

# God & the Greats

February 17, 2013

Idolatry's Idiocy

Isaiah 44:1-45:7

**The History:** Hezekiah's death, Babylon destroys Jerusalem and the temple

## God's people are not forgotten:

*"But now hear, O Jacob my servant,  
Israel whom I have chosen!*

<sup>2</sup> *Thus says the LORD who made you,  
who formed you from the womb and will help you:*

*Fear not, O Jacob my servant,  
Jeshurun whom I have chosen.*

<sup>3</sup> *For I will pour water on the thirsty land,  
and streams on the dry ground;*

- God is reassuring His people that his final purpose for them is blessing.
- He is assuring His people how fully committed to them He is.
- Though the "utter destruction" (43:28) has left Israel a "thirsty land" and "dry ground" (44:3) there is blessing and deliverance promised.

*I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring,  
and my blessing on your descendants.*

<sup>4</sup> *They shall spring up among the grass  
like willows by flowing streams.*

<sup>5</sup> *This one will say, 'I am the LORD's,'  
another will call on the name of Jacob,  
and another will write on his hand, 'The LORD's,'  
and name himself by the name of Israel."*

## The Lord reminds Israel (and us) of the God we serve:

*Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel  
and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:*

*"I am the first and I am the last;  
besides me there is no god.*

<sup>7</sup> *Who is like me? Let him proclaim it.  
Let him declare and set it before me,  
since I appointed an ancient people.*

*Let them declare what is to come, and what will  
happen.*

<sup>8</sup> *Fear not, nor be afraid;  
have I not told you from of old and declared it?  
And you are my witnesses!*

*Is there a God besides me?  
There is no Rock; I know not any."*

- The two main ideas here are that 1. God confirms His claims with prophecy, and proves his God'ness by his ability to declare what will come to pass and then make it happen. (verses 7-8) 2. God alone is able to keep all promises and worthy to be relied upon. (verse 8b)

The alternative to relying on and worshipping God is idolatry. From Isaiah 44:9-20 we see just exactly how idiotic idolatry is...

## 2 Reasons that Idolatry is Idiocy:

### 1. Idols cannot offer you anything. (verse 9-13)

<sup>9</sup> All who fashion idols are nothing, and the things they delight in do not profit. Their witnesses neither see nor know, that they may be put to shame. <sup>10</sup> Who fashions a god or casts an idol that is profitable for nothing? <sup>11</sup> Behold, all his companions shall be put to shame, and the craftsmen are only human. Let them all assemble, let them stand forth. They shall be terrified; they shall be put to shame together.

<sup>12</sup> The ironsmith takes a cutting tool and works it over the coals. He fashions it with hammers and works it with his strong arm. He becomes hungry, and his strength fails; he drinks no water and is faint. <sup>13</sup> The carpenter stretches a line; he marks it out with a pencil. He shapes it with planes and marks it with a compass. He shapes it into the figure of a man, with the beauty of a man, to dwell in a house.

- Isaiah tells us that idols are profitless.
- The language used here to make the point shows how idolatry reverses creation. In Genesis we read how God turned the chaos ("waste and void") into His creation, culminating in His forming human life as His image. When people cast idols they were forming gods as images of themselves... *So Isaiah uses the same language, effectively saying idol-making changes creation back into chaos.*

## 2. Idol-makers rely on God for idol-making material. (verses 14-20)

<sup>14</sup> He cuts down cedars, or he chooses a cypress tree or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest. He plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it. <sup>15</sup> Then it becomes fuel for a man. He takes a part of it and warms himself; he kindles a fire and bakes bread. Also he makes a god and worships it; he makes it an idol and falls down before it. <sup>16</sup> Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat; he roasts it and is satisfied. Also he warms himself and says, "Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!" <sup>17</sup> And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you are my god!"

<sup>18</sup> They know not, nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand. <sup>19</sup> No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say, "Half of it I burned in the fire; I also baked bread on its coals; I roasted meat and have eaten. And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?" <sup>20</sup> He feeds on ashes; a deluded heart has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself or say, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?"

- Those who make idols (which is like 'creating gods') are just humans, and they make their images in the forms of "human beings"—which would need things humans need: such as food and shelter.
- The prophet marvels that when someone (a pagan) makes an idol, half of the tree is used as fuel to keep one warm, or to bake food but the other half becomes a god to be worshiped—he bows down to a stump asking for help or deliverance.
- Isaiah says worshipping an idol is to the soul what eating ashes would be to our body. An idol made of wood, regardless how well it's carved and decorated, isn't greater than the ashes it could become in a fire.
- There is humor in the tone here. . (ex: those who make idols depend on God for their raw materials b/c they did not create the tree...) It is laughable that people would construct idols! But the humor of it all is a dark humor b/c people do worship idols.

## 3 Ways to Avoid the Idiocy of Idolatry:

### 1. Allow yourself to be shaped by biblical truth. (44:21-23)

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.

I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud  
and your sins like mist;  
return to me, for I have redeemed you.

<sup>23</sup> Sing, O heavens, for the LORD has done it;  
shout, O depths of the earth;  
break forth into singing, O mountains,  
O forest, and every tree in it!  
For the LORD has redeemed Jacob,  
and will be glorified<sup>[b]</sup> in Israel.

- Harold Best defines idolatry generally this way: "idolatry is the act of shaping something that we then allow to shape us [and that] what we serve is made out of the same stuff that in other circumstances serves us."
- Put another way, Best describes idolatry as: **"the difference between walking in the light and creating our own light to walk in."**

### 2. Work hard to get clear and proper theology. (44:24-28; 45:7)

<sup>24</sup> 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,  
<sup>25</sup> who frustrates the signs of liars  
and makes fools of diviners,  
who turns wise men back

and makes their knowledge foolish,  
<sup>26</sup> 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';

<sup>27</sup> who says to the deep, 'Be dry;  
I will dry up your rivers';  
<sup>28</sup> 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.'"

- When we fail to see God as he truly is: see him as inactive, not listening, unable or unwilling to help, all love and no wrath.. and the list goes on.
- This is especially dangerous because we tend to act upon the truths we believe... it is not only sinful to hold improper ideas about what God is like, but also the actions that believing such falsehoods create.

### 3. Rely on God alone for your help and deliverance. (45:1-7)

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:  
<sup>2</sup> "I will go before you  
and level the exalted places,<sup>a</sup>  
I will break in pieces the doors of bronze  
and cut through the bars of iron,  
<sup>3</sup> I will give you the treasures of darkness  
and the hoards in secret places,  
that you may know that it is I, the LORD,  
the God of Israel, who call you by your  
name.

<sup>4</sup> 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.  
<sup>5</sup> I am the LORD, and there is no other,  
besides me there is no God;  
I equip you, though you do not know me,  
<sup>6</sup> 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.  
<sup>7</sup> I form light and create darkness,  
I make well-being and create calamity,  
I am the LORD, who does all these things.

- Where does your help come from? Spouse? Parents? Finances? Intelligence? Ability to problem solve? Work?
- God has created us as dependant beings... so we naturally look for comfort, rest, deliverance and salvation... where are your eyes turned? Where is your heart turned?

#### A Lesson from History:

CYRUS (the Great)

- God's ability to use a foreign leader for his purposes in delivering Israel
- Gods using Cyrus was (Verse 6) SO THAT "the people" [of the earth] "may know"... "I am the Lord, and there is no other."
- That his ability to name Cyrus, and use Cyrus and ensure his plans would succeed sets us up to trust that he "forms light and creates darkness... makes well-being and creates calamity"
- THIS IS THE ONLY GOD WORTH PLACING OUR TRUST IN.