

# OpenTheo

## Isaiah 42 - 48



### Isaiah - Steve Gregg

This analysis of Isaiah 42-48 by Steve Gregg examines God's role in restoring the Jews to their Promised Land after their captivity in Babylon, with a focus on Cyrus as God's appointed agent. Gregg also highlights the futility of idol worship and emphasizes the unique Hebrew theology that distinguishes God as the sole creator and ruler of the universe. The talk concludes with a discussion of Yahweh's divine title denoted by "I he."

## Transcript

All right, we're turning to Isaiah chapter 42. We got two chapters into this section of Isaiah, this last 27 chapters that make up what's called the Book of Comfort. I would like to think that we will get through chapter 48 in this session.

Now that is because chapter 48 brings us to the end of the first subdivision of this section, that is the first nine chapters. Now to cover seven chapters in a single session would be difficult, actually just difficult to read it out loud in that period of time. That's a lot of chapters.

But what I think I'll do is make an effort to draw from it the repeated themes. I don't know how recently you've read these chapters. I know you have since you've been here at the school.

I don't know if you have in the last few days. But you may not remember there are certain themes that just keep coming up. And he says these things again and again.

In this section, chapters 40 through 48, there is a focus on God's deliverance of His people. There are several passages that mention that the people of Israel are not really worthy of this and that they're very obstinate still, but that He is for His own namesake going to rescue them. And this rescue, of course, is in the context of their exile in Babylon.

So it's talking about them being rescued from that 70-year period of Babylonian captivity. And the agent of that was a man named Cyrus. We already saw when we were talking about chapter 41 that there was a reference to Cyrus, although not by name, not

yet.

He will be mentioned by name as we go along. But in chapter 41, verse 2, it speaks of God as one who has raised up one from the east. It says, Who has raised up one from the east? Who in righteousness called him to his feet? Who gave the nations before him and made him to rule over kings? Who gave him the dust to his sword, as driven stubble to his bow? Now, this is saying that God is the one who gave the nations and the adversaries of Cyrus to Him, that no one was able to stand against Cyrus.

Cyrus was the one leading the Persian or the media Persian forces against the Babylonian Empire and who conquered it. And Babylon fell in 539 B.C. to Cyrus. And Cyrus then, a year later or so, issued a decree that permitted all the people that Babylon had taken into captivity, that would include the Jews but others as well, a decree was made that anyone who had been removed against their will from their own country by the Babylonians in the earlier conquest, they could now go back if they wished.

And Cyrus actually authorized certain government funds to go back with the Jews under Zerubbabel. Actually, the Persian government did some financing of the rebuilding of the temple, although he also encouraged the Jews who were in Babylon, any of them who did not go back should help financially, should contribute to those who are going back to build the temple again. So this was the restoration of the Jews from their captivity to go back to the promised land, and very much a replay of the Exodus where God had exiled Jacob's family into Egypt.

Remember, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had begun in the promised land. That's where they were before they went into Egypt. So they were exiled in Egypt for a season, a long season.

And then through Moses, they were led back to the promised land. In this case, the deliverer is not Moses but Cyrus, the Persian, the pagan. And God refers to Cyrus as one that he, God, has called to his feet, as a man might call his servant to come and stand before him at his feet and given orders to him.

And God says he has given the nations to him. Now, we saw that in chapter 41. We will see that this reference to Cyrus recurs.

And we saw also in chapter 41, verse 25, another reference to Cyrus. It says, I have raised up one from the north, and he shall come from the rising of the sun, which means from the east, and he shall call on my name. And he shall come against princes as though mortar and as a potter treads clay.

That is, his opposition will be no more strong against him than clay is against a potter treading on it or someone fighting against mortar rather than stone walls. A wall of mortar would be like plaster. It's not hard to break through that.

Most walls were made of stone and were mortared in the cracks. But a wall of mortar would be nothing. And so Cyrus, in other words, conquers without any considerable opposition able to stop him.

We'll see Cyrus mentioned again and again as we look, for example, at chapter 44 and 45, a rather lengthy section about him where he is actually mentioned by name. And you'll bear in mind that Cyrus was not born at the time these prophecies were uttered. He was born about 150 years later.

And the actions that are attributed to him, that is, his giving the Jews permission to go back and rebuild Jerusalem, those that decree was when Cyrus was 50 years old. So this is now 200 years before the event that an event is predicted. And the actor in it is Cyrus, who is named 150 years before he's even born.

And in chapter 44, 26, it says that God is the one who confirms the word of his servant and performs the counsel of his messengers, who says to Jerusalem, you shall be inhabited to the cities of Judah, you shall be built. And I will raise up her waste places. So God is decreeing that there will be a restoration of that damage that was done by Nebuchadnezzar some 70 years earlier.

There's going to be a rebuilding of Judah, of the buildings and of Jerusalem. And it says, who says to the deep, be dry and I will dry up your rivers. Who says of Cyrus, he is my shepherd and he shall perform all my pleasure, even saying to Jerusalem, you shall be built and to the temple, your foundation shall be laid.

