

## Judah after Israel's Fall (725-585 BCE)

### *Isaiah's Prophecies about Restoration and the Messiah*

Readings: *Isaiah 43:8-28; 44:1-28; 45:1-13*

#### **Reflections:**

- We see in Isaiah 43:8 ff God's heart for trust-based relationship. "...that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he." God's saving work through Israel reveals to us God's heart to be known and to experience true relationship with all people. In knowing God, his power and authority is obviously a huge dimension of how we can come to trust him in all things, "No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?" Israel's deliverance from Babylon will be a key sign of God's saving power.
- Again we see in Isaiah 43:16 ff that God is putting a stake in the ground and declaring he is going to fundamentally change things. We are to intentionally "forget the former things." The Israelites needed to stop focusing on the ways God had worked in the past to miraculously deliver them out of Egypt so that they could be open to the new way God was going to work in their midst. This process of forgetting the past is vital when we see through Jesus that God is completely overhauling our understanding of the kingdom and what it means to be his people. God wants to establish something completely new and so even here he is challenging his people to begin to put behind them their own understanding of how God has worked in the past.
- God's grace to forgive is striking when you consider how terrible the offenses of Israel were: child sacrifice, idolatry, and systematic abuse from their adoption of pagan temple worship. "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more."
- Isaiah 44 continues to cast vision for this new order God will establish. God's transforming work will be accomplished through an outpouring of his Spirit. As we will see, this work of the Spirit is to change our hearts from the inside out. This intimate experience with God will result in his people having a deep bond with God and being enfolded into his community: "One will say, 'I belong to the Lord'; another will call himself by the name of Jacob; still another will write on his hand, 'the Lord's' and will take the name Israel.'" As we will see, the first Christ-followers understood that they were the true Israel, those who lived by faith and were living out the fullness of what

God always desired. I Peter 2:9 states of the first Christ-followers, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

- Isaiah 44:9-20 is an extended passage on the futility of idolatry. Although we don't worship idols we do worship and give our love and devotion to the accumulation of material goods. In a sense, “our stuff” is our idols and the words of Isaiah continue to speak to our obsession with physical objects: “Is not the thing in my right hand a lie?” We don't treat our possessions as a deity but they do deceive us.
- We encounter an incredible passage at the end of Isaiah 44. Here Isaiah prophesies a new King, Cyrus, who would be used by God to restore his people to their land and rebuild the temple. What is striking is that God works through one of Israel's great enemies to accomplish his gracious purposes. “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.” God actually accomplishes his shepherding work through an enemy king. This reminds us that we must be careful not to judge those that we see as our enemies. God may use them to actually complete his will and even provide shepherding leadership for our lives in unexpected ways.
- The vision of this enemy king is even used to help the people catch a vision for the coming Messiah. Just as some of the evil kings helped God's people catch a vision for Satan (see Ezekiel 28 on the king of Tyre), so Cyrus was used as a sign to help people envision the coming king of kings. “This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I will take hold of to subdue the nations before him and strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: I will go before you and will level mountains; I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the Lord.” Although Cyrus does not know the Lord, he will be used by God to bring salvation and deliverance to the Israelites. “I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness: will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free, but not for a price or reward, says the Lord Almighty.”
- See the following for more on Cyrus: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyrus\\_the\\_Great](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyrus_the_Great); [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_ancient\\_Israel\\_and\\_Judah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_ancient_Israel_and_Judah)
- No doubt the people of God were scratching their heads with what Isaiah was saying. Judah would be saved even though they were being held as slaves in a foreign land and were experiencing the worst imaginable circumstances? And the way God would do that would be to raise up a king over their enemies who would be his “shepherd” and “anointed”? Talk about an implausible solution to their problems. Yet, we will see is that God will do exactly as he said and what would have seemed unimaginable would become a fact of history. This reminds us that with God, nothing is impossible!