

A Great and Mighty God Keeps Great and Mighty Promises

ISAIAH CHAPTER 45

Is it more important to make a promise or to keep a promise? If, as a child, you ever had a parent promise you something and you were really looking forward to it, then for one reason or another that parent did not keep the promise, how did you feel? What did it do to your trust level the next time that parent made a promise? Part of the security and one of the joys of being a Christian is knowing that God, our Heavenly Father, keeps every promise He has made. That message is reinforced today as we look at chapter 45 of Isaiah.

You may remember as we began the second half of the book of Isaiah back in Chapter 40 that there was an expectation in the air about the Jews being released from their captivity in Babylon, which would be around the year 536 B.C.; and if you don't remember you'll undoubtedly find this brief review helpful before we continue our study today in Isaiah chapter 45. In chapters 40–48, which Isaiah wrote 100 years before the captivity even began, liberation was in the air. There is the persistent promise of a new exodus with God taking the lead. There is the approach of a conqueror who is eventually identified as Cyrus who will overthrow the nation of Babylon. There is also a new theme unfolding that will reveal the glory of the call to be a servant and a light to the nations. The prophet Isaiah expresses all this with a sense of excitement.

In Isaiah 40 we're reminded of the greatness of God.

This chapter contrasts the greatness of God with the weakness of mankind (verses 6–8) and the idols (verses 18–20). How could this weak remnant of Jews ever return to their land and establish the nation again? God would go before them and open the way (verses 3–5). In Matthew 3:3 this promise is also applied to John the Baptist preparing the way for the arrival of Christ. “*Don't look at yourselves*” says the prophet in verses 9–17. “*Look at your God. He is the Creator of the universe. Is He not able to strengthen you and sustain you?*” Then this blessed promise in Isaiah 40:28-31:

28 Have you never heard or understood? Don't you know that the Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth? He never grows faint or weary. No one can measure the depths of his understanding. 29 He gives power to those who are tired and worn out; he offers strength to the weak. 30 Even youths will become exhausted, and young men will give up. 31 But those who wait on the Lord will find new strength. They will fly high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.

In Isaiah 41 we're reminded of the greatness of God's purposes.

Jehovah God is not simply the God of the Jews; He is in control of all nations. He would raise up Cyrus from Persia to the east (verse 2) but bring him down from the north after he had conquered the Medes (verse 25). The nations which he attacked trembled before him and turned to their idols, but these idols could not save them (verses 3–7). God has a purpose in the rise and fall of nations, and Israel did not have to fear (verses 10, 13–14) because God was with them and working out His purposes (Rom. 8:28). He would turn what the heathen nations considered a “worm”¹ into a “threshing-machine” (verses 14, 15) and remove mountains. The idols had no purposes and they were not able to plan and control future events (verses 21–24).

In Isaiah 42 and 43 we’re reminded of the greatness of God’s forgiveness.

In Isaiah 42:1–9 we’re introduced to Jesus Christ (Matthew 12:18–20) as we see His first coming in humility and grace, and His second coming in power and judgment. Between these two events we have the present age of the Church. God had permitted the Jews to be captured and exiled to chasten them for their sins (42:18–25), but their captivity would not be forever. God would come in judgment and destroy Babylon (42:10–17), using Cyrus as His tool. Chapter 43 again assures Israel, “*Do not fear, for I (God)² have redeemed you.*” Their deliverance would make them witnesses to the world of the grace and power of God (43:10, 12). But Isaiah scolds the nation for having forgotten God (43:22–27); and yet in His grace God would forgive their sins (43:25). It’s also possible to apply these promises of forgiveness and restoration to the future Jewish remnant during the Tribulation period.

In Isaiah 44 and 45 we’re reminded of the greatness of God’s promises.

Note the repeated “*I will*” statements in these chapters. Here God is promising Israel His help and blessing. In 44:1–8 He promises to restore them to their land, bless the land, and reign as their King. Of course, the nation must repent of its sins before God can restore and forgive (44:21–23). In 44:9–20 the prophet again addresses the foolishness of the heathen (those who do not recognize the authority of God and the Bible) idols: a man chops down a tree, uses part of it for fuel, and uses the rest of it to make himself a god. Jehovah is a God who makes and keeps His promises; the idols are but liars (44:18–20). In 44:24–45:8 we have another promise of deliverance through Cyrus. The heathen priests and sorcerers may promise Cyrus’ defeat (44:25), but God will frustrate their lies and give Cyrus victory. Judah would be inhabited again, and Jerusalem would be rebuilt. This was fulfilled in Ezra 1.