And of course, Cyrus did make a decree that Jerusalem could be rebuilt and such and authorized the remnant of Israel to go back if they would and rebuild it. It continues in verse four, chapter 45, verse one. Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held, to subdue nations before him and to loose the armor of kings, to open before him the double doors so that the gates will not be shut.

I will go before you and make the crooked places straight. I will break in pieces the gates of bronze and cut in the bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness, the hidden riches of secret places that you may know that I, Yahweh, who call you by name, am the God of Israel.

For Jacob, my servant's sake, and Israel, my elect, I have even called you by your name. I have named you, though you have not known me. I am Yahweh and there is no other.

There is no God besides me. I will gird you, though you have not known me. So, Cyrus is not doing this as an agent, knowledgeably, serving Yahweh, but he is Yahweh's anointed, it is said in verse one.

God has anointed him or appointed him, authorized him to go and do what he does. Now, of course, we've read already several passages about Cyrus that says God gave the

nations before him, but this is speaking specifically not just about the nations in general, but about Babylon. When it says in verse 27 of chapter 44, Who says to the deep, Be dry, and I will dry up your rivers.

As I pointed out earlier, the conquest of Babylon involved the drying up of the river of Euphrates, and Cyrus did this, Cyrus rerouted the river at the point where the river flowed under the walls of Babylon. Babylon was basically invincible. It had no weak spots.

It had walls 300 feet tall, according to Herodotus, and it's so thick, they say that you could have an eight-lane highway on the top of the wall, so it's like an eight-lane freeway. How wide is that? Pretty wide. That's a big, wide, thick wall, and this wall went around the whole city.

Obviously, there was no military technology in those days that could get over or through walls like that. There were gates, of course, but they were strong, bronze gates, and there was the river Euphrates running through the city, which meant it had to go under the wall. That meant there was a point of vulnerability, but Babylon knew that, and they had put strong bronze gates in the river bed, allowing water to come into the city, but not people.

However, what we find is that, and this is historical, the Bible actually doesn't record this happening. This is what history tells us happened. Cyrus did reroute the river, dried up the river bed at the point that it went under the wall, and marched under the wall and conquered the city, essentially without a fight, because Belshazzar and his generals were all having a drunken feast, and we read about that in Daniel chapter 5, but the gates under the wall in the river bed were, in fact, open for him.

Now, historians suggest that he must have had collaborators within the city, sympathetic with his designs to conquer the city, and who had opened the gates. That is entirely possible. The Bible does not tell us how the gates would be opened, but it does say that God, and God could have done this through people, of course, or he could have done it supernaturally, maybe through angels, just like the angels that opened the doors of the prison for Peter in Acts chapter 12 when he was in prison, an angel came and opened the prison doors.

Maybe these gates were opened by angels, or men, or simply by God. But the point is, verse 1 of chapter 45 says that God will subdue nations before Cyrus and loose the armor of kings to open before him the double doors, so that the gates will not be shut. And so, way early, 200 years before this happened, the prediction was that when Cyrus would attack Babylon, the river would be dried up, and the gates would be opened, and God would give him the city.

Cyrus' conquests are mentioned again in chapter 45, verse 13. 45, 13, God says, I have

raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct his ways. He shall build my city and let my exiles go free, not for price nor reward, says the Lord of hosts.

That is, Israel didn't have to pay off Cyrus to get their freedom. He just had it in his heart to let them go, and to see the city of Jerusalem built again, and the exiles to go free. So, these many references to Cyrus occur.

Actually, the last one in this section is in verse 11 of chapter 46. 46.11 says that God calls a bird of prey from the east. This is a reference to Cyrus.

Calling a bird of prey from the east, the man who executes my counsel from a far country. Indeed, I have spoken it, and I will bring it to pass. I have purposed it, I will also do it.

Now, God emphasizes that he's doing this, and throughout this section, there's some interwoven themes related to this. Cyrus didn't just release the Jews. He released other countries, too.

So, one might say, well, why should we see this as the work of Yahweh? Maybe the other nations that Cyrus also released from captivity, maybe their gods did it, and God makes the point that, well, their gods didn't predict it. The reason I'm saying it in advance is so that when it happens, you'll know that I did it. No other idols can predict things like this.

And one of the things that is going through this section repeatedly is a denunciation of idolatry, and of images in particular. Now, this is partly because the Babylonians trusted in idols. And, for example, in chapter 46, verses 1 and 2, it talks about the idols of the Babylonians, Bel and Nebo.

Bel and Nebo were the principal deities of Babylon. And in chapter 46, verses 1 and 2, it says, Bel bows down, Nebo stoops. Their idols were on the beasts and on the cattle.

Your carriages were heavily loaded. The burden to the weary beast. They stoop, they bow down together.

They could not deliver the burden, but they themselves have gone into captivity. What this is referring to is that when the Persians conquered Babylon, they took the idols. No doubt there was a lot of gold and silver and so forth.

They were of value. And they were taken as trophies, and they were put on the backs of beasts. Beasts of burden had to carry off the idols of Babylon when Babylon was captured.

And he says, look at that. There go the gods. There go the gods of Babylon being carried off into captivity themselves.

They couldn't deliver themselves, much less could they deliver their people. They're just

a burden to animals now. These gods can't bear any burden.

