and the Book of the Conqueror. That three-part division of Isaiah is pretty standard. The titles come from Alec Motyer. And I continue to use his titles as we further break down the structure.

Right now, we are in the Book of the Servant, which can be divided into four major sections, The Consolation of the World; The Redemption of Israel; The Great Deliverance; and the Greater Deliverance. The theme of the Great Deliverance, our current section, has been raised both in our previous sections of consolation and redemption. God's people need consolation because Israel will be exiled. That will not be the end. Israel will consequently be redeemed. That redemption will come in two forms, national redemption from exile and spiritual redemption from sin. Those are the themes of the last two sections of the Book of the Servant. The Great Deliverance further develops the promise of national redemption, and the Greater Deliverance further develops the promise of spiritual redemption.

We began the third section of the Book of the Servant, the Great Deliverance, in our last lesson with the Cyrus prophecy. My focus on historical background made for a long lesson, so I have not yet discussed the structure of the Great Deliverance. Motyer gave me options, and I chose the simplest one. We will divide the Great Deliverance into three parts titled, Cyrus; Israel; and Babylon.

The Cyrus section announces God's plan to use a non-Jewish messiah (anointed one) to liberate Israel from Babylon. The Israel section considers Israel's response to that unexpected plan, and the Babylon section describes how the plan will unfold.

Having covered the Cyrus section in our last lesson, we're ready now to consider Israel's response to God's plan. I had thought to do this in one lesson, but there is so much interesting connection between this chapter and Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans, I'm going to need two lessons to cover this. There are prophecies about Israel here that look so far ahead into the future, it will be really helpful to have Paul come in with added information about these prophecies. He has advantage over Isaiah in that he receives revelation about Israel's role in the plan after the Gospel of Jesus Christ has been made known.

We will address this Israel section as a loose chiasm. Israel complains about God's plan to use Cyrus. God rebukes Israel and explains He still intends for Israel to play a central role in the plan, and then Israel complains again. Complaint, correction, complaint, that's our loose chiasm.

We will cover the first complaint and the correction in this lesson. That's in 45:9-25. We will leave the second complaint in chapter 46 for our next lesson. The text of this first complaint is really a response from God to Israel. The complaint is understood in the way that God responds. Motyer titles the section, "Impermissible Questions: The Sovereign Lord." This is 45:9-13.

### Impermissible Questions: The Sovereign Lord 45:9-13

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| <p><sup>9</sup> “Woe to the one who quarrels with his Maker—<br/>Will the clay say to the potter,<br/>Or the thing you are making say,<br/><sup>10</sup> “Woe to him who says to a father,<br/>‘What are you begetting?’<br/><sup>11</sup> Thus says the LORD,<br/>“Ask Me about the things to come concerning<br/>My sons,<br/><sup>12</sup> “It is I who made the earth,<br/>I stretched out the heavens with My hands<br/><sup>13</sup> “I have aroused him in righteousness<br/>He will build My city<br/>Without any payment or reward,”</p> | <p>An earthenware vessel among the vessels of earth!<br/>‘What are you doing?’<br/>‘He has no hands’?<br/>Or to a woman,<br/>‘To what are you giving birth?’ ”<br/>the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker:<br/>And you shall commit to Me the work of My hands.<br/><br/>and created man upon it.<br/>And I ordained all their host.<br/>And I will make all his ways smooth;<br/>and will let My exiles go free,<br/>says the LORD of hosts.</p> |
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#### *Sovereignty versus obstinance*

God has a plan. This passage starts with the implication that someone is quarreling with God about that plan. The previous passage, the Cyrus prophecy, ended with this assertion from God.

- I am the LORD, and there is no other,  
<sup>7</sup> The One forming light and creating darkness,      Causing well-being and creating calamity;  
I am the LORD who does all these.

God has a plan. That plan includes both calamity and well-being for Israel; calamity in defeat, destruction, and deportation to Babylon; well-being in deliverance from Babylon through Cyrus. From God’s perspective, the whole plan is good news. The very last verse of the Cyrus prophecy is both a conclusion and a bridge to our present section about Israel. 45:8.

- <sup>8</sup> “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.

