

“A Message of Hope”  
Isaiah 44:1-45:25  
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Good morning/good evening. It’s great to see you all – it’s been a while! I don’t know about you, but there are portions of Scripture that can set your heart on fire and get you excited. Conversely, and being candid, some sections of Scripture can feel pretty dry and leave you thinking, “*What does this have anything to do with me and my faith?*” Regarding today’s lesson reading covering chapters 44 and 45, for me, this falls into the first category. When I first read over the reading, I got so excited! But then I started trying to comprehend how can I do any justice to the rich messages in these two chapters in just 30 minutes??? Thankfully, the Lord provided an outline to follow, so here’s what we’re going to talk about.

1. God’s Imitators
2. God’s titles
3. God’s power
4. God the promise keeper

Let’s get started with God’s imitators. Specifically, the LORD lays out a stark and brutal assessment of idolatry. In its simplest form, idolatry is something that takes the place of devotion and worship that is rightfully due to God. In modern times, idolatry can be something like wealth, celebrity, health, societal position, and even the number of alleged friends someone has on their social media account. Specific to our reading, the idolatry being called out is one that is focused on man-made objects. Isaiah eviscerates those who make the idols and points out the folly and consequences to those who choose to worship them. Idolatry is a BIG deal to God – the idea of having no gods before Him or making carved images are the *first* two of God’s “Top 10” list of things to do and not do – aka The Ten Commandments.

Let’s start with God’s thoughts about those who *create* idols:

- All who make idols are nothing, and the things they treasure are worthless. (44:9)
- They will be brought down to terror and shame. (44:11)
- All the makers of idols will be put to shame and disgraced; they will go off into disgrace together. (45:16)

Well, that’s not a good start and a good “heads up” to those who are considering a career in idol creation. Let’s move onto the truth of the folly of idols beginning with the fact that they are made by humans. According to Romans 3:23, save for Jesus, all humans have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. By that truth alone, a flawed being is going to create a flawed idol, or god. The next point the LORD makes is the materials that are used to construct the idols were not created by them – they were created by Him. Where’s the power in that? The insanity deepens because verses 15-17 speak to the truth that the *same* materials that are being used to create the idols are being used for fuel for fire to cook food and to warm themselves.

God does not mince His words when providing His assessment of the value of idols. Verse 18 of chapter 44 is pretty clear, “*They know nothing, they understand nothing; their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see, and their minds closed so they cannot understand.*” The psalmist in Psalm 115:4-8 adds to the vapidity of man-made idols, “*They are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; eyes they have, but they do not see; they have ears, but they do not hear; noses they have, but they do not smell; they have hands, but they do not handle; feet they have, but they do not walk; nor do they mutter through their throat. Those who make them are like them; so is everyone who trusts in them.*”

One of the countless things I love about the LORD are His snarky conclusions after making a case of the folly of human stupidity. You can just hear the mocking tone in His voice when He presents His summation to the goofiness of idol worship. From 44:19c, “*Shall I bow down to a block of wood?*” or from verse 17b, “*Save me! You are my god!*” I also love it when the LORD is direct. From verse 10, He bluntly states idolatry profits nothing. He wisely concludes in verse 44:20b: “*a deluded heart misleads him; he cannot save himself, or say, “Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?”*”

In my opinion, the underlying reality behind idol worship is *self-worship* - making oneself his/her own god. People who do this don't want the accountability and responsibility for their own sinful-based desire to live as they please. Therefore, they create something that “allows” them to do what they want. Yet, we must remember God loves these people just as much as He loves you and me. Remember how He describes the idol worshipper in 44:20b? *He/she has a deluded heart that misleads them.* I hope that when you hear these words, you remember not only the first words from Jesus when He was on the cross, but also His heart behind them, “*Father forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing.*”

Another reason I got so fired up about this reading were all the titles the Lord gave Himself. Each of these titles represent one of His character traits. Let's take a gander, shall we?