They couldn't deliver the burden. Now deliver the burden might even be a play on words because so many of the prophecies are called burdens. The burden against Tyre, the burden against the Philistines and so forth.

A prophetic word is a burden. And saying they couldn't deliver the burden might even be saying these gods couldn't predict anything. These gods couldn't tell what was going to happen.

They were taken by surprise. They couldn't help anybody. They couldn't even help themselves.

They themselves are going into captivity. This is one of the many times that Isaiah mocks idols as being entirely helpless. We actually ran into this theme back in chapter 40 in yesterday's lecture.

Chapter 40 in verse 19, he said, the workman molds a graven image. Chapter 40 verse 19. The goldsmith overspreads it with gold and the silversmith casts silver chains.

Whoever is too impoverished for such a contribution chooses a tree that will not rot. He seeks for himself a skillful workman and to prepare a carved image that will not totter. Now, essentially saying if people have the money, they make their images out of gold and silver.

If they're cheap, they just go get a tree and carve it. But in any case, whether you've got money or not, these people are all dedicated to worshipping images and they make images. And he mentions to prepare a carved image that will not totter.

The reason I point that out is because he, not infrequently, he points out that they have to fasten these images with nails so they don't tip over. Not only do these images have no power to deliver in the day of calamity, they don't even have the power to stand up without being nailed down. They're going to tip over.

They don't have the power to even stand erect. These are lifeless, powerless gods. And one reason that he says this often is because not only did Bel and Nebo, Babylon's gods, fail to deliver Babylon, but all idols fail to do anything.

They can't do anything. And yet Israel had so often run to idolatry when they actually had access to God. They had Yahweh on their side, but they insulted him by seeking after idols who could do nothing.

And this is what Isaiah seems to be so shocked by. How could these people have trusted in stones and stalks of wood carved into the shape of men and animals? He brought this up in chapter 41, which we took last time. In verse 5, 41-5, The coastlands sought and

feared.

The ends of the earth were afraid. This is the Babylonians when they see Cyrus coming. They drew near and came.

Everyone helped his neighbor and said to his neighbor, Be of good courage. So the craftsman encouraged the goldsmith, and he who smooths with the hammer inspired him who strikes the anvil, saying, It is ready for the soldering. Then he fastened it with pegs that it should not totter.

Again, this having to fasten it down so it doesn't totter. He's building an idol. He's saying they're seeing the danger.

Here come the Persians against Babylon. Oh my, everyone's terrified. What shall we do? Oh, I know.

Let's build an idol. That'll help us. We better hurry because if this idol doesn't exist yet, we better bring it into existence so it can help us.

I mean, just the concept is crazy. What is emphasized is these idols are the works of men's hands. Whereas we're going to see another theme running through the whole section where God repeatedly says, I'm the one who made everything.

I made the heavens and the earth. And so by contrast to Yahweh, who actually is the creator of all things, these idols not only have created nothing, but they are creations themselves of men's hands. In chapter 41, verse 23, God is challenging the false gods, the idols, to do something, do anything.

Chapter 41, verse 23. Show the things that are to come hereafter that we may know that you are gods. Yes, do good or do evil, that we may be dismayed and see it together.

Indeed, you are nothing and your work is nothing. He who chooses you is an abomination, he says to the idols. They can't do anything.

They can't do good or bad. They can't tell the past or the future. They're nothing.

They don't do anything. In chapter 44, there's a lengthy section mocking the idolatry of those who look to images. Starts at verse 9, chapter 44, 9, and it runs through really all the way through verse 20.

But it says, those who make a graven image, all of them are useless. And their precious things shall not profit. They are their own witnesses.

They neither see nor know that they may be ashamed. Who would form a god or cast a graven image that profits him nothing? Surely all his companions would be ashamed, and the workmen, they are mere men. Let them be gathered together.

Let them stand up. Yet they shall fear. They shall be ashamed together.

The blacksmith with his tongs works one in the coals, fashions it with hammers, and works it with the strength of his arms. Even so he is hungry, and his strength fails. He drinks no water, and is faint.

In other words, he is exerting energy to produce this idol. This idol doesn't have any strength. It doesn't even come into existence except by the strength of a human being who exhausts himself making it.

The craftsman stretches out the rule. He marks one with his chalk. He fashions it with a plane.

He marks it out with a compass. It seems like Isaiah had watched this done before, all these different stages of sculpting an idol. He makes it like the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man, that it may remain in the house.

You don't want ugly things in your house, so you have to make a nice-looking human figure, since you want to have this idol in your home. He hews down cedars for himself, and takes the cypress and the oak. He secures it for himself among the trees of the forest.

He plants a pine, and the rain nourishes it. Then it shall be for a man to burn, for he will take some of it and warm himself. Yes, he kindles it and bakes bread.

Indeed, he makes a god and worships it. So he takes this one tree, part of the wood he uses to heat his home, part of it he uses to bake his bread, and part of it he worships. He makes it a carved image and falls down to it.

He burns half of it in the fire. With this half he eats meat. He roasts a roast, and is satisfied.

He even warms himself and says, Ah, I'm warm. I have seen the fire. And the rest of it he makes into a god, his carved image.

