

Isaiah 45 Called by Name

Our Old Testament text is highly significant theologically and historically. Isaiah in 700 BC, around 150 years before King Cyrus of Persia is born, speaks of a Cyrus who will conquer Babylon and let his people go from Babylon back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, thus fulfilling the return prophecies that may or may not still be being tossed around your television screens and media today.

Now, the ever “brilliant” biblical critics will tell you that, “You foolish Christians, a prophecy like this can’t be real because miracles aren’t real. So clearly this must have been written after the events themselves transpired, by a ‘Second Isaiah’ who edited or altered the book.” Which is interesting, because, Josephus, a Jewish historian who, granted, wrote after the events, writes thus: “Accordingly, when Cyrus read [the prophet Isaiah] and admired the divine power, an earnest desire and ambition seized upon him to fulfill what was so written...” And so he sent them back along with the vessels of the temple, and wrote a decree that Josephus and Ezra chapter 1 record, “Thus saith Cyrus the King: - Since God almighty hath appointed me to be king of the habitable earth, I believe that he is that God which the nation of the Israelites worship; for indeed he foretold my name by the prophets; and that I should build him a house at Jerusalem, in the country of Judea.” And, well... how could Cyrus read this prophecy about himself if it hadn’t been written by “Second Isaiah” yet!?

And I suppose one could say, “Well, Josephus made his account up.” Ok, well, that still wouldn’t explain why the historian Xenophon, who lived 350 years before Josephus, is said to have called this Cyrus “the shepherd of God” the exact same term used in Isaiah 44:28, just one verse before our reading today: “Who says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, “Let it be rebuilt,” and of the temple, “Let its foundations be laid.””

And it would necessitate that this “Second Isaiah” came around and altered the book of Isaiah before the Qumran Dead Sea Scrolls were written in 100bc, because, guess what? They have the same Isaiah in them that you have in your Bibles!

So, by all means, you decide, you foolish Christians. Can God, the maker of the universe from nothing - a miracle defying the laws of physics itself, yet is necessitated by those same laws of physics: afterall, “matter is neither *created* nor destroyed” (yet here it all is!)– is that God capable of calling Cyrus by name 150 years beforehand? Or are you going to go with “Second Isaiah” who by the way, we have zero, that’s right, zero textual or historical evidence for but was invented to try and explain away the prophecy? And they say we deny the evidence!

The facts are that we have the writings of Isaiah who describe Cyrus, and the fact that a Cyrus does indeed let God’s people go. And an edict is sent to the world

praising the One true God – as prophesied in verse 5: “That people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none beside me; I am Yahweh, and there is no other.” And some extra biblical evidence to support Isaiah’s text to sweeten the deal.

Can God work in history for his people? Can he work in the midst of wars and the rising and falling of nations and great tribulation to save his people? Can he do the same for you?

And we say, “I am no King. I am no one. I have doubts and fears and sins and I am a drop in the ocean, one in seven billion. My friends don’t get me, my boss would replace me in two weeks, I make no real difference, it may even be better if I wasn’t around. Could God care for me? Much less know and call me by name?”

And you see where the sermon is going now don’t you? Because you have heard God’s promises before. You have received his promises, personally, in water, word, and bread and wine.

But don’t spoil my sermon yet!

Let us first meditate on the Greater Cyrus. The Greater Deliverer. The Greater anointed One, the greater Messiah and King. What grand, and fitting, titles for Jesus, no!? May He be forever praised.

But consider that he, unlike Cyrus, was not sent to subdue nations before him, or loose the belts of kings – no the nations plotted and the kings mocked Jesus. Jesus, unlike Cyrus, was not sent with open doors before him, but captured and imprisoned. Jesus was not sent to level the exalted places, with the doors of bronze broken before him, no, he was lowly, with fishermen and the sick, with no army or battering ram. Jesus was not given the treasures of darkness, hidden in vast treasure chambers, he was of a manger, poor, and with no place to lay his head.

So maybe this greater Messiah, in a way, is more like you than you might think, in lowliness and meekness, poverty, and humility.

And so God calls Cyrus, the one who doesn't know God, to deliver his people and then uses Jesus, the greater Cyrus, who is known to him, his very beloved, One with Him, the very I AM, through lowliness and death on a cross, to bring about a far greater victory, from a far greater foe, to the entire, world for all time.

Cyrus got riches, yes, he delivered God's people, yes. But then he died, and his sons ruled and fought after him. Jesus died, and rose again. King of all, and brings after him sons and daughters, called by name, out of every nation to share in his eternal kingdom.

Which brings us back to you nobodies. Nobodies? Or people called by name?

People with God's name upon them in baptism. With his Spirit dwelling in them.

With his death, your death, and his life your life. And his Kingdom and riches,
eternal, lasting, and let's not forget, as Cyrus helps show: God's Word and promise
is very, very real.

God be praised!