- LORD (44:2) – as a reminder, when you see the word “LORD” with all capital letters, this is signifying God's personal sacred name in Hebrew, YHWH – or we call it Yahweh. This capitalization shows it's God's unique covenant name, "I AM," revealing His eternal, personal presence.
- King (44:6)
- Redeemer (44:6)
- LORD Almighty (44:6)
- Rock (44:8)
- Maker (44:24)
- God of Israel (45:3)
- Holy One of Israel (45:11)
- Savior of Israel (45:15)

As I looked at this list, I found myself asking, ‘*Do I really believe He is all of these to me?*’ I will tell you that I do *believe* He is all of these titles and the blessings that come from each one. However, I would be lying to you if I told you I *lived* like these are true all the time. I would guess many of you – if you're being honest with yourselves - might come to the same conclusion. Try to imagine life where the power behind each of these titles were manifested – or demonstrated – in the way we lived. As our LORD, He is never out of our presence. As our King, He is the supreme power – nothing is above Him. As our Redeemer, our insecurities – the fruit of ours and the rest of the world's sin natures – are obliterated when we comprehend the length His Son went to in order to earn that title. As our Maker, we become aware that we were fearfully, wonderfully, and lovingly created by Him. He made us for a purpose – we're not some random accident. As our Rock, regardless of the violence and cruelty of the storms of this life, we can stand on Him.

I'll use His title LORD Almighty to be the segue into the next component of our outline – God's power. The references to God's power in our reading are too numerous, and our time does not allow me to get into all of them. Just a few are:

- “For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.” (44:3)
- “I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist.” (44:22)

- “I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things.” (45:7) I know for some of you the thought that God can be behind the creation of disaster will take you to an uncomfortable place regarding your understanding of Him. I’ll admit without an eternal perspective, God being the author of disaster – an initiator of pain and suffering – is a tough thing to comprehend. Yet, in my opinion, this is a clear Biblical truth. For me, to help reconcile this harder-to-understand fact of God’s character, I’ve sought to balance this with His other more desirable and understandable character traits such as His goodness, His love, and His mercy.
- “For this is what the LORD says — he who created the heavens, he is God; he who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it; he did not create it to be empty but formed it to be inhabited — he says: “I am the LORD, and there is no other.” (45:18)

Please forgive me for a moment, as I’m going to briefly interrupt the flow of this lecture. I chose verse 18 as it is one that, I believe, provides a possible explanation to what appears to be two contrasting visions of God as the Creator in the first two verses of Genesis chapter one. Verse one of Genesis 1:1 tells us, “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*” This verse alone likely stretches our imagination of what glorious and vivid power and beauty this must have looked like. But then we get to verse 2 and find a more subdued visual, “*The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep.*” This doesn’t sound so wonderful, does it? Because these two verses of starkly contrasting visuals, many Bible scholars believe that something of great significance happened between the first and second verses.

These scholars say this because of Isaiah 45:18 (and a few other verses). They can’t reconcile why would God claim to not create the earth to be empty but then create what is described in Genesis 1:2. Verse two claims the earth was without form and void. Void is another word for empty. Notably the Hebrew word for void/empty in both Genesis 1:2 and Isaiah 45:18 is the same – it is “*tohu.*” This has led many Bible scholars to come up something called the “Gap Theory.” In its simplest form, the Gap Theory believes that after God performed His initial creative powers – creating something from nothing – in verse 1, something cataclysmic must have happened to cause the contrasting description of creation described in verse 2. The theory behind what this cataclysmic event was, is when Satan rebelled in heaven, he and a third of the angels who were following him were evicted and thrown down to earth. This event is detailed in Revelation 12:7-9, “*And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So, the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.*”

The Gap Theory concludes that because of God’s righteous eviction, from verse two of Genesis through the rest of the first chapter, the acts described are *recreations* or *restorations* of what God originally created in verse 1 but were so badly damaged by Satan’s most unwelcomed arrival. Please remember that this is just a theory, so it doesn’t make much sense to be dogmatic about it. Personally, it makes sense to me because based on what Isaiah lays out in our reading. This puts a question mark – at least in my imagination – of what God created in verse one of Genesis versus what I read in verse two. Again, it’s just a theory – but an interesting one. So concludes my rabbit trail – back to the main points of this lecture.