Now as we move into Isaiah 45 we will see that in verses 1–3, Isaiah even tells how Cyrus would capture the invincible fortress of Babylon: he would dry up one of the rivers that flowed into the city and come in under the gates. History records this feat, but prophecy announced it hundreds of years before it happened. Can anyone prevent or

¹ When the word “worm” is used in reference to Israel, God is referring to the contempt that the ungodly nations have of Israel.

² Parentheses added.

oppose the promises and purposes of God? (45:5–10) No. God would raise up Cyrus to build His city of Jerusalem which had been torn down by the Babylonians (45:13). God would give Cyrus other nations as a reward for serving God (45:14). The idols would be frustrated, but God would be glorified (45:16–19). You will note in Isaiah 45:17 that the historical blends in with the eternal in the promise of everlasting salvation. Here the Prophet Isaiah looks down the centuries to the salvation we have in Christ (45:22), as well as to the future deliverance of Israel and the establishing of the kingdom of God.³

Beginning in Isaiah 44:24, Isaiah predicted the fall of Judah to Babylon. Now beginning in Isaiah 45:1, he predicts the fall of Babylon and the return of the Jews to their homeland.

To decisively demonstrate His superiority over idols, the Lord reveals the name of the Persian conqueror who will overthrow Babylon and issues a decree that not only releases the Jews from captivity but authorizes them to rebuild the Jerusalem temple. Some commentators, who deny the possibility of such detailed predictive prophecy, have insisted the mention of Cyrus is evidence of postexilic⁴ authorship of the second part of Isaiah. But in the context the naming of Cyrus is evidence of something far different. It is proof of the power of Israel's living God and a guarantee that history itself moves toward His intended end.

As we go through chapter 45 we will see what promises God made and we will see that they have applications to three groups of people. There are promises to the Israelites, to believers of all time, and to the heathen. Some promises apply to more than one group.

In addition, Isaiah 45 is another chapter that extols who our Lord God Jehovah is. Now you might be thinking, "*Oh, more of that? We heard that there's only one God and He's pretty great last week. Ho hum, aren't you pretty repetitious?*"

God forgive us if we think that. Our God is so great and so sovereign and so powerful and so loving and on and on—so wonderful that we don't have enough words or enough time to describe Him adequately. We could go on for days and still not say enough about the Lord God Jehovah of heaven and earth.

Now let's take a closer look at Isaiah 45 NAS:

Isaiah 45:1-4 NAS:

- 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:
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.
3 "I will give you the treasures of darkness And hidden wealth of secret*

³ Wiersbe, W. W. 1993. Wiersbe's expository outlines on the Old Testament . Victor Books: Wheaton, IL

⁴ Written after the Jews returned from the exile in Babylon.

places, So that you may know that it is I, The Lord, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name.

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.

The historical context here is that besides issuing a decree permitting the captives to return home, **Cyrus** would also avenge God’s wrath on the **nations**. Amazingly the Lord called Cyrus **His anointed**. The word “*anointed*” referred to the relationship Israel’s first two kings, Saul and David, had with God (1 Samuel 10:1; 16:6). But remember, Cyrus hadn’t yet been born. Since Israel in exile had no king, Cyrus would function in a sense as her king (the anointed one) to bring about blessing, like the Messiah (“*the Anointed One*”) who would come after him. Cyrus would have a twofold mission: (1) to free the people, and (2) to bring God’s judgment on unbelievers. Cyrus would easily conquer other nations with God’s help according to verses 1 and 2. Verse 3 tells us that he would also receive wealth from the nations he conquered. And so it was as Cyrus went on to conquer Lydia and Babylon. This is a promise to Cyrus and also to the Israelites who were in captivity and whom Cyrus would release from that captivity. The *treasures of darkness* are those that are the most carefully hidden and the most precious. All of this would be for **the sake of Jacob**, Israel, God’s **Chosen People**. And even though Cyrus would enjoy a special relationship with God as we see in verse 4 (God called him **by name**; Isaiah 43:1) and was honored by God, he still was not a believer for he did **not acknowledge** the Lord as the true God.

