

Introduction: Five “Thus Says the LORD”

Remember these things, O Jacob,
 and Israel, for you are my servant;
 I formed you; you are my servant;
 O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me.

God calls his servant, Israel, to remember what idolatry is.

Remember that idols cannot save you.

But I will not forget you.

I will remember you, my Servant,
 and speaking of what he will do first in the restoration from exile,
 but then finally in our Lord Jesus Christ,

“I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud
 and your sins like mist;

Return to me, for I have redeemed you.”

Remember these things.

Humanity has Alzheimer’s.

Worse yet, the people of God have Alzheimer’s.

We are forgetful.

We forget the one who formed us.

And Isaiah speaks here both of the first creation,
 and also the new creation—when he took Israel out of Egypt,
 and created his Servant.

And so Isaiah calls us to remember what God has done,
 and to remember what God will do.

Speaking to Israel *before* they go into exile,
 Isaiah declares that God “has done it.”

That is how certain your redemption is.

And so Isaiah calls out, (verse 23)

Now, how will Yahweh redeem Israel his Servant?

That is the burden of 44:21-46:2, which consists of five statements,
 each beginning “thus says the LORD.”

1. The LORD Is the Creator and Your Redeemer (44:24-28)

Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer,

who formed you from the womb:

“I am the LORD, who made all things,

who alone stretched out the heavens,

who spread out the earth by myself,
²⁵ *who frustrates the signs of liars*
and makes fools of diviners,
who turns wise men back
and makes their knowledge foolish,
²⁶ *who confirms the word of his servant*
and fulfills the counsel of his messengers,
who says of Jerusalem, 'She shall be inhabited,'
and of the cities of Judah, 'They shall be built,
and I will raise up their ruins';
²⁷ *who says to the deep, 'Be dry;*
I will dry up your rivers';
²⁸ *who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd,*
and he shall fulfill all my purpose';
saying of Jerusalem, 'She shall be built,'
and of the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid.'"

First, verses 24-28 introduce this great redemption in one long sentence.

Thus says Yahweh, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: I am Yahweh.

There are ten participles describing Yahweh in verses 24-28.

the four in verse 24 specify Yahweh as the creator

the two in verse 25 reveal Yahweh as the one who mocks idolaters

the three in verses 26-27 reveal Yahweh as the one who does what he says

and the one in verse 28 reveal Yahweh's particular purpose.

This great statement of who Yahweh is comes to its focus in the promise of Cyrus.

God promises that one named Cyrus would be God's instrument in delivering Israel.

He would be the shepherd who would bring Israel back to Jerusalem,

the one who would command the building of the temple.

A shepherd who would build the temple.

This is an echo of Solomon, who was the Son of David who built the first temple.

The second "Thus says the LORD" in verses 45:1-10 speaks to Cyrus.

2. The LORD Will Subdue Nations Before Cyrus, His Anointed (45:1-10)

Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus,

whose right hand I have grasped,

to subdue nations before him

and to loose the belts of kings,

to open doors before him

that gates may not be closed:

The first thing that we need to wrap our minds around

is that God is speaking here to Cyrus – the King of Persia!

I tend to think that the whole of the book of Isaiah was written by Isaiah.
(There are some faithful scholars who think that the second half
was written after the exile by a later student of Isaiah).
Isaiah prophesies around the year 700 BC –
and Cyrus was king of Persia more than 150 years later.

But God says that he will open doors *for Cyrus*.
He will do for Cyrus what he promises to do for his Messiah –
his anointed one.

² *“I will go before you
and level the exalted places,^[d]
I will break in pieces the doors of bronze
and cut through the bars of iron,
³ I will give you the treasures of darkness
and the hoards in secret places,*

God promises Cyrus that he will subdue nations before him,
and will level the exalted places and cut through the bars of iron
in order to give to Cyrus “the hoards in secret places.”

Why would God give to Cyrus “the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places”?
Why would God do this for a Persian king?!

*that you may know that it is I, the LORD,
the God of Israel, who call you by your name.*

After all – the God of Israel is the one, true God!
And God’s purpose is to make himself known to all the nations.

Think about it this way:
In Genesis, God makes himself known to the Pharaoh in Joseph’s day.
In Genesis, Pharaoh blesses Joseph – the Seed of Abraham –
and the result is that God blesses Pharaoh with life.

Now God says that he will bless Cyrus.
Why?