We are certainly supposed to see the plan of God as good news. This is righteousness. But Israel does not. There are two major problems with the plan from the Jewish perspective. First, Israel is going to be defeated and deported. That’s a problem. Second, the shepherd that God has anointed, the messiah who will deliver Israel, is not even Jewish. He is some foreign king from the northeast whose name is Cyrus. Faithful Jews might hear this plan as a rejection of the Davidic Messiah, a moving on from David to a Persian.

We are supposed to assume out the outset of this passage that the Jews have objected to the plan in way similar to the later prophet Habakkuk. This is what Habakkuk was known for. He will be active during the time of the Babylonian threat. He will prophesy about the same eventual exile that Isaiah is here prophesying about, just that he’ll be much closer to the event. Habakkuk asks God to do something about the wickedness of Judean Jews. He sees a problem in Judea. God has a plan. Babylon will be sent to judge Judah. Habakkuk is shocked when God reveals that plan. He quarrels with God.

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| <p>Your eyes are too pure to approve evil,<br/>Why do You look with favor<br/>Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up</p> | <p>And You cannot look on wickedness <i>with favor</i>.<br/>On those who deal treacherously?<br/>Those more righteous than they?</p> |
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- Habakkuk 1:13

Habakkuk was ready for Judah to be judged. As a faithful believer he knew Judah deserved punishment. But to use Gentiles to punish the chosen people? That just couldn’t be it! That can’t be the plan! This dismay that we hear from Habakkuk is what we should imagine when we turn back to Isaiah’s passage. Not only has Isaiah revealed the plan of a Babylonian punishment: he has also

foreseen a type of Gentile Messiah. And the Jews are shocked. They don't like the plan. They oppose the plan. Our passage records God's response to their complaint. This is God speaking.

- <sup>9</sup> "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'?"

Woe in this sense is the declaration of punishment or calamity on the one who would have the audacity to quarrel. It's not going to go well to argue with the One who has made you. Nor should it go well. It makes no sense that we should instruct Him: the One who came up with the very idea of our existence, who envisioned us, who designed us, who brought us into being. Isaiah likens it to a clay pot or vessel among all the vessels of the earth.

Will the clay say to the potter,      'What are you doing?'

And that is almost a Disney movie. Imagine a clay jar used for storing grain or wine hopping into the potter's workroom to berate him, "What do you think you are doing using me this way?" And imagine a half-made vessel on the potter's wheel joining in to say, "He has no hands," even as those hands are carefully forming that vessel!

This is the Israelite questioning of God's plan, "What are you doing?" And a second Israelite going further to deny that God is even able to accomplish His will, "He has no hands." Isaiah follows with a second metaphor.

- <sup>10</sup> "Woe to him who says to a father,      Or to a woman,  
'What are you begetting?'      'To what are you giving birth?'"

The question seems absurd. A father and a mother give birth to a baby. There is a similar absurdity in questioning God's plan. God is giving birth to a holy people: to a people that can be called by His name. Instead of questioning, judging, rejecting how God goes about doing this, Israel should be seeking to understand God's plan from the attitude of obedience and worship. God is not willing to be questioned by His people about His sovereign right and His ability to execute His plan. He is willing to explain His plan to a people that will trust Him and want to understand Him and are seeking Him. Verse 11.

- <sup>11</sup> Thus says the LORD,      the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker:  
"Ask Me about the things to come concerning      And you shall commit to Me the work of My hands.  
My sons,

"Ask me" God says. He is willing to reveal what He plans to do. And "commit to me the work of my hands." This is the right response. Trust God's plan to God because He is God. Verses 12-13.

- <sup>12</sup> "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.  
<sup>13</sup> "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.

Cyrus is the plan. God is Sovereign. God is able. God made the heavens and earth. When He says He plans to raise up Cyrus to build Jerusalem and let the exiles go free, you can bet on that plan. Cyrus is going to do it without payment or reward. God has got it all figured out. This is the way it is going to be.

