

July 13th 2014: Isaiah 45:1-13: CYRUS—THE LORD'S ANNOINTED

This morning we commence a study in an amazing chapter from the book of Isaiah(45). It emphasizes the Sovereignty of God over all people and does so through this amazing prophecy about a man who would become a world leader, and his name was Cyrus.

What this chapter says about this Cyrus is incredible. For Isaiah began his ministry in 740 BC and died in about 681 BC—59yrs later. Cyrus however wasn't born until 580 BC.

This is at least a small part of the reason why some scholars suggest that the book of Isaiah was written by at least two people. The first Isaiah who wrote chapters 1-39, and then another author who added chapters 40 onwards. That he added them after the exile was over and in about the second century BC.

However, only the name Isaiah is attached to this OT book, and he is credited with chapters from both sections as the author in the New Testament. And then there is the expression, "the Holy One of Israel." This title for God occurs 12 times in chapters 1-39 and 14 times in chapters 40-66, yet is only found 6 times in the rest of the OT. And also there are numerous themes and grammatical structures that are common to both sections, and several verses that are basically repeated in both sections, as though the author was reminding his readers of a point already made.

Josephus, the Jewish historian who wrote in the first century AD, had no doubt in his mind regarding the book of Isaiah as being the work of one man. He writes about Isaiah's mention of Cyrus as a prophecy spoken 140 years before Cyrus reigned supreme over Asia. In his Jewish Antiquities he says:-

In the first year of the reign of Cyrus, which was the seventieth from the day that our people were removed out of their own land into Babylon, God commiserated the captivity and calamity of these poor people, according as he had foretold to them by Jeremiah the prophet, before the destruction of the city, that after they had served Nebuchadnezzar and his posterity, and after they had undergone that servitude seventy years, he would restore them again to the land of their fathers, and they should build their temple, and enjoy their ancient prosperity.

And these things God did afford them; for he stirred up the mind of Cyrus, and made him write this throughout all Asia: "Thus saith Cyrus the king: Since God Almighty hath appointed me to be king of the habitable earth, I believe that he is that God which the nation of the Israelites worship; for indeed he foretold my name by the prophets, and that I should build him a house at Jerusalem, in the country of Judea."

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; so he called for the most eminent Jews that were in Babylon, and said to them, that he gave them leave to go back to their own country, and to rebuild their city Jerusalem, and the temple of God, for that he would be their assistant, and that he would write to the rulers and governors that were in the neighborhood of their country of Judea, that they should contribute to them gold and silver for the building of the temple, and besides that, beasts for their sacrifices.

So what Josephus believed, what many Biblical scholars today believe, and what I believe too, is that God spoke about Cyrus as His instrument through His prophet Isaiah over 100 years before Cyrus was born. And that Cyrus, a pagan ruler as he was, was a pivotal person in God's plan for our salvation.

So who was this Cyrus?

Well in fact he was very famous and is remembered as Cyrus the Great. Indeed there is this Bas-Relief of him in Pasargad Iran that was connected with his royal tomb, and you will even find a statue of him today at Olympic Park in Sydney.

His early life is shrouded in mystery and legend, one of which has him being born as the grandson of an Achaemenidian King, who, on the night of his birth had a dream in which his grandson overthrew him and took his kingdom. He therefore took the new born baby from his parents and told his steward to kill him. The steward wasn't too keen on killing a baby so he took the child to a herdsman who lived in the mountains and told him to abandon the child somewhere where he would die. The herdsman's family however kept the child alive. When Cyrus was ten it was noticeable that he was different and this was brought to the attention of the old king who returned Cyrus to his parents.

Later on Cyrus did indeed take over the old Kings kingdom, which became the Kingdom of the Medes and through battle he united it with the kingdom of Persia. He then won a famous victory over Croecus, the king of the Lydian empire and made himself extremely rich through the spoils of that war. He then proceeded to conquer the Neo-Babylonian Empire and to control the largest Empire that the world had ever known. It stretched from Asia Minor in the West to the Northwestern areas of India in the East.

But as well as being known to be a great conqueror, Cyrus the Great is best remembered for his tolerance and magnanimous attitude towards those he defeated. He had no thought of forcing conquered people into a single mould, and had the wisdom to leave unchanged the institution of each kingdom he attached to the Persian Crown.