Verses 2 and 3 are also promises that have encouraged and strengthened believers of all time. When God’s children are facing insurmountable obstacles, it comforts them to focus on God who knows no obstacles. God can make the rough places of our lives smooth. He can give us His peace in the midst of tribulation if we focus on Him and, in the words of James and Peter.

James 1:2, NAS

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials.

1 Peter 1:6-7, NIV

6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

7 These have come so that your faith-- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-- may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

God’s children also face times that are full of darkness. They may experience a depression that seems so very black. Yet they can take comfort in the promise of verse 3: “*I will give you the treasures of darkness.*” They wonder, “*How can there be any treasure in what I’m going through?*” Yet if they look to God in all of this, they will find light in His presence and find the treasure of the strength and grace He gives day by day.

As they lean hard on Him and experience His mercy, they truly find a treasure that no one can take away. **Their faith will be genuine and real and worth far more than gold.**

Isaiah 45:5-7 NAS:

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;*
6 *That men may 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,*
7 *The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the Lord who does all these.*

Again in these verses the uniqueness of **God** is emphasized. The fact that **there is no other God** is stated in verses 5-6, 14, 18, 21-22 (also see Isaiah 43:11; 44:6; 46:9). In Cyrus' day the Lord was not universally acknowledged, but eventually He will be (Philippians 2:10-11). *Light and ... darkness ... well-being and ... calamity* are typically Hebraic expressions as pairs of opposites for **"all that exists"** (Psalm 49:1-2). People will realize that all that goes on in the world is under the control of God. As the sovereign Lord of the universe He can do anything.

Isaiah 45:8 NAS:

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.*

When the millennial kingdom is established on the earth the *heavens*, figuratively speaking, will *rain down righteousness*. God's standards will be followed, and *salvation*, like a great harvest, will *spring up*. This simply means that people everywhere will know Jesus as Savior (verses 6; 11:9).

This verse contains a tremendous superlative about salvation for believers of all time. Do you recall the story of the Flood in Genesis chapters 6 and 7? God had instructed Noah to build an Ark, a huge boat in which he would save and protect people who believed in Him along with either 2 or 7 of every kind of animal. Turn to Genesis 7:11 and let's read it:

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the same day all the fountains of the great deep burst open, and the floodgates of the sky were opened.

Do you see the parallel? In the Flood that destroyed all living creatures on the earth except those few that trusted in God, not only did the heavens open up and pour down rain, but the *"fountains of the deep"* also opened up and flooded the earth from the underlying water. Such was the totality of the Flood that completely judged the earth and punished sin. So in Isaiah 45:8 God uses similar language, saying that the heavens would open and pour down righteousness and the earth would open up so salvation and righteousness would spring up.

Just as God once covered the earth with water to judge sin, so he would one day cover the earth with righteousness to provide salvation.

Isaiah 45:9-13 NAS:

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’?”*

10 *“Woe to him who says to a father, ‘What are you begetting?’ Or to a woman, ‘To what are you giving birth?’ ”*

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.*

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.*

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.*

How often we foolish humans try to argue with God! The unsaved argue against Christ being the only way to salvation and Heaven. But even believers argue with God about what He wills for us. “Why do I have to live a pure life?” “Why should I treat others with love when they don’t treat me that way?” “Why must I forgive those who mistreat me? Why can’t I call for revenge on them?” “God, You gave me a good brain, why should I have to ask You for guidance in every thing?” If God created and redeemed us, then we are to commit ourselves to Him.

God called forth and created the nation of Israel and so God is making a promise to His people here but also calling them to trust Him and to be committed to Him.