Accepting God's plan for humanity is an ongoing struggle for humans, not only among non-believers, but also among those we who have believed. Test yourself. Read through the Bible, and I'm sure you will find God doing all kinds of things that you object to, that you emotionally, intellectually, you just struggle to agree with. There is a lot. The punishment of Adam and Eve that brings sin and death to all people; allowing pain and suffering to affect good people; allowing Satan to continue to influence the world; the Flood; the conquest of Canaan; striking dead that priest who touched the Ark of the Covenant; striking dead Ananias and Saphira after Jesus had come; not removing our body of sin when we believed; requiring knowledge of Jesus Christ as the exclusive means of salvation;

condemning non-believers to Hell. There is a lot about God's plan revealed in the Bible that causes severe angst and dismay. Is this plan really good? How can this be the plan? Is this the way God is going to bring about His Kingdom?

*Complaint in the Letter to the Romans*

I intentionally brought up Habakkuk as an example. One, because he's a good example of this kind of questioning attitude, but also because he is a stepping stone that helps clarify the link between Isaiah and the Apostle Paul, particularly in regard to a rejection of God's revealed plan. The revealed good news of God is resisted here in Isaiah 45. The revealed will of God is resisted in the prophecy of Habakkuk, and the revealed will of God is going to be resisted throughout the argument section of Romans, chapters 1-11.

The connection between Paul and Habakkuk is set up in the thesis statement in Romans 1:17 where Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4, "But the righteous man shall live by faith (Romans 1:17)." That quote does two things. It brings in for Paul the issue of righteousness by faith. (And righteousness is going to be a big issue for us here in Isaiah 45.) It also sets up for Paul a particular literary approach in the letter to the Romans. Habakkuk was the prophet who stood on the wall in defiance of God's plan. He could not accept the judgment of wicked Judah by the more wicked Babylonians. God told Habakkuk to wait for it. It was going to happen. God is sovereign. Habakkuk had a choice. He could either respond as a righteous man in faith, or he could set himself against God as a proud man in opposition. Habakkuk started with resistance, struggling to accept this unthinkable plan of God. But his perspective dramatically changes, so that by the end of the book he is seeing God's plan with the eyes of faith. His prophecy ends with these words, Habakkuk 3:17-19.

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| 17 | Though the fig tree should not blossom           | And there be no fruit on the vines,        |
|    | Though the yield of the olive should fail        | And the fields produce no food,            |
|    | Though the flock should be cut off from the fold | And there be no cattle in the stalls,      |
| 18 | Yet I will exult in the LORD,                    | I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. |
| 19 | The Lord GOD is my strength,                     | And He has made my feet like hinds' feet,  |
|    | And makes me walk on my high places.             |  |

In Romans 1-11 Paul argues for the righteous plan of God that has been revealed in Jesus Christ. As with Habakkuk, every person has a choice to make. The righteous will live by faith, accepting and submitting to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, while the proud will resist the plan as being incompatible with their vision, their understanding of who God is and what His plan ought to be.

Paul uses the literary device of a Jewish opponent who rejects God's plan, just as we see here in Habakkuk, and as we see here in Isaiah. When Paul explains the Good News of justification by faith in chapters 1-4, the Jewish opponent pushes back, "That invalidates the Law!" When Paul explains the Good News of empowerment through grace in chapters 5-8, the Jewish opponent pushes back, "That promotes sin!" When Paul explains the Good News of inclusion in mercy in chapters 9-11, the Jewish opponent pushes back, "That invalidates God's promises to Israel!"

Opposition by Jews against the Gospel plan climaxes in that last section, Romans 9-11. There is a double problem. Not only will the majority of Jews reject Jesus as the Messiah (as Cyrus is rejected here) and then be left out of the New Covenant community, but the majority who will be included by faith into the New Covenant community are going to be Gentiles. That's shocking news to the Jews. Certainly, disobedient Jews should be left out. But to include a majority of Gentiles who are not even required to keep Old Testament law, that is scandalous. That plan cannot be, it ought not be.

Paul insists that is exactly the way it is going to be. God has acted in His sovereignty through Jesus Christ. This is the plan. Paul picks up on the same metaphor we see in Isaiah 45:9 of a potter's sovereignty over the vessels he has made. Romans 9:18-21.

So then [God] has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" 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? 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?