He falls down before it and worships it. He prays to it and says, Deliver me, for you are my god. They do not know nor understand, for he has shut their eyes so they cannot see, and their hearts so that they cannot understand.

In turning from God, people invite God to blind them. And then they do really stupid things. And you know what I have to say, as I look at the lives of many unbelievers I've known, many of them who have had knowledge of God in the past, have been raised Christians or whatever, and I see the things they think and the things they do, and I think, how could a person be really so blind? How could a person be so stupid? Why wouldn't somebody see that following God is the only thing that makes sense, and



they're following some kind of an idol, some other kind of a vision that they have, other than of Christ.

And it just looks like they've been supernaturally blinded. And this says that God has blinded these people's eyes because they've turned from him. It says in 2 Thessalonians 2, there will be those who do not receive the love of the truth, and therefore God will send them strong delusion, that they might believe the lie, who had pleasure in unrighteousness.

So God has blinded these people. They're doing stupid, irrational things. They take the same log, burn in the fireplace, cook in the oven, and worship the remainder, as if it can do something.

It couldn't even save itself from being burned. How can it save them? And no one considers in his heart, nor is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned half of it in the fire. Yes, I have baked bread out of its coals.

I have roasted meat and eaten it. And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood? He feeds on ashes. A deceived heart has turned him aside, and he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, is there not a lie in my right hand? This idol is a lie.

It's a deception. It's an abomination. And they don't have the good sense to notice that.

And yet any thinking person looking on who's not involved in that would say, how could anyone be so stupid? And that's what Isaiah is saying is, how could people not think this through? He's mocking the stupidity of idolatry. Likewise, over in chapter 45, he's talking about idols when he says, they shall be ashamed and also disgraced, all of them, they shall go into confusion together, who are makers of idols. The idols, as we said, can't deliver the people.

Chapter 46, 1 and 2, we saw, shows that even Babylon's idols couldn't deliver Babylon or even themselves from going into captivity. In that same chapter, chapter 46, 6 and 7, it says, they lavish gold out of the bag. They waste silver in the balance.

They hire a goldsmith and he makes it a god. They prostrate themselves. This is specifically talking about the Babylonians and their idolatry, apparently, or maybe just the Jews in imitating them.

Yes, they worship. They bear it on their shoulder. They carry it.

They set it in its place and it stands. From its place it shall not move, though one cries out to it, yet it cannot answer, nor save him out of his trouble. And we're not done with this theme.

Isaiah keeps coming back to this, or God keeps coming back to it, because God is astonished that people who have access to a God who is real and has demonstrated His power in delivering them from Egypt, for example, and many other things He's done, that they would prefer a God that has never shown itself capable of doing one thing, except tip over if you don't nail it down strong. In chapter 47, 9, it says, But these two things shall come to you. Now, by the way, this chapter 47 is a denunciation of Babylon, so this is about Babylon's idolatry.

It says, These two things shall come to you in a moment, in one day, loss of children and widowhood. They shall come upon you in their fullness because of the multitude of your sorceries and the abundance of your enchantments. Now, their sorceries and their enchantments were related to their idolatry.

The gods, the demons that they worshipped were invoked by sorceries and enchantments. He says, You're going to experience loss of children and widowhood. Loss of children for Babylon probably meant death of their citizens.

Widowhood would be the removal of their gods. Like a nation is married to its god, they're going to lose their husband. Nebo's going into captivity and so is Bel.

Babylon's going to be without a patron god. And he says in verse 12 to them, to the Babylonians, chapter 47, verse 12, He says, Stand now with your enchantments and the multitude of your sorceries in which you have labored from your youth. Perhaps you will be able to profit.

Perhaps you will prevail. You are wearied in your multitude of your counsels. Now let the astrologers, the stargazers, and the monthly prognosticators stand up and save you from these things that shall come upon you.

Behold, they shall be as stubble. The fire shall burn them. They shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame.

It shall not be a coal to be warmed by, nor a fire to sit before. Thus shall they be to you with whom you have labored, your merchants, etc., etc. Now, what he's saying is Babylon has trusted in gods, has used, instead of following the true god, they've used enchantments and sorceries and astrologers to consult their gods.

He says, OK, now let them save you because you're in trouble. I'd like to see what they can do. This is their time to shine.

Let them do it. And, of course, again, we've seen through this whole section this mockery of those who worship idols. And interwoven with this mockery is, of course, the contrast with Yahweh.

Now, Yahweh describes himself in a number of ways here, and usually the things that

come up most often are A. He knows the future, and he will show his sovereignty by predicting something before it happens, implying that I will predict it and I will bring it to pass. When things happen, there might be any number of interpretations of events that do not include God. Many things that God does are through what appear to be natural means.

Or just ordinary geopolitical movement. I mean, the rise and fall of empires. Daniel said God raises up kings and tears down kings, but really it usually happens through war.

Most kings go down by being conquered. And most kings come up by conquering. This is, you know, when we say God raises a king and brings down a king, we really mean that in the process of those ordinary historical events that cause nations to rise and fall, which are usually militaristic, it is really God who is working in those things.

And so very often what happens, what God actually does, is not obviously God. One could explain it in natural terms. Even when God spoke from heaven in John chapter 12, some said it thundered.