⁴ *For the sake of my servant Jacob,
and Israel my chosen,
I call you by your name,
I name you, though you do not know me.*

When the nations bless the Seed of Abraham –
when the nations bless “my servant Jacob” –
then God blesses the nations!

Cyrus is famous for sending the exiles home!

If you think about it – Cyrus is remarkable.

What did it take to convince Pharaoh to let Israel go?

Ten plagues – including the death of Pharaoh’s firstborn!

But Cyrus lets Israel go without anything like that!

Cyrus is famous because he sent *all exiles home*.

The Assyrians and Babylonians were both notorious

for moving exiles around – and never letting them go home!

But Cyrus was renowned for sending all exiles back to their native lands.

So while Cyrus is – and remains – a pagan,

the LORD will equip him as his anointed–his Messiah.

(read v5-6)

⁵ *I am the LORD, and there is no other,
besides me there is no God;*

I equip you, though you do not know me,

⁶ *that people may know, from the rising of the sun
and from the west, that there is none besides me;*

I am the LORD, and there is no other.

The purpose of Cyrus is that all people – all over the earth – may know
that God is Yahweh – and there is no other.

⁷ *I form light and create darkness;*

I make well-being and create calamity;

I am the LORD, who does all these things.

There is lots of creational language here.

God is the one who *forms light* and *creates darkness*.

There can be no “treasures of darkness” (v3)

unless the LORD has first created them!

When the LORD says “I make well-being and create calamity” –
the words are the words for “peace” and “evil.”

God is the one who makes *shalom* – he makes peace – he makes “well-being” –

but God is also the one who creates calamity –

the word “evil” in Hebrew (as in English)

can refer either to “natural evils” – such as earthquakes or diseases –

or to “moral evils” – such as sin.

The point is that both good things and bad things come from the hand of the LORD.
The disaster that came upon Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah
was from the hand of the LORD.
There are lots of echoes of Isaiah 10 in this chapter.

Isaiah 10 was Isaiah's prophecy against Assyria –
how Assyria would be the “rod of God's anger” against Jerusalem –
how God would use Assyria to accomplish his purpose of judgment –
but then the LORD would overthrow the arrogant Assyrians in turn.

The difference between Isaiah 10 and Isaiah 45
is that Cyrus is treated very differently from the Assyrian kings!
Cyrus is not merely an instrument (an axe or a rod) in the hand of the LORD.
God calls Cyrus by name – and he calls him his *meshiach* – his Anointed One –
and “my shepherd” –
because Cyrus (unlike the Assyrians –
and unlike the Pharaoh of Moses' day)
will bless the Seed of Abraham – my servant Jacob!

This is an important lesson for the kings of the earth!
Be like Cyrus – and do what is right!
Sure – the focus is on what Cyrus did for Israel!
But rulers who treat conquered peoples like human beings will be blessed!

The Persians had their own faults –
and God would eventually judge them for those! –
but Cyrus was a breath of fresh air
(compared with the Assyrians and Babylonians!)

And so the LORD says:

⁸ *“Shower, O heavens, from above,
and let the clouds rain down righteousness;
let the earth open, that salvation and righteousness may bear fruit;
let the earth cause them both to sprout;
I the LORD have created it.*

Remember that all things are from the hand of the LORD –
and so even Cyrus is simply an earthen pot in the hands of the potter (verse 9).

⁹ *“Woe to him who strives with him who formed him,
a pot among earthen pots!
Does the clay say to him who forms it, ‘What are you making?’
or ‘Your work has no handles’?”*

The potter and the clay again appears in Isaiah's preaching.

There is all the difference in the world between *complaining*
and “talking back” (or grumbling).
God encourages us to be good complainers.
We may come to him and bring our complaints!

But we should not grumble – we should not whine –
we should not “talk back” to God –
as illustrated in verse 10:

¹⁰ *Woe to him who says to a father, ‘What are you begetting?’
or to a woman, ‘With what are you in labor?’”*

Um – *you, son!*
At least, we would be, if you weren’t interrupting!

A complaint will always show respect.
A complaint will not order God around!
(So children, don’t order your parents around!
When you bring a complaint, make sure that you do it with honor and respect.
And then submit to their judgment
(and if you don’t think that you *should* submit,
make sure that you talk to your elders about it!)

And so the third “thus says the LORD” (verses 11-13) explains God’s purposes.