I’ll wrap up the God’s power portion of this lecture with some phrasing that Isaiah uses several times throughout our reading, “*Apart from me, there is no God.*” Or “*Is there any God besides me?*” There is enormous power in these statements. Many of you may remember the actor, Robert Conrad. He often played a tough guy, and he was in a very popular commercial for Eveready Battery. He put a battery on his shoulder and dared the viewer, “*Go ahead, try to knock this off.*” This is, admittedly crudely, the same attitude God is exhibiting in these statements. He’s, rightfully, boldly proclaiming there is no one

who holds a candle to Him. Good luck to anyone who tries to knock the battery off of God's shoulder! They will likely not get the charge out of it they were hoping for.

We now move into the final segment of this lecture – God the promise keeper. What is the most important component of a successful relationship? I'm not just talking about a marriage relationship – I'm asking about all relationships. I gave this some thought, and I landed on the foundation of any successful relationship is trust. The Christian faith is about a relationship with God made possible through the sacrificial and atoning blood of His only begotten Son. From the believer's perspective, the path to the depth and fullness of blessings of such a relationship is paved with our deepening trust in God's character.

As I thought some more about this concept of trust being foundational in a relationship, I was convicted by my inability and unworthiness to be considered trustworthy to God. The Scriptures plainly prove this – I mentioned earlier that we've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. As much as I don't want to sin and try not to sin, at a minimum, my thoughts do not hold up to God's standard of complete trustworthiness. I only need to be on a crowded road for a few minutes, and my desire for constant holy thoughts disintegrate and turn into unholy fits of frustration and rage over people's idiotic driving. This is where the Gospel of grace inserts itself. God knows we cannot be perfect, so He grants us His grace by faith via His Son's permanent forgiveness, or propitiation, of our sins – before *and after* our confession of faith. I'm so very grateful for the grace of God.

One of the most powerful testimonies to God's trustworthiness is fulfilled prophecy. When God, through His prophets, makes predictions of future events, He is putting on the line His reputation as a Being to be trusted. As each prophecy comes to fruition, He can rightfully make the claim that He made in chapter 45:23, "*my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked.*" Let's take a look at a few of the prophecies noted in our reading.

Isaiah 44:3 proclaims, "*For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.*" Prior to Israel becoming a nation again in 1948, the land of this region had been barren since the nation was destroyed and scattered first by the Romans in A.D. 70 and after the Bar Kokhba revolt in A.D. 135. Upon the first time-in-history resurrection of a country in 1948, God fulfilled the geographic portion of this prophecy by taking this barren land and turned it into a beautiful, lush, and fertile land. Today, Israel is one of the largest exporters of fruits, vegetables, and flowers. As for the portion of verse three that speaks to the pouring out His Spirit on their offspring, that prophecy will be fulfilled after the Great Tribulation when Jesus will fully reconcile the nation of Israel to God.

From Isaiah 44:26a, Isaiah specifically points out God's prophetic trustworthiness, "*Who carries out the words of his servants and fulfills the predictions of his messengers.*" He goes on to prophesy in this same verse regarding Jerusalem, "*It [the towns of Judah] shall be inhabited. They shall be rebuilt, and of their ruins, I will restore them.*" This is a two-staged prophecy – Jerusalem, indeed, was rebuilt after A.D. 70, but it will be badly damaged during the Great Tribulation. Since He has already fulfilled the first stage of the prophecy, we can confidently believe that He will rebuild it again heading into Jesus' millennial reign.

One prophecy that caught my eye was the mentioning of Cyrus. Firstly, the Cyrus Isaiah is mentioning is not going to come on the scene for another 150-200 years from the time of this prophecy. He was a great pagan Persian king of the Medo-Persian empire, and he would lead the conquering of the Babylonian empire. From this victory, he would, unknowingly, become God's instrument to fulfill verse 44:27, "*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.'*" There are more references to Cyrus chapter 45:1-5 and 13. These verses demonstrate that Cyrus was not aware it was God who was giving him the

power and ideas to have Jerusalem rebuilt. Isaiah notes more than once the phrase, “*though you do not acknowledge Me.*”