The Lord can exercise supreme power over individuals on the earth because **He created it.** When someone who is created voices disapproval of the Creator’s work he/she risks receiving a pronouncement of impending doom (verses 9 and 10; also see Isaiah 3:9) from the Lord. A piece of pottery has no right to question the potter. Nor does a child have the right to question why his parents brought him into the world. In the same way, as we read in verses 9 and 11, Israel has no right to question God her Maker and the Creator of the world (verse 12) in His plans to raise up Cyrus. Cyrus’ purpose was again stated. **He was to allow freed exiles to rebuild God’s city,** Jerusalem (Isaiah 44:28).

Isaiah 45:14-17 NAS:

14 *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.’ ”

15 Truly, You are a God who hides Himself, O God of Israel, Savior!

16 They will be put to shame and even humiliated, all of them; The manufacturers of idols will go away together in humiliation.

17 Israel has been saved by the Lord With an everlasting salvation; You will not be put to shame or humiliated To all eternity.

Here are some serious promises to Israel and to the heathen. God promises the heathen⁵ who make and worship idols that they will come to nothing, while Israel will be rescued and saved by the Lord.

In the Millennium all people will realize that Israel's God is the only God. People from Egypt and Cush and the Sabeans will be subservient to Israel and will admit that there is no other god (Isaiah 45:6, 18, 21-22; also note Zechariah 14:16-19; Malachi 1:11). Though at times it seems as if God has withdrawn, He really is the Savior of Israel. Whereas people who persist in idol-worship will be ashamed (Isaiah 42:17; 44:9, 11; 45:24); believing Israelites will never be ashamed (Isaiah 54:4; Romans 9:33; 10:11; 1 Peter 2:6) for they will enjoy God's salvation forever.

Isaiah 45:18,19 NAS:

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.

19 “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.

Again God's creative power (Isaiah 42:5; 44:24; 45:12; 48:13; 51:13, 16) is proof that what He predicted about Cyrus is true. Another proof is the very nature of God's word. **He is the one and only God and He speaks only what is true.**

In captivity the Jews could count on the fact that the Lord would one day deliver them from exile using Cyrus as their deliverer. What a promise to cling to!

Isaiah 45:20-25 NAS:

20 “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.

21 “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.

⁵ An unconverted member of a people or nation that does not acknowledge the God of the Bible.

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

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, ‘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.*

25 *“In the Lord all the offspring of Israel Will be justified and will glory.”*

When a speaker wants to drive a point home, he or she uses repetition. Throughout this chapter God is driving home the point that He is the only God and that as such **He not only makes great promises, He has the integrity and power to keep those promises.** So throw away your idols, those things that are more important to you than God is.

I personally love verse 21. How foolish can a person be to make a god out of wood, stone, gold, or whatever, and then have to carry it somewhere in order to worship it, when they could turn to the one true God who would carry them whenever they needed to be carried. The concluding verses of this chapter are remarkable, first for their picture of world-wide and heart-felt conversions, and secondly for the bold use the New Testament was to make of verses 23 and 24, applying them directly to Christ in Phil. 2:10–11 NAS:

10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

And applying them indirectly in 1 Pet. 3:14–15 NAS:⁶

14 But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled,

15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;

God appealed to the Gentiles to turn from wooden idols and be saved from coming destruction. They were to note the prophecies God had given and to acknowledge His uniqueness as the only God (verses 5-6, 14, 18) and to turn to Him because eventually everyone will acknowledge His sovereignty (verse 14; Malachi 1:1; Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10-11). Gentiles would be saved, recognizing that only in God is righteousness available. God’s “*commitment to do right*” is revealed in the salvation of sinners as well as in His judgment of sin. God has chosen and loved His people. **He will**

⁶ Carson, D. A. 1994. New Bible commentary : 21st century edition. Rev. ed. of: The new Bible commentary. 3rd ed. / edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970. (4th ed.) . Inter-Varsity Press: Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA

be true to His love for us, despite our failures. That's a promise we can count on. Here, salvation moves beyond deliverance from present danger to hint of the resurrection at history's end (Isaiah 30-31). But many will continue to rage against God. However, Israel, God's covenant people, will be justified (found righteous) in the Lord, and in that they will rejoice.⁷

When you place your faith in God, the Holy One of Israel, and in His Son Jesus Christ, you too can rejoice and count on Him to keep His promises to believers.

⁷ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. 1983-c1985. The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures . Victor Books: Wheaton, IL