It's entirely possible for someone to observe an act of God, God speaking through something, a supernatural thing that God is doing, and to find some way to describe it in natural terms. It's just thunder. And so also the rise and fall of Babylon, Medo-Persia, and so forth, could be, if people misunderstood, mistaken for the work of simply strong armies.

Of course, no one in that day would see it that way because there were no naturalists. We have naturalists today. In fact, it's the prevailing mood of our society is naturalism.

There are no gods. There's no supernatural. Everything can be explained naturally.

No one did that back then. Everyone knew there were gods, or at least supernatural things, and they attributed to their gods their victories. But God repeatedly says, listen, I'm going to tell you in advance what happens.

That way you'll know I did it when it happens. Bel, Nebo, Baal, Ashtaroth, they can't really tell you what's going to happen because they don't do anything. They don't know because they can't do anything.

I know because I can do it. I can raise up Cyrus if I want to. So I can tell you in advance that I'm going to do it, and then do it.

Now, if I didn't say anything, you might have just thought Cyrus rose up the same way Nebuchadnezzar or any other king does. Of course, Nebuchadnezzar came up through God too. He predicted that.

The point is, by making predictions of the future, God shows that when the event

actually comes true, it was him, not something else that made it happen. No other gods predicted it. No one else foresaw it.

And so one of the things God points out in contrast to the other gods is that he does, in fact, know the future and predicts it. He also emphasizes his own role as the creator of all things, and this too is in contrast to the idols because they don't create anything. In fact, they are, as has been seen in these passages we just saw emphatically, they are created.

And they're not even created by supernatural means. They're just created by natural means. Men, mortal men, they go out and get a tree, a rock, reshape it, and then worship it.

These gods aren't anything. They don't create anything. They are created things themselves, but God emphasized that he is the creator.

And the other thing he emphasizes, and we'll see it again and again, is there's only one of him. Of the idols, there's a multitude, any number. Anyone who can cut down a tree can make a new one.

There's no end to false gods, but there is only one true God. So these are the things, we're going to read a number of passages here, some of them lengthy, some of them not, which are talking about this, that in contrast to the idols, God tells the future, God created everything, and God is alone. God, there is no other.

These are the things really that make up the distinctives of the Hebrew theology as opposed to the pagan theology. One God, the creator of everything, who intervenes in real life events and can show that it's his intervention by predicting it beforehand. So those are the main points we're going to see several times.

We've actually run into the beginning of this in chapter 40, obviously. We were there yesterday, but chapter 40 talks about God as the one who is the creator of everything and bigger than everything and we're not going to go back into chapter 40, but there are lots of references to God's power and his accomplishments in chapter 40. And then, for example, chapter 40, verse 21, Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth.

All its inhabitants are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a curtain. And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in.

He brings the princes to nothing. He makes the judges of the earth useless and goes on. But he mentions that he stretches out the heavens.

Now, he also emphasizes his uniqueness in verse 4 of chapter 41. After he's mentioned

that he's going to raise up this one from the east, in verse 4 he says, Who has performed and done it? Calling the generations from the beginning, I, Yahweh, am the first and with the last, I am he. Now, several things here.

We saw this verse yesterday but I didn't make these comments particularly. One is here he says, I am the first and I am with the last. I don't know why he says with the last here because several other times he just leaves out the with.

And he says, I am the first and the last. For example, in chapter 44, 6, he says, Thus says Yahweh, the king of Israel, and his redeemer, Yahweh of hosts, I am the first and I am the last. Beside me there is no God.

Now, this is the point. Why is he called the first and the last? Well, because he's the first God and the last God and he's the only God. And he emphasizes this in chapter 43 where he says in chapter 43, 10, You are my witnesses, says Yahweh, and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he.

Before me there was no God formed, so I'm the first, nor shall there be after me, therefore I'm the last. There's no other one before or after or in the middle. I'm the first one, the last one.

I'm all. I'm all the gods there are, just me. No one else but me here.

And he says that again in chapter 44, 8, You are my witnesses, the middle of verse 8, 44, 8, You are my witnesses. Is there a God besides me? Indeed, there is no other rock. I don't know one.

If there was one, God probably would know about that. He says, I don't know of any. If you look at chapter 45, verse 6, he says, that they may know from the rising of the sun, that is the east, to its setting, which is the west, from all over the world, that there is none besides me.

I am Yahweh, and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness. Now this, of course, perhaps refers back to the first day of creation, and it is therefore, again, another reference to him being the creator, but more than that, light and darkness seem to take on a symbolic thing, because in Isaiah, light is used as blessing, and darkness as calamity, and that's what he goes on to say in the parallel, I make peace, and I create calamity.

I, the Lord, do all these things. By the way, in some Bibles, like the King James, it says I make peace and I create evil, and some people have struggled with that, because it sounds like God's saying he's the author of sin, but the word evil in the Old Testament Hebrew often doesn't mean moral evil, but a circumstantial disaster, and that is certainly clear here. The New King James translates it calamity, and that is really the way the word evil in this passage is intended.

It's in contrast with peace. It's not in contrast with righteousness. If you say I create righteousness and I create evil, you think, oh, good, you know, righteousness and sin, that's the contrast.

