

Lesson 23
Isaiah 43:1 – 45:25
The Greatness of God (Part 2)

Memory verse: “Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.” (Isaiah 45:22 NIV).

“In your time we have the opportunity to move not only toward the rich society and the powerful society but upward to the Great Society.” President Lyndon B. Johnson spoke those words at the University of Michigan on May 22, 1964. Reading them over five decades later, we may ask, “We wonder how the Jewish captives in Babylon would have responded to what the president said?”

A rich society? They were refugees whose land and Holy City were in ruins. A powerful society? Without king or army, they were weak and helpless before the nations around them. A great society? They had been guilty of great rebellion against God and had suffered great humiliation and chastening. They faced a great challenge but lacked great human resources.

That is why the prophet told them to get their eyes off themselves and look by faith to the great God who loved them and promised to do great things for them.

“Be not afraid!” he admonished them. “Behold your God!” (40:9).

The theme of “Israel God’s Servant” is continued in Isaiah 43 - 44 with an emphasis on God the Redeemer of Israel (43:1–7). (Note also v. 14; 44:6, 22–24.) The word translated “redeem” or “Redeemer” is the Hebrew word for “a kinsman redeemer,” a near relative who could free family members and their property from bondage by paying their debts for them. (See Lev. 25:23–28 and the book of Ruth.) God gave Egypt, Ethiopia (Cush), and Seba to Cyrus as a ransom payment to redeem Israel from Babylon, because Israel was so precious to Him. And He gave His own Son as a ransom for lost sinners (Matt. 20:28; 1 Tim. 2:6).

Even though Israel had failed to learn from the Lord (42:18-25), He would still deliver her in the future out of pure grace (43:1-7). He had not cast off His covenant people (cf. Rom. 11:1).

Isaiah continued to show that God was both willing and able to deliver His people, a theme begun in 42:10. He confronted the gods, again (cf. 41:21-29), but this time in chapter 43 He challenged them to bring forth witnesses to their deity, namely, people who could confirm their ability to predict the future. The captive Judeans were God's witnesses. They would, despite their spiritual blindness and deafness, give witness to His ability to predict their salvation and to accomplish it.

God would make His people the proof of His deity by delivering them from captivity in Babylon (43:14-21) and from their sins (44:1-5). Chapter 44 expands the focus of God's promise from physical to spiritual deliverance, and extends it from an approaching to a more distant fulfillment.

Chapter 45 begins with God's promise to Cyrus (vv. 1-8; cf. Pss. 2; 110) and a vindication of God's right to use whom He will (vv. 9-13). The promise to Cyrus was, of course, for the benefit of the Israelites who wondered how God would restore them to the land as He promised. The Creator can do anything He wishes that is consistent with His own character and stated purposes.

In Chapter 46, the emphasis shifts from God as the true Saviour (45:20-25) to the idols who cannot save (46:1-7). It sums up the argument that Yahweh is superior to pagan gods, and expands the idea introduced in 45:20: that a god that people need to carry cannot save.

The Lord - Yahweh is His covenant name - is a distinct person with His own name (cf. Exod. 3:13-15). He would keep His covenant with Israel.

Scripture reading: Isaiah Chapter: 43:1-13; 44:1-5; 45:18-25

Things to learn: 1) The Creator God 2) The Redemptive God 3) The Just and Saving God

Discussion Questions:

Q1. What is God telling Israel in Chapter 43 and how will that be applicable to Christians today too?

Q2. Why did God contrast Israel with the Gentile nations and are there any warnings or promises for us to take note?

Q3. How much more do you we know about God in chapter 45 who called Cyrus, a Gentile king, His anointed?