Just as Jewish listeners would object to God's plan of exile to Babylon and redemption through Cyrus, so also Paul's Jewish listeners would object to God's plan of salvation through faith in Jesus that would leave unbelieving Jews out and include believing Gentiles in.

But if that's the plan, what does that mean for Israel? To use Paul's language in Romans 11:1 and 11, "I say then, God has not rejected his people, has he? ... They have not stumbled so as to fall, did they? May it never be!" Do the use of Babylon to punish Israel and the use of Cyrus to provide national redemption indicate a moving on from Israel to Gentiles; a moving away from the promises to David? Has the sin of Judah lead to a complete rejection of Israel? Have they stumbled so badly as to fall out of God's plan of salvation? According to Paul, "may it never be!" Also, according to Isaiah, no they have not. That's the emphasis provided in the middle of our loose chiasm. We move now from complaint to correction. This passage is titled "A World Plan, A Central People," Isaiah 45:14-25.

### **A World Plan, A Central People 45:14-25**

See if you pick up on any allusions that Paul uses later in his letters.

- <sup>14</sup> Thus says the LORD,  
"The products of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush And the Sabeans, men of stature,  
Will come over to you and will be yours; They will walk behind you, they will come over  
in chains  
And will bow down to you; They will make supplication to you:  
'Surely, God is with you, and there is none else, No other God.' "  
<sup>15</sup> Truly, You are a God who hides Himself, O God of Israel, Savior!  
<sup>16</sup> They will be put to shame and even humiliated, all of them;  
The manufacturers of idols will go away together in humiliation.  
<sup>17</sup> Israel has been saved by the LORD With an everlasting salvation;  
You will not be put to shame or humiliated To all eternity.  
<sup>18</sup> For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (He is the God  
who formed the earth and made it, He established it  
and did not create it a waste place, but formed it to be inhabited),  
"I am the LORD, and there is none else.  
<sup>19</sup> "I have not spoken in secret, In some dark land;  
I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, 'Seek Me in a waste place';  
I, the LORD, speak righteousness, Declaring things that are upright.  
<sup>20</sup> "Gather yourselves and come; Draw near together,  
you fugitives of the nations;  
They have no knowledge, Who carry about their wooden idol  
And pray to a god who cannot save.  
<sup>21</sup> "Declare and set forth your case; Indeed, let them consult together.  
Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it?  
Is it not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me,  
A righteous God and a Savior; There is none except Me.  
<sup>22</sup> "Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth;  
For I am God, and there is no other.  
<sup>23</sup> "I have sworn by Myself, The word has gone forth from My mouth  
in righteousness  
And will not turn back,  
That to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance.  
<sup>24</sup> "They will say of Me, 'Only in the LORD are righteousness and strength.'  
Men will come to Him, And all who were angry at Him will be put to shame.  
<sup>25</sup> "In the LORD all the offspring of Israel Will be justified and will glory."

*The Importance of Israel*

Every knee will bow and every tongue confess. Do you recognize that in Paul's letters? It is in Philippians 2:10-11 in reference to Jesus who become a servant, even to the point of death, but then He was lifted up again by God. Every knee bows and every tongue confessed that He is Lord. Paul quotes the same verse in Romans 14:11 to emphasize that we all stand before God as our Lord. We will come back to Paul at the end of this lesson and the beginning of the next. This passage starts with a surprising prophecy concerning Israel. And we're going to really have to think about this, what could this mean.

<sup>14</sup> Thus says the LORD,

"The products of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush	And the Sabeans, men of stature,
Will come over to you and will be yours;	They will walk behind you, they will come over
	in chains
And will bow down to you;	They will make supplication to you:
'Surely, God is with you,	and there is none else, No other God.' "

Isaiah referred to these same three nations of Egypt, Cush, and Seba in 43:3, saying that they would be given in ransom for Israel. The three terms cover the upper and lower Nile region which we can lump together as "greater Egypt." The southern superpower of greater Egypt is representative of human power and opposition to God in much the same way that the northern superpowers of Babylon and Assyria are representative of that human power and opposition to God. Reference to Egypt links the original Exodus story to the future exodus foray of Babylon. We have already seen that a few times. In this prophecy, the products of greater Egypt are to be given over to Israel as plunder, and the people of Egypt are to walk behind Israel as captives.

