

The Book of Isaiah

Lesson 19: Cyrus, the Sovereign Lord, and Babylon's Fall -- Isaiah 45:1–48:22

Imagine reading a letter addressed to you by name, written and sealed long before you were born. That is something like what happened with a Persian king called Cyrus. Roughly a century and a half before he drew his first breath, God spoke his name through Isaiah and described the work he would do. When Cyrus finally stepped onto the stage of history and opened the door for God's people to go home, the only honest explanation was the one God Himself had given in advance. He does this, in His own words, so that you may know that He is the Lord, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name.

We live in a world crowded with rival claims about who runs things. Empires boast, markets surge and crash, strongmen rise and fall, and the headlines can make us feel that everything is up for grabs. Chapters 45 through 48 of Isaiah press one massive truth against all of that noise. There is one God, and there is no other. He forms light and creates darkness. He makes well-being and creates calamity. Nothing happens behind His back or outside His reach, and that is not a frightening thought once you know His heart toward you.

These chapters also give us one of the tenderest pictures in the whole Bible. Babylon's gods had to be loaded onto carts and carried by weary animals, dead weight that could not save anyone. But the living God says of His people, even to your old age I am He, and to gray hairs I will carry you. The idols are a burden you have to haul. The Lord is the One who hauls you. That contrast alone is worth a whole evening of study.

Then, in the middle of all this majesty, comes a personal invitation flung to the very edges of the earth. Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God and there is no other. This is the gospel call before the gospel, the open arms of God reaching past Israel to you and to every soul who will turn. As we walk through Cyrus, the falling idols, and the doomed pride of Babylon, keep your eye on that invitation, because it has your name on it too.

Group Discussion: Babylon trusted in its astrologers, its idols, and its own strength, and Isaiah 47 shows how completely those things failed in the day of trouble. What are the modern equivalents, the things our culture and even we ourselves quietly trust to keep us safe, and how does the claim that there is no God but the Lord challenge that trust?

Personal Reflection: Isaiah 46:4 promises that God will carry His people to gray hairs and old age. Where in your life right now are you trying to carry a burden that God is actually offering to carry for you, and what would it look like to hand it over to Him this week?

Read Isaiah 45:1–48:22

Study Questions

1. In Isaiah 45:1–7 God names Cyrus and declares, I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity; I am the Lord, who does all these things. What does this passage teach us about God's sovereignty over rulers and history, and how does it guard us against thinking world events are out of God's reach?
2. Think honestly about how you read the news and respond to the headlines that unsettle you. How would truly believing that the Lord raises up and uses even pagan rulers for His purposes change the way your heart settles down each day?
3. In Isaiah 45:9–13 God answers those who would quarrel with their Maker, comparing it to clay arguing with the potter. What is the right posture for a creature before the Creator, and where do people most often cross the line from honest questions into quarreling with God?
4. Is there an area of your life where you have been quarreling with the Potter rather than trusting Him, perhaps over a circumstance you did not choose? What is one thing you can surrender to His hands this week?
5. Isaiah 46:1–7 contrasts the idols of Babylon, which must be carried as burdens, with the God who carries His people from birth to old age. What does this contrast reveal about the difference between false gods and the true God, and how do idols always end up burdening the people who serve them?

6. What is something good in your life that could quietly become an idol, a burden you carry rather than a gift you receive, and how can you tell the difference in your own heart?
7. Isaiah 47 announces the downfall of proud Babylon, which said in its heart, I am, and there is no one besides me. How does this chapter expose the self-deception of pride, and how does Babylon's boast mock the very words God alone has the right to say?
8. Pride rarely announces itself out loud; it hides in small assumptions of self-sufficiency. Where do you sense the seed of Babylon's I am, and there is no one besides me in your own attitudes, and what keeps you humble before God?
9. In Isaiah 45:22–23 God says, Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God and there is no other; to me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance. How does this universal call show both God's exclusive claim to be the only Savior and His open invitation to all people, and how does Paul apply these very words to the Lord Jesus in Philippians 2:10–11?
10. Isaiah 48:17–18 has God saying, I am the Lord your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you in the way you should go. Looking back over this lesson, name one specific way God has been teaching and leading you, and one concrete step of obedience you will take to walk in that way.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Philippians 2:9–11, Paul applies God’s words in Isaiah 45:23 to the exalted Christ before whom every knee will bow; Acts 17:24–31, Paul preaches the one Creator God and the universal call to repentance to the men of Athens; Daniel 5, the actual night Babylon fell, fulfilling Isaiah’s words about the city that boasted in its security; Romans 9:19–24, Paul takes up the potter and clay image to defend God’s right over His creation; Jeremiah 50–51, a parallel prophecy of Babylon’s fall that fills out the picture Isaiah paints.

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