

Review

God has been pointing out the idiocy of idolatry. The idols are not gods, are powerless to speak, and those who make them are fools. And so He begins verse 21 by saying, "Remember these things..."

44:21 You Will Not Be Forgotten By Me

Israel has not been called to serve other gods. God says, "You are MY servant. I'm the One Who formed you."

And then He says something that is really poignant:

Is. 44:21 "...O Israel, you will not be forgotten by Me."

Imagine God's heart breaking every time His people forgot Him in pursuit of other gods. In spite of their faithlessness, God would not do the same to them.

44:22 I Have Wiped Out Your Transgressions

The Lord tells them that He will blot out their transgressions. It's such a sure promise that it is spoken in the past tense.

Notice that their sin will be blotted out by being obscured, as with a thick cloud or heavy mist. In the Old Testament, when God made atonement for sin, the word used was "kaw-FAR," which means "to cover over."

It is a great thing to have God throw a blanket over your sin! However, under the New Testament covenant, we don't get atonement, we get forgiveness, which is a total dismissal. So, our sin isn't just covered - it's completely erased!

44:23 Shout For Joy

God's redemption of the Jews is cause for all creation to rejoice.

It is interesting to me that the praise of God is so frequently tied in to shouting. It does seem to be basic human nature to shout about the things that excite us. We'll shout at sporting events and concerts without thinking twice about it. But when it comes to praising God, we're very subdued. I wonder why that is?

- Does it seem wrong to shout to God? Like it's sacrilegious or something?

- Or can we just not muster enough excitement to shout to Him?

Psa. 71:23 My lips will shout for joy when I sing praises to You...

Psa. 118:15 The sound of joyful shouting and salvation is in the tents of the righteous...

Psa. 33:1-3 Sing for joy in the LORD, O you righteous ones; Praise is becoming to the upright. Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre; Sing praises to Him with a harp of ten strings. Sing to Him a new song; Play skillfully with a shout of joy.

44:24-27 It Is I Who

God reminds Israel just Who it is that redeemed them:

- He is the one Who formed them from the womb.

- He is the one who is the Creator all all things - the heavens and the earth.

- He is the One who directs the path of the future, often purposefully making sure that the predictions of psychics don't come true, just to ruin their reputations.

- He is the One Who insures that the words of His prophets comes true.

Knowing that He is such an all-powerful and all-knowing God should reassure the Jews that when God promises to bring them back to Jerusalem, they can trust it will happen.

44:28-45:7 Cyrus Called By Name

God directs His messengers to speak of the future, and then confirms that it will happen. He promises that after the Bablyonian Exile, Jerusalem will be inhabited again. But how would that happen? God says it will happen through a man named Cyrus.

Now, it is important to understand that the last of the book of Isaiah was finished about a hundred years before the Babylonian Captivity. And the Jews' return to Babylon would be yet another 70 years after that!

God names a man called Cyrus as His shepherd, who will accomplish His will. Who will declare that Jerusalem will be reinhabited after its abandonment, and that the temple will be rebuilt after its destruction.

God will do this by subduing nations before Cyrus, making him a conqueror of seemingly unconquerable armies.

Did this ever happen? You bet - in exactly the way God said it would. About 200 years after Isaiah recorded these words, when the Babylonian Empire was the most powerful in the world, and the Jews had been carried off to Babylon and left in slavery for almost 70 years, a series of amazing events happened.

Belshazzar, the king of the Babylonian Empire, was in the city of Babylon having a drunken, idolatrous feast for his nobles. He ordered that the vessels from the temple of God be brought out. His plan was to drink out of them.

Dan. 5:5 Suddenly the fingers of a man's hand emerged and began writing opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, and the king saw the back of the hand that did the writing.

Daniel the prophet was called in to interpret the writing. Daniel told Belshazzar that the message said that God had numbered his kingdom and put an end to it. The king had been weighed on the scales and was found deficient. His kingdom had been divided and would be given over to the Medes and the Persians that very night... under the leadership of the king of Persia, a man named... Cyrus the Great.

That very night in 538BC, they came against the city of Babylon. The Greek researcher Herodotus writes (Herodotus, The Histories, 1.189-191) that when Cyrus found the city of Babylon completely shut in with enough supplies to last them twenty years, he formulated a plan.

Knowing that there would be no besieging or the city, or conquering its walls, he began to think unconventionally. Babylon had been built straddling the massive Euphrates River - the river actually flowed with its powerful current right under the walls of Babylon.

Cyrus commanded that his army be divided - one part at the wall

where the river entered the city, and another division where the river exited.

Then he did something brilliant: He took the rest of his army upstream, and had them dig a canal to divert the river. When much of the river changed course, the divisions stationed at the walls of Babylon saw that the water level had dropped down to just thigh-high, enabling them to enter the city.

The conquering of Babylon was so peaceful that many of its citizens didn't even know that the invasion had taken place!

In one night, the Babylonian Empire had fallen, and the Medo-Persian Empire arose.

Over two years passed, and Cyrus ended up being the ruling king over the entire Medo-Persian Empire. The Chronicler tells us about an amazing event that took place that year:

2Chr. 36:22-23 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 his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, "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. Whoever there is among you of all His people, may the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up!'"

Cyrus was telling the Jews in captivity in Babylon that they were allowed to go home! It had been seventy years, just as God had said it would be (Jer. 29:10; Dan. 9:2).

God had stirred up Cyrus' spirit (Ezra 1:1). This could have been merely a supernatural motivation, but what is interesting is that the Jewish historian Josephus wrote,

"This was known to Cyrus by his reading the book which Isaiah left behind him of his prophecies; for this prophet said that God had spoken thus to him in a secret vision: "My will is, that Cyrus, whom I have appointed to be king over many and great nations, send back

my people to their own land, and build my temple.” This was foretold by Isaiah one hundred and forty years before the temple was demolished. Accordingly, when Cyrus read this, and admired the Divine power, an earnest desire and ambition seized upon him to fulfill what was so written... ” (Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews 11:2).

Cyrus had been put into place so that he would facilitate the rebuilding of Jerusalem's temple, and God would receive the glory!