When does that come true? There is no direct reference here to Israel. The pronoun "you" is not specified. So, the suggestion has been made that we are not talking about Israel at all, but this is Cyrus. The military language fits the Cyrus prophecy well. But not only did Cyrus not defeat Egypt, more to the point, the pronoun "you" here is feminine singular in the Hebrew. Isaiah is making sure we don't connect this to Cyrus. So this is Israel.

That creates another problem. Persia did eventually conquer Egypt. Israel never did. Israel never took the plunder of Egypt nor led her peoples as captives. Unless maybe we really stretch it and say this is the Six Day War in 1967. But I really don't think that fits. We have options in how we might interpret this prophecy. There are two issues to consider. The first regards how we understand prophecy about Israel in the New Covenant age. We'll need to spend some time on that. The second regards whether the defeat of Egypt here is military or spiritual. So, is military language figurative?

There are two traditional approaches to how we understand the prophecies regarding Israel in the new Covenant Age. One approach takes Israel to be the Israel of old, the geo-political state made up of ethnic Jews. This approach emphasizes discontinuity between the old and the new. Israel is Israel. Israel is not the Church. The Church is the Church. This approach is associated more with dispensationalism. A different traditional approach is to understand the Church and Israel as synonymous in the New Covenant age. Prophecies about the people of God Israel in the Old Covenant now apply to the people of God, the Church, in the New Covenant. This approach emphasizes continuity between the old and the new. Israel flows right into the Church. It's the people of God. This approach is more associated with covenantalism.

The first approach might understand the capture of Egypt literally or figuratively. It could be a military victory or a spiritual victory. When we go back to the original Exodus, we can get a sense of what that might look like after the tenth plague, where God did all the fighting. It was a spiritual battle. The Egyptians gave goods to the Israelites just to get them out of Egypt. And there were a number of Egyptians who joined the Israelites when they left. And the Bible even uses the language of "plunder". Israelites "plundered" the Egyptians. Whether we consider the language as a military truth, or if we understand it as a spiritual reality that the Egyptians join in spiritually with Israel, the

key point to the first traditional approach is that Israel will fulfill this prophecy as an ethnic, geo-political entity. It is the nation Israel, and that's what we should be looking for.

The second approach might also view the plunder of Egypt as either a military event or a spiritual reality. But either way, the prophecy would be fulfilled by the Church, the new Israel, not ethnic Israel. And I was trying to figure out a way if we think of Israel as the Church, how might this be true as a military event. And I think in the Crusades there were believers who could use this as a prophecy that would validate conquering Egypt as the Kingdom of God on Earth. More likely, the second approach would interpret the plundering of Egypt as a spiritual event, where the peoples of Egypt become part of the Church. The key point to this approach is that we read the prophecies about Israel as prophecies that are realized in the Church: the Church is the new Israel.

There is some justification in the text of Isaiah both for reading this prophecy as figurative of a spiritual conquest of Egypt, and as applying this prophecy to the New Covenant people of God, to the Church. The new Zion image in Isaiah 2:3 with the peoples of the Earth streaming into Jerusalem sounds very much like the New Heaven and New Earth of Revelation. If that's true, the Gentiles are not streaming into a ethnic community of Jews. When they stream into Zion, they are streaming into the multi-ethnic community of the Church. There is also the oracle in Isaiah 19:22-25 that describes the people of God as a multi-ethnic community.

<sup>22</sup> The LORD will strike Egypt, striking but healing; so they will return to the LORD, and He will respond to them and will heal them. <sup>23</sup> In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrians will come into Egypt and the Egyptians into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. <sup>24</sup> In that day Israel will be the third *party* with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, <sup>25</sup> whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, "Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance."

How are we to understand that prophecy? The New Covenant community of the Church provides a conceptual framework that aligns very well with this prophecy, of Egyptians, and Assyrians, and Jews worshipping God together. Paul says in Ephesians 2 that when Christ broke down the barrier, He became our peace and He took the two men, the Jew and the Gentile, and He brought them together as one in Christ. Still, someone could point out that the way Israel is being used in this passage is not as the multi-ethnic church, it's not Assyria and Egypt will become part of Israel. They don't melt into Israel, but Israel remains ethnic Israel in this prophecy. It's Egypt, and Assyria, and Israel together. Maybe it's more the first approach?