It is said of Cyrus that

His policy was to bring peace to Mankind. A new wind was blowing from the east, carrying away the cries and humility of defeated and murdered victims, extinguishing the fires of sacked cities, and liberating nations from slavery.

On December 10, 2003, in her acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize, Shirin Ebadi evoked Cyrus, saying:

I am an Iranian, a descendant of Cyrus the Great. This emperor proclaimed at the pinnacle of power 2,500 years ago that he "would not reign over the people if they did not wish it". He promised not to force any person to change his religion and faith and guaranteed freedom for all. The Charter of Cyrus the Great should be studied in the history of human rights.

When Cyrus' forces entered Babylon they did so without a battle. Known for its many bronze city gates, they opened without force, and the Jewish community, when they realized it was Cyrus, greeted his army with cheers.

Now we know something of this battle from the book of Daniel chapter 5. That Almighty God played a part when He wrote upon the walls the words that Daniel interpreted to the Babylonian king.

Daniel 5:25-31

"This is the inscription that was written:

MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN

"Here is what these words mean:

Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end.

Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.

Peres: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."

Then at Belshazzar's command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom.

That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two.

Now the title Darius the Mede may have been Cyrus' throne name or more likely another name for the governor who we know Cyrus put in charge of the Babylonian territories. A little later on in Daniel 10, Daniel talks about the third year of Cyrus king of Persia..

So here we have this Cyrus that Isaiah talks about in Isaiah 45 when he writes:

Isaiah 45:1-6

**"This is what the LORD says to his anointed,
to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of
to subdue nations before him
and to 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 the mountains;
I will break down gates of bronze
and cut through bars of iron.
I will give you hidden treasures,
riches stored in secret places,
so that you may know that I am the LORD,
the God of Israel, who summons you by name.
For the sake of Jacob my servant,
of Israel my chosen,
I summon you by name
and bestow on you a title of honor,
though you do not acknowledge me. I am the LORD,
and there is
no other;
apart from me there is no God.
I will strengthen you,
though you have not acknowledged me,
so that from the rising of the sun
to the place of its setting
people may know there is none besides me.
I am the LORD, and there is no other.**

Notice not only what God promised to do for this man, but why God would do it. For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen.

But also so that Cyrus may know that "I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God."(v5)

And then again in v6... so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting people may know there is none besides me. I am the LORD, and there is no other.

In the book of Ezra and in 2 Chronicles we find references to what Cyrus went on to do for the Jewish nation, and the one that sums it up is found in Ezra 1:1-4

Ezra 1:1-4

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing:

"This is what Cyrus king of Persia says:

"The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Any of his

people among you may go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem, and may their God be with them. And in any locality where survivors may now be living, the people are to provide them with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem.”

So it can be clearly seen that the real story is not about Cyrus at all but about God. God in control for the sake of His mighty plan that He has for His church. God showing the world that He is the Lord and that there is no other God but Him. God using those who do not acknowledge Him to achieve blessings for His people. And God still does that today.

(Stories from China)

We have that verse from Jeremiah 29 about the plans that God has for us, displayed in our church hall, and we can be confident that God will at times even use non-believers to bring about His plans to bless us.

But before we close the pages of Isaiah 45 this morning there is one final thing to be said and it concerns the word anointed in v1

***“This is what the LORD says to his anointed,
to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of
to subdue nations before him
and to strip kings of their armor,
to open doors before him
so that gates will not be shut:***

In the Hebrew text the word is Messiah, for that is what anointed means. The anointed and chosen one. Cyrus was the only Gentile that God calls by that name, and he was chosen by God to send His people back to Israel and to rebuild His Temple there.

And to do so because one day the Eternal Messiah would be born in Israel, not in Babylon, and would fulfill the prophecy of Malachi who wrote in 3:1

Malachi 3:1 “I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the LORD Almighty.

So, in a small way Cyrus too prepared the way for the coming of the True Messiah, Jesus.

Jesus who also had a childhood of obscurity and poverty yet rose to be the conqueror of kingdoms, yet not of this world. To release His people from the Babylon of sin and darkness and to bless them with eternal riches in glory.

This is Jesus who rose triumphantly from the grave to be King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Is He your King and your Lord this morning? For unto Him is all the glory, and all the power, both now and forever, Amen