He says, no, I create peace and evil, which means peace versus what isn't peace, calamity, and it says in this chapter 45 verse 9, woe to him who strives with his maker, chapter 45, 9, let the potsherds strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him who forms it, what are you making? Or shall your handiwork say he has no hands? Woe to him who says to his father, what are you beginning? Or to the woman, what have you brought forth? He says, thus says the Holy One of Israel, his maker, ask me of things to come concerning my sons and concerning the work of my hands command me. In other words, concerning what I'm going to do in the future, ask me what I'm going to do.

I can tell you. I can tell you the future. I have made the earth and created man on it.

It was I, my hands that stretched out the heavens and all their hosts I have commanded. So we see here all three of those points that I mentioned are here in this chapter. He says in verse 6, he's the only one, only one God, and he emphasizes that he's the creator.

In verses 9 and 10, he's the potter, he's the father, he's the one who brings it into existence. Or verse 12, I've made the earth, I've created man on it. So he's the creator God.

And then of course he talks about his ability to tell the future and to be the one who's intervening in life. In verse 11, go ahead and ask me about things concerning the future, he's saying. So these three points are going to be emphasized in various ways.

In chapter 44, verse 24, he says, Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, and he who formed you from the womb, I am the Lord who makes all things, who stretches out the heavens all alone, who spreads abroad the earth by myself. Now by myself and all alone, this was not a council of the gods getting together to concoct how to create an earth and people it. Which is almost a direct quote from Joseph Smith who said in the beginning the chief of the gods called a council of the gods and they concocted a plan how to create a world and people it, said Joseph Smith.

He believed many gods. God said, No, I did that myself. No committees here.

There are no councils of the gods. I stretched out the heavens alone. I spread abroad the earth by myself.

There's only one of me and I'm the one who created it all. And so we see these recurring emphases in chapter 45, 18. For thus says Yahweh, who created the heavens, who is God, who formed the earth and who made it, who has established it, who did not create it in vain, that is for no purpose, who formed it to be inhabited.

I am Yahweh and there is no other. Really wants to get that across, apparently. There is no other God, just the one and I'm the one who made everything.

Now I would just point out something that has become a point of confusion for some people. And that is where he says, I didn't create it in vain. The phrase in vain here is the same Hebrew term that's used in Genesis chapter 1 and verse 2 where it says the earth was formless and void.

The word void is the same word as in vain here. So when it says, in the beginning God created the heavens, the earth and the earth was formless and void. It is describing the original condition, it seems, of the planet before God began to shape it and fill it with life.

However, this statement, God says, I made the earth, I formed the earth and made it. I established it, I did not create it. It could be translated, I did not create it void.

See, the same Hebrew word could be translated void or in vain and it is translated void in Genesis. Now, based on this verse, some people have said, ah, well when we read then in Genesis 1-2 that the earth was void, that was not in fact its original condition. God did not create it void.

It must have become void between verse 1 and 2 of Genesis. And thus we have what they call the gap theory. Genesis 1-1, in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Okay, He created it. In what form did He create it? Well, we are not told but it became formless and void according to Genesis 1-2. Now, the word was in Genesis 1-2, the word, the earth was without form, could be translated became.

However, that verb in Hebrew is not very often translated that way. It almost always means was rather than became. There is a remote possibility of translating that verse became and therefore, those who hold this gap theory say there was a gap.

After God created the heavens and the earth, He did not originally create it void. It became void. It became formless and void.

Therefore, they suggest that between verse 1 and 2 of Genesis, there must have been some history that is unrecorded, a gap. He made an earth that was not void. He made it not void but He made it to be inhabited.

And therefore, He made it habitable. It became formless and void, perhaps as an act of judgment upon it. And therefore, there is an extensive theory postulating a great deal of history between chapter 1 and verse 1 of Genesis and then the very next verse.

They say perhaps that's when Lucifer fell. Maybe Lucifer during that gap was reigning over the earth and then he fell. Maybe that's when the dinosaurs lived and that's why we

find their fossils.

And there's all kinds of theories thrown in there and it's all based on the assumption that the earth was not created void in the first place. And therefore, that Genesis 1-2 cannot be describing the original condition but an acquired state. And all that is based on this one verse in Isaiah.

Essentially saying, God didn't create the earth void. Therefore, obviously it must have become that way subsequent to its creation. This verse alone really is the support for the so-called gap theory.

However, the term can be translated in vain, meaning for no purpose. I didn't create it for nothing. And that is quite clearly what it means here.

Because as you look at the context of Isaiah 45-18, he says God did not create it in vain. Let's take that for the sake of argument to mean for nothing. I didn't make it for no purpose.

I formed it to be inhabited. Okay, I made it for a purpose. I'm the Lord, there's no other.

But look at the next verse. I have not spoken in secret or in dark place of the earth. I did not say to the seed of Jacob, seek me in vain.

That's the same phrase, in vain. Now, to translate it void there would seem very peculiar. I did not say to Jacob, seek me void.