I do not favor either traditional approach. I think the tension between these two ways of understanding Israel raises important questions to think about. But I also think presenting the issue as an either/or creates a polarization that results in proponents of one approach or the other being a little too confident in their interpretations. They might automatically assume that we're speaking of ethnic Israel, or they might automatically assume that it's the New Covenant community the Church, whereas in the original prophecy it's just not clear. We don't want to be overly confident just because we've come up with a mechanism, a way that we always interpret. I believe there is a better, third, approach. Before stating that approach, we first do need to talk about the obscurity usually inherent in prophecies of the far future. Far future prophecy is often very hard to interpret in detail until the prophecy is actually fulfilled. We may get some clear detail, but that is more an exception than the rule. For example, the naming of Cyrus. That is a lot of detail. We are looking for a guy named, Cyrus. That level of specificity is unprecedented. That's much more an exception than the rule. Prophecy of the far future usually outlines principles and events. God reveals the details of that outline but over time, not all at once. We have to get closer to the events and then the details become clearer. Like Habakkuk, the faithful must wait for the plan to unfold.

Prophecy regarding the far distant future is just as fuzzy as looking at a far distant horizon. We might be able to recognize a white church spire, or the blue of the sea, or a towering, purple mountain, but the water particles in the air make the details all the more blurry the further away the objects of our

gaze. In a similar way, the details of prophecy become blurred by the further away in time that the prophetic events will take place.

We can also compare it to a mountain. Sometimes the mountain the prophet sees in the distance looks like one massive peak. As events progress, the people of God climb one peak to realize there is a long valley between that peak and the next peak. You know, what looked like one peak is at least two. For example, prophecies of Israel's return from exile might seem to include the building of the Temple and the establishment of David's eternal throne. In the prophecy it all seems to happen together. But after reaching the peak of a rebuilt Temple, believers faced a valley of 500 years before reaching the point of the Messiah's coming. And it was not until the ascension of the Messiah back into Heaven that believers understood, "Oh, He's coming more than once!" There is a long valley between the Messiah's first coming and His second coming. What appeared to be one large mountainous peak in Isaiah, upon closer inspection, is at least three distinct peaks in time. The building of the Temple, and then there's a long time before Jesus comes the first time, and then there's a long time before Jesus comes again. And the details of that third coming, the third peak, they're not so clearly defined as we would like. So there are still questions in our far future, and the details are not so easy to discern.

So we have this issue that various events can be conflated together in prophetic announcements, they don't become clear until you get close to the events themselves. There is another issue, and that's the issue of using language understandable at the time of writing to speak of events or realities that have not yet happened. So, God provides an outline of New Covenant events through Isaiah. So, some things about the New Covenant we can see. But God has made known only a limited amount of New Covenant detail. There is so much you can't see from Isaiah's vantage point. So, Isaiah had to communicate the outline of what he did see using the language he had available in his Old Covenant times. Old Testament prophecies, like Egypt, Assyria, and Israel coming together in worship prepare Israel for some kind of revolutionary new conceptualization of what it means to be the people of God, but without providing all the definition that can be needed for that new concept. Isaiah is using Old Covenant language to communicate amazing new realities. But God has not yet provided clarity on the details of that far future reality.

Okay. Now I am ready to suggest a third approach to understanding the fulfillment of prophecies concerning Israel. I am not suggesting that this approach will clear up all the problems. That's the point of what I've just said. I want to insist that there is obscurity in future, especially far-future, prophecy. That's the nature of the prophecy. We should not expect to understand all the details. I do think this third approach provides a better general outline. And that's what the prophecy of the far future does for us, it gives us an outline. And this is what I think the outline is regarding Israel. Prophecies concerning Israel in the New Covenant age refer to the ethnic people Israel, and may also refer to the whole Church in that the specific instance of ethnic Israel implies the larger whole.