3. Will You Command the LORD? (Of Course Not) (45:11-13)

¹¹ *Thus says the LORD,
the Holy One of Israel, and the one who formed him:
“Ask me of things to come;
will you command me concerning my children and the work of my hands?”^[e]*
¹² *I made the earth
and created man on it;
it was my hands that stretched out the heavens,
and I commanded all their host.*
¹³ *I have stirred him up in righteousness,
and I will make all his ways level;
he shall build my city
and set my exiles free,
not for price or reward,”
says the LORD of hosts.*

After all, what *is* God doing here?

Israel may wonder, why are you going to use this heathen to save Israel?
Wouldn’t it make more sense to raise up a Samson or a Gideon?
Why not deliver Israel through a Son of David?
And God’s answer is to ask Israel, “will you command me concerning my children

and the work of my hands?”
I am the creator of all things.
I dispose of my creation in the manner that I see fit.
And I have chosen Cyrus.
“I have stirred him up in righteousness, and I will make all his ways level;”
God will give a highway in the wilderness to Cyrus.
“He shall build my city and set my exiles free, not for price or reward.”
Perhaps if Israel bribed a king, they could free themselves!
No, Cyrus will do this of his own volition—
God will stir his heart.
This is yet another example of the hints and clues that God is giving to Israel
that his purposes for Israel are bigger than Israel.

The fourth “thus says the LORD” in verses 14-17 speaks of the result of Cyrus’s actions.

4. The LORD Will Confound the Makers of Idols (45:14-17)

¹⁴ *Thus says the LORD:*

*“The wealth of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush,
and the Sabeans, men of stature,
shall come over to you and be yours;
they shall follow you;
they shall come over in chains and bow down to you.
They will plead with you, saying:
‘Surely God is in you, and there is no other,
no god besides him.’”*

The wealth of Egypt and Cush will flow into Jerusalem and Israel.

But not only their wealth.

They themselves will recognize that God is with Israel,
“and there is no other, no god besides him.”

God is raising up Cyrus because God is bringing the Gentiles to faith.

In verses 15-17 Isaiah responds to this truly good news. (Read)

¹⁵ *Truly, you are a God who hides himself,*

O God of Israel, the Savior.

¹⁶ *All of them are put to shame and confounded;
the makers of idols go in confusion together.*

Why does he say that God is hiding himself?

If you think about it, it is truly bizarre that anyone fails to believe in God.

He demonstrates his glory and his goodness in such obvious ways.

Over and over again he is faithful to his people,
and yet idolaters refuse to see it.

Truly, you are a God who hides yourself.

The blind cannot see.

The deaf cannot hear.

¹⁷ *But Israel is saved by the LORD
with everlasting salvation;
you shall not be put to shame or confounded
to all eternity.*

God alone is the Savior.
And when he saves – he saves with an everlasting salvation!

5. Because the LORD Is the Creator and the Savior of All the Earth (45:18-46:2)

¹⁸ *For thus says the LORD,
who created the heavens
(he is God!),
who formed the earth and made it
(he established it;
he did not create it empty,
he formed it to be inhabited!):
“I am the LORD, and there is no other.
¹⁹ I did not speak in secret,
in a land of darkness;
I did not say to the offspring of Jacob,
‘Seek me in vain.’^[1]
I the LORD speak the truth;
I declare what is right.*

The fifth and final “thus says the LORD” in 45:18-46:2 concludes the message regarding Cyrus and the redemption of Israel, the Servant. Once again Yahweh is called the creator of the heavens and the earth. And he formed it to be inhabited! (v18)

And he did not speak in secret – in a land of darkness.
Think back to verse 3 –
(the treasures of darkness – the hoards in secret places) –
that is *not* where God spoke.

God spoke openly to the offspring of Jacob!
He did not tell them “seek me in vain” –
he spoke the truth – he declared what was right!

Yes, he is a God who hides himself! (v15) –
but that is because *he is God!*
He is not answerable to us!
We don’t get to tell him how to run his world!

But at the same time, he has called us to seek him –
and he does not call us to seek in vain!

Seek, and you *will find!*

And so God calls “the survivors of the nations to assemble and draw near:

²⁰ *“Assemble yourselves and come;
draw near together,
you survivors of the nations!
They have no knowledge
who carry about their wooden idols,
and keep on praying to a god
that cannot save.*

²¹ *Declare and present your case;
let them take counsel together!
Who told this long ago?
Who declared it of old?
Was it not I, the LORD?
And there is no other god besides me,
a righteous God and a Savior;
there is none besides me.*

He calls those who carry about their wooden idols,
and keep on praying to a god that cannot save.