He means, I didn't say to Jacob, seek me for no purpose. In vain would be to no end, to no purpose. And therefore, since the same phrase is used two verses in a row, and it clearly means, in verse 19, in vain rather than void, that would seem reasonable to suggest its meaning in verse 18.

Therefore, to form a whole theology of the gap based on this one verse and this one translation is, to my mind, very foolish and quite mistaken. Isaiah 45, 21. He says, Tell and bring forth your case.

Yes, let them take counsel together. He says, Who has told it from that time? Have not I, the Lord? And there is no other God beside me. Adjust, God, and save you.

There is none beside me. Now, he says, Who told it in advance? I did. And it says in verse 22, Look to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth.

For I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by myself, the word has gone out from my mouth in righteousness and shall not return, that to me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath. This verse is what Paul is referring to when he says that every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, over in, of course, Philippians 2.10. But God emphasizes, There is no other.



I have determined how things are going to turn out. Eventually, everyone will bow to me. Of course, this gives some encouragement to the universalist position.

Although, it also gives encouragement to the post-millennial position. Some say there will come a time on earth where everyone is converted and every knee will be bowing to him. Others say, No, everyone who has ever lived will bow to him, and that's the universalist position.

Others say, Well, no, after he's wiped out all the wicked and they're gone, then all the remainder of the people will bow to him. So, in any case, depending on one's theological paradigm, this verse can fit more than one set of assumptions. It says, in chapter 46, verse 9, Remember the former things of old, for I am God, there is no other.

I am God, there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things that are not yet, saying, My counsel shall stand, I will do all my pleasure. And then he talks about Cyrus. The point is, he's saying, I'm predicting it, and then I'm making it happen.

So, if you see it happen, the thing I predicted, no, that's my proving who I am. I'm the real God. I'm the one who does these things.

In chapter 48, the last chapter in this section, verse 3, he says, I have declared the former things from the beginning. They went forth from my mouth, and I caused them to hear it. Suddenly I did them, and they came to pass.

Because I knew that you were obstinate, and your neck was an iron sinew, and your brow bronze. Even from the beginning, I have declared it to you. Before it came to pass, I proclaimed it to you, lest you should say, My idol has done them, and my carved image, and my molded image have commanded them.

That is, I knew that you'd be inclined to give credit to your idols for your deliverance. And therefore, I did something your idols didn't do. I predicted that I would do it.

Therefore, I kind of cut you off at the knees there, your idols at least, so that you couldn't give them credit. He says, You have heard, verse 6, See all this, and will you not declare it? I have made you hear new things from this time, even hidden things, and you did not know them. They are created now, and not from the beginning.

And before this day, you have not heard them, lest you should say, Of course I knew them. Surely you did not hear. Surely you did not know.

Surely from long ago, your ear was not open. These are not things you knew before I told you. I told you, and you would have known otherwise.

And then it says in verse 12 and 13, Listen to me, O Jacob, in Israel my call. I am he. I am

the first.

I am the last. Indeed, my hand has laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand has stretched out the heavens. When I call to them, they stand together.

In other words, I made them, they answer to me, and they obey my command, the heavens. So we have these many passages in this section, where he emphasizes this about himself. He is the one God, there is no other.

He is the creator. He stretched out the heavens. They answer to him.

They come when he calls. They do what he says. He is the Lord, and he can tell you in advance what he is going to do, which no other God can do.

Therefore, why are you listening to idols who can't do a thing, didn't create anything, can't predict anything? That is the emphasis of this entire section. Now within it, we encountered something that I did not draw attention to, and I think I would like to. Over in chapter 41, in verse 4, where we first encountered God saying, I am the first, and where he said, I am with the last, he then said, I am he.

Now, if you are paying attention when you read through this segment of Isaiah, you will find a number of references to God saying, I am he. I am who? I am he. Well, who is he? Well, I am he, the true God.

But, here is the thing. The term, I am he, is used as if it is a proper name itself. I mean, if you said, Steve Gregg here, I would say, I am he, and there is nothing strange about that.

But, I am not using I am he as a proper name. I am just answering a question. I am the one that you are looking for.

But, God uses the term, I am he, as if that is one of his divine titles. How do we know this? Well, look at chapter 43, and verse 10, or verse, let's look at verse 12. We read verse 10 already.

43.12 says, I have declared and saved, I have proclaimed, and there is no foreign God among you. Therefore, you are my witnesses, says Yahweh, that I am God. Indeed, before, verse 13, before the day was, I am he.

Now, that is strange grammar. Before the day was, I am he. You would expect it, before the day was, I was.

If he is just giving information about himself, rather than using it as a title. If he is just saying, I was here before the day, then he would say, before the day was, I was. Instead, he uses, I am he, as if it's, you know, the tense of the verb doesn't change, no matter what the sentence would require, because it's a name.

It's an unchanging title. And we see it again, in chapter 46, in verse 4. By the way, we find I am he, numerous times, in this section of Isaiah, but the cases I'm showing you, are showing exactly, how this is used as a proper name. Isaiah 46.4. Alright, 3 and 4. Listen to me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been upheld by me from birth, who have been carried from the womb.

Even to your old age, I am he, and even to gray hairs, I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear. Even I will carry, and I will deliver you.