That's my way of saying that I think Isaiah is looking ahead to the Church and yet, he is not equating Israel with the Church. The Church will be a spiritual community of peoples from every tribe, nation and language. Ethnic diversity continues to exist in the New Covenant community. We don't all melt together. Our ethnicity is not lost. The church is a gathering of a remnant from all nations. Egyptians, and Assyrians, and Israelites, and Koreans, and Croatians, and Americans, and Portuguese, and Chinese, and Poles, and Turks, and Greeks, and Ukrainians, and Russians, and Ethiopians, and Australians, and Indonesians, and Mexicans, and Argentines, and Belgians, and Germans, the Persians, and on, and on, and on: believers from every specific ethnic group are drawn together to make up a worldwide people of God united by faith in Jesus Christ.

I do not think references of Israel in this chapter, or in the rest of Isaiah, are equivalent to that New Covenant reality. When we refer to Israel I don't think we're talking about the multi-ethnic Church, the New Covenant community. I think reference to Israel is reference to one of the ethnic groups included in that New Covenant reality. You know, at least the believing remnant of Israel is the Israel that's in that group. At the same time, in light of Israel's special, special role in God's historic plan of salvation, I believe that reference to Israel can be a specific instance that implies the whole. So we



refer to Israel as Israel, but the truth prophesied applied to the whole Church, to all the ethnic communities that have come together to be one in Christ. So, as a reference to Moscow might imply the city of Moscow, but it might be a way of referring to all the cities and villages of Russia; or a reference to a Coke might imply a Coca Cola, but it also might imply all varieties of soft drink. We can refer to a special instance that implies. Reference to Israel is sometimes used to imply all the ethnic groups included in the New Covenant community. That is different than saying that Israel is synonymous with the New Covenant community. And it still may be possible that, at times, the Bible uses that language: the new Israel is the Church. I think that occurs some, but I think that's generally exceptional. I think when you read, "Israel," you should be thinking, ethnic Israel.

So, I believe that some of the prophecies regarding Israel in Isaiah are fulfilled by the Church, as the New Covenant community of God. And that sense, we're speaking of Israel as instance of the whole, but the whole fulfillment is accomplished by what God is doing through the New Covenant community. And I believe that some of the prophecies are fulfilled by ethnic Israel. How do we know which prophecies about Israel are fulfilled by the Church and which prophecies about Israel are to be fulfilled by ethnic Israel? It's not always easy. Sometimes it seems clear to me: context, context, context, context is king and helping us understand what the prophet is doing. We will do our best to interpret the text in its own context, acknowledging that a clear interpretation based on Isaiah alone simply might not be possible. It may be too far in the future for us to see the details clearly.

We do have the advantage of living in the New Covenant age. So, some fulfillment has already been revealed for us in the New Testament. We may have already passed the events that were prophesied, and so we ought to be able to interpret and understand those events quite clearly. Still, we also have to acknowledge that some events remain far in the future.

So, some things that were far in the future to Isaiah are still far in the future to us. So, the New Testament is not going to clarify all of Isaiah for us. We may still be in the position of Habakkuk, of the faithful believer who is waiting for the plan of God to be made manifest. So, I am going to continue with a bit of open handedness. But I will use the third approach, assuming that Israel refers to ethnic Israel, and I'm going to apply that here to Isaiah 45. Later we will refer to Paul to help us with interpretation, but I am going to hold that off until our next lesson. For the remainder of this lesson, I am going to follow the logic of Isaiah 14-55 passage the best I can with this third approach in mind.

#### *The Importance of Israel*

This is where we are. God has declared a plan of salvation for the Jews from exile in Babylon that envisions a non-Jewish type of Messiah named Cyrus who will be instrumental in freeing Israel and rebuilding Jerusalem. That's the plan. The people of Israel respond to that plan with shock and complaint. That was our first passage in this section. In this our second passage, God reasserts His plan to use Cyrus and emphasizes that His promises to Israel still stand. Greater Egypt will become captive to Israel. The last line of verse 14 suggests this is a kind of spiritual captivity as the Egyptians confess, "Surely, God is with you, and there is none else, No other God."

Verse 15 responds to this plan with these words,

<sup>15</sup> Truly, You are a God who hides Himself,                      O God of Israel, Savior!