In other words, God calls *you* to present your case.

If you want to believe in idols, give some evidence of their power!
But they have never spoken—only Yahweh is a righteous God and a Savior.

And so Yahweh calls out to the nations,

²² *“Turn to me and be saved,
all the ends of the earth!
For I am God, and there is no other.*
²³ *By myself I have sworn;
from my mouth has gone out in righteousness
a word that shall not return:
‘To me every knee shall bow,
every tongue shall swear allegiance.’*

This is quoted by Paul in Philippians 2 –

“every knee shall bow and every tongue confess”
that Jesus Christ is Lord.

²⁴ *“Only in the LORD, it shall be said of me,
are righteousness and strength;
to him shall come and be ashamed
all who were incensed against him.*

²⁵ *In the LORD all the offspring of Israel
shall be justified and shall glory.*"

All the offspring of Israel shall be justified and shall glory!

In one sense, "all the offspring of Israel" will wind up as one man – Jesus.

And because it is true of Jesus –

therefore all who are in Jesus become the offspring of Israel,
and are justified in his name!

*46 Bel bows down; Nebo stoops;
their idols are on beasts and livestock;
these things you carry are borne
as burdens on weary beasts.*

² *They stoop; they bow down together;
they cannot save the burden,
but themselves go into captivity.*

The gods of Babylon will be humiliated.

Bel will bow down before Yahweh.

Just like Dagon, the god of the Philistines, in 1 Samuel 5.

When the ark of the covenant was placed in the Philistine temple,

Dagon collapsed before Yahweh!

Even so the gods of Babylon will themselves go into captivity when Cyrus,
the shepherd of God's people, comes to deliver them.

There will come a day when God will judge between Israel and the nations.

And on that day God will vindicate Israel.

He will justify his people.

The return from exile was a picture of that day.

On that day, God declared "not guilty!"

And he brought back his people to Jerusalem.

But all of these "justifications" –

from the deliverance from Egypt to the return from exile–

fall short of the glory of God.

Because the people of God keep sinning.

They keep turning back to idolatry.

God alone is the Savior.

He must redeem his people.

Seven hundred years later, a boy sat in the temple, asking questions of the priests and teachers.

You can almost see him wrestling with the scripture

as he begins to understand what God has called him to do.

Because there must be a final day when God justifies the offspring of Israel–
the seed of Abraham.

He raised up Moses and delivered Israel from the hand of Pharaoh.

But that was only the creation of Israel—
it was only the beginning.
He raised up Joshua and brought his people into the Promised Land.
But that did not give the people rest—
their enemies continued to harry them from every side.
He raised up David and established his kingdom.
But that only lasted two generations before the kingdom was divided.
He raised up Cyrus and brought his people back from exile.
But they still lived under foreign kings without a son of David for 600 years.

The day had not yet come when
“In Yahweh all the offspring of Israel shall be justified and shall glory.”
And yet his own mother named him “Yahweh saves.”
He knows that God is his Father in a unique way—in a way that is true of no other man.

How can a man be justified before God.
How can the Servant of the LORD be declared righteous in the court of heaven.
The servant is blind and deaf.
Israel does not see what God is doing.
Jacob does not hear what God is saying.

Paul uses this verse in Philippians 2.
Isaiah is talking about the justification of Israel and the inclusion of the Gentiles.
All nations will be brought under the sway of the kingdom of God.
And that is Paul’s point in Philippians 2.

All that Isaiah promised about the inclusion of the Gentiles comes true in Jesus.
It is only when Yahweh himself takes the form of a Servant
that justification comes to the Servant.
In the law court of heaven both Israel and the Gentiles stand convicted of sin.
No one is righteous—no not one!
When the divine verdict is declared, only Jesus is left standing.
Jesus alone is declared righteous.
He alone is the justified one.

And that is why only in the LORD all the offspring of Israel shall be justified and shall glory.
Because Jesus Christ is Lord.
All those who have that same mind in them that was in Christ Jesus
will stand in the final day.
Every knee will bow—every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.
Will you bow today?
Or will you wait until the Lord of Glory appears in judgment?
For that day will be too late.