To whom will you liken me, and make me equal, and compare, that we should be alike. Now, notice this line in verse 4. Even to your old age, I am he. Shouldn't he have said, even to your old age, I will be he? Actually, the next line says, even to gray hairs, I will carry you.

He's talking about the future. Till you are old, till you have gray hairs, I will carry you. Till you are old, I am he.

Notice, I am he. It's not information, it's a title. If it was information, the verb am would change to fit the sentence, would fit the grammar.

Instead, it's an unchanging title, no matter what the grammar of the sentence would ordinarily dictate. Now, why did I bring that out? Because when, in John chapter 8, John chapter 8, we have a passage that is often said to be Christ using a divine title of himself, and indeed he is. But I think that Christians interpret it wrongly too often.

Because there we have Jesus saying, in John 8, 58, Jesus said, most assuredly I say to you, before Abraham was, I am. And it's typical for Christians to say, well, I am, that's the name that God revealed to Moses at the burning bush. When Moses said, well, what is your name? When Israel says, who sent you? What is the name of that God? What shall I say? What's your name? And God says, I am that I am has sent you.

You go say to Israel, I am has sent me. So God reveals his name as I am. And here we see Jesus saying, before Abraham was, I am.

But there's a problem here in making that identification with Exodus chapter 3, and it is this, that in the Greek of Exodus chapter 3, in verse, whatever verse that is, I forget, 14? 15? Okay. In the Greek of the Septuagint to that verse, it does not use the same Greek word for I am as Jesus is using here. Now, of course, Jesus spoke in Aramaic and this Greek word is given by John, but John still chose the Greek word that he did in order to render what Jesus said.

And John, if John saw Jesus as referring to Exodus chapter 3 in verse 15, he would no doubt have used the same Greek word to translate Jesus' words. Whatever word is used in Exodus 3.15 should be used here if it's Jesus, if John is trying to give us the impression that Jesus is using that name. In fact, here, in John 8.58, Jesus uses the term ego, a me.

Now, in Greek, a me by itself means I am. Just the word a me means I am. But ego, like our word ego, is I. So ego, a me, essentially means I, I am.

It's an emphatic I am in the Greek. But it also, in the Greek, can mean I am he. For example, if you look at chapter 9 of John, John 9.9, when the blind man had been healed and his neighbors were wondering if this is the same man or not, in John 9.9, it says, some said, this is he.

Others said, he is like him. But he answered, I am he. That's also ego, a me.

Obviously, the blind man is not using the name of God to distinguish himself. He's simply answering the information, I'm he, I'm the one. Ego, a me, the same phrase Jesus used.

Ego, a me can mean I am, which is the literal meaning, but in usage in the Greek language, it can have the implied he. I am he. So, when Jesus says, ego, a me, in John 8.58, it could be translated I am, as we have it in our English versions, or equally, it could be translated, I am he.

Ego, a me means both in the Greek. Now, suppose it was like this, before Abram was, I am he. That sounds very much like the grammar of Isaiah 43.12. Before the day was, I am he.

Before Abraham was, I am he. The I am he is not proper grammar. It is a title.

Now, what's interesting is that even though in Exodus 3, at the burning bush, when God said, I am, the Septuagint does not use the term ego, a me. It has a different term for I am. But, in those passages in Isaiah, where God says, I am he, that is ego, a me, in the Septuagint.

In other words, Jesus and his contemporaries, when they read the Septuagint, would read ego, a me, in those passages where God says, I am he. That's how the Septuagint translated, ego, a me, means I am he. Now, Jesus said before Abram was, I am he.

Jesus is, in fact, using a divine title, but not the same one that was used at the burning bush. He is using a divine title found in Isaiah, where Yahweh says, before the day was, I am he. Even unto your gray hairs, I am he.

I am he stays present tense, no matter whether it's past or future tense in the sentence. It's an unchanging title, and Jesus uses it that way. You know, the Jehovah's Witnesses trying to avoid the implication that Jesus is really Yahweh, they translate Isaiah 58, Isaiah 8-58, as before Abram was, I have been.

Because that's pretty much what you'd expect. If Jesus is simply trying to say that he existed before Abraham, he should have said something like, before Abram was, I have been. That would get the information across.

But Jesus is not giving that information. Jesus is declaring himself by a divine title. In the Greek, it is present tense in John 8-58.

Before Abram was, I am he. It's awkward. It could be translated I am, but actually, to be consistent with the Septuagint, I am he is a better translation.

But you can see from the way it functions in that sentence, it is not mere information, it is a title. And where does he get that title? He gets that title from Isaiah where it is always Yahweh who says, I am he. I am he.

I am he. That's Yahweh's title. Now, we're going to have to end this session here, but there's one other stream of thought in this section of Isaiah I do want to draw, and that is the servant.

The servant motif. But it is actually in our next section of Isaiah we're going to consider in our next lectures that the servant motif comes out primarily. We first encountered in this first section, we will look at it in chapter 42.

Chapter 42, verses 1 and following, we have the first servant song. But the other servant songs are going to appear in the next section of Isaiah which we'll take, so we'll look at all of them when we come back to our next session and we will hold off on some of this material in our present section because of its likeness and its relationship to the material we're going to be looking at.