That may be a statement made by the new Egyptian believers of verse 14, or it may be a statement made by Israel, still in a bit of shock about this plan to use Cyrus. The revelation of God's word can feel like this. "You have hidden yourself, God! Who would have guessed you would have worked in this way."

Verses 16 and 17 separate Israel out from those who worship idol-gods. This is the result of God's plan.

<sup>16</sup> They will be put to shame and even humiliated,                      all of them;  
The manufacturers of idols    will go away together in humiliation.  
<sup>17</sup> Israel has been saved by the LORD                                      With an everlasting salvation;  
You will not be put to shame or humiliated                      To all eternity.

God is going to form for Himself a holy people. That has been His intention from the creation of the Earth. He made the Earth as a habitation for His people. That's verse 18.

18 For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (He is the God  
who formed the earth and made it, He established it  
and did not create it a waste place, but formed it to be inhabited),  
I am the LORD, and there is none else.

This has been the plan from the beginning. God will form a people for Himself to dwell on the Earth. He has not kept this secret, contrary to the statement in verse 15 that He has hidden Himself. God has given revelation for those who will listen and obey. Verse 19.

19 “I have not spoken in secret,  
I did not say to the offspring of Jacob,  
I, the LORD, speak righteousness,  
In some dark land;  
‘Seek Me in a waste place’;  
Declaring things that are upright.

God's plan unfolds as He has foretold. His intention has always been to gather a people made up of all nations with Israel playing a special role. God calls all people together in verses 20 and 21 using the language of a law court.

20	“Gather yourselves and come;  They have no knowledge, And pray to a god	you fugitives of the nations;  Who carry about their wooden idol who cannot save.	Draw near together,
21	“Declare and set forth your case; Who has announced this from of old? Is it not I, the LORD? A righteous God and a Savior;	Indeed, let them consult together. Who has long since declared it? And there is no other God besides Me, There is none except Me.	

God prosecutes the idol-gods and finds them impotent to save. At the same time, He asserts His on ability to save. He is Savior. He is unique in this. He is the only righteous God and Savior, “There is none except me.” In the next verse, God issues an invitation to the fugitives of the nations.

<sup>22</sup> “Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth;  
For I am God, and there is no other.

He is very clear in that. God is sovereign. God is unique. This is the plan. There is no other plan. Everyone will declare the right lordship of God, whether in rebellion or in submission. It can't be escaped. Willing or unwilling, every knee will bow. Verse 23 and 24.

23	“I have sworn by Myself,	The word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness
	And will not turn back,	
	That to Me every knee will bow,	every tongue will swear allegiance.
24	“They will say of Me, Men will come to Him,	‘Only in the LORD are righteousness and strength.’ And all who were angry at Him will be put to shame.

This language of shame and humiliation has been used throughout for those who hold to idols and oppose the revealed will of God. You can be angry at God. You can be cynical about God. You can refuse God. You can lift up alternatives to God. But unless you yield in obedient submission to God, you will be put to shame. God is real. Only God can save. He is on that throne in the end. So, no matter how dark things might get, hold on to God. If you rebel against Him or deny Him, you will end in shame. But verse 25 applies to those who hold on.

<sup>25</sup> “In the LORD all the offspring of Israel Will be justified and will glory.”

The word “justified” here means, “to be declared right in a court of law.” That is the context Isaiah has envisioned. He called the nations to stand in the court. Those who stand and affirm their allegiance to Yahweh and their trust in Him as Savior, will be vindicated. They will be declared right. That’s what it means to be justified. They will glory in the revelation of Yahweh as Lord and Savior. Those who deny God and turn away from His plan will end up humiliated in their rebellion.

The promise here is to Israel. All the offspring of Israel will be justified and will glory. Paul says something very similar in Romans 11 that I really want to get into. The language of Isaiah helps us understand Paul, and the revelation given through Paul helps us interpret Isaiah. Let’s stop for now, and I will pick up right here in our next lesson to support that idea that Isaiah helps us interpret Paul and Paul, Isaiah, and we will also finish our loose chiasm. We have covered complaint and correction. And we will come back to the final complaint next time.