Why the mentioning of Cyrus caught my eye, was, by his giving the authorization to rebuild Jerusalem, this would lead to the fulfillment of what may be the most important fulfilled prophecy in all of Scripture. From Daniel 9:25-27, we learn of a prophetic timeline for the nation of Israel and the arrival of its Messiah. For the purpose of keeping this lecture within a timeframe to give you the best chance to stay awake, I’m going to summarize this remarkable prophecy. Daniel prophesied that from Cyrus’ order to restore and build Jerusalem until the Messiah arrives, it will take 483 years. While I can later provide you the math on how I got to 483 years, the last day of that period landed on April 6, A.D. 33. This is the date when Jesus rode into Jerusalem riding on a donkey and, for the first time in His 3-year ministry, received the praises and proclamations that He was the Messiah. Jesus even alluded to the truth and accuracy of this fulfilled prophecy when He told the people in Luke 19:42, “*If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace!*” In summary, the fulfillment of so many of Old Testament prophecies – even just through Jesus – should leave us with a level of trust in God’s faithfulness and the integrity of His Word to believe that those remaining unfulfilled prophecies the LORD Almighty will absolutely fulfill.

Before I get to my conclusion, I feel compelled to briefly point out God’s using of the pagan king, Cyrus. When becoming a Christian, we can easily fall into a lifestyle of surrounding ourselves only with fellow believers. To a point, this is a good and wise thing. Iron sharpens iron – we can hold each other accountable. However, by inserting ourselves into “Christian bubbles,” we are putting ceilings on how high God can grow our faiths. If we’re not purposely choosing to put ourselves into the general population, we are likely doing two things:

1. We’re putting up a wall of disobedience to the LORD’s great commission given in Matthew 28, “*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.*” If we’re sealing ourselves off from the non-believing world, we cannot perform what the LORD has clearly commanded.
2. We are missing the opportunity to glean and gain wisdom, creativity, and an understanding of what the non-believing world is struggling with. Having been in the business world now for more than 43 years, I have come across some of the most pagan people you can imagine. However, as we learned through Cyrus, God can and has worked through these non-believers to provide me countless lessons in terms of God’s direction, correction, and self-inspection.

For those of you who might be waking up now, we have covered four themes that we found in this week’s lesson’s reading:

1. God’s Imitators
2. God’s titles
3. God’s power
4. God the promise keeper

Ok – now to my conclusion. Please allow me to start with two wonderful proclamations from our reading:

- Isaiah 45:19: “I, the LORD, speak the truth; I declare what is right.”
- Isaiah 45:22: “Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.”

Put these two verses together, and we get a beautiful insight to the character and heart of God. He speaks the truth and declares what's right. And what's right to Him is that all the ends of the earth will turn to Him and be saved. Just take that statement in and then compare it to all the lies from other faiths and non-believers diminishing and dismissing the God of the Bible.

Now let's take these verses and marry them with Isaiah 45:25, "*But all the descendants of Israel will find deliverance in the LORD and will make their boast in him.*" Throughout Isaiah, we are reading of not only judgments on Israel, but future redemptive and restorative blessings upon them. I would imagine some of you might be wondering what does all this have to do with you and your faith. The word I want to zero in on in verse 25 is "*descendants.*" Let's jump ahead in the Bible to Galatians 3:29 – we read: "*And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*" While there are indeed certain promises God has made to the nation of Israel that are specific to them, this verse proclaims that by our faith in Jesus Christ, we become the heirs to the promises of God in terms of forgiveness, redemption, and eternal reconciliation. The Apostle Paul affirms this in chapter 3, verse 7 of his letter to Titus, "*that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*"

My point in this conclusion is to remind each of you loved ones that God is not only a promise keeper to His chosen ones – the nation of Israel, but *He is also a promise keeper to each of us who have been given an inheritance of His kept promises by our faith in His Son, Jesus.* The Apostle Peter powerfully summarizes this great truth of our inheritance in 1 Peter 1:3-4: "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.*"

My prayer for each of you as you step into the rest of this day and continue in this gift of life that each of us has been given is that you truly understand and believe that everything we are reading and studying in this Bible is the truth. When I first read through this lesson's reading, the first note I made was "the power of God." Jesus, being God's only begotten Son, proclaimed He was the truth in John 14:6. If there is great power in God, then there is also great power in His truth. God is also love according to John's first epistle. Again, if there is great power in God, then there is great power in His love.

We lecturers always hope that each of you take away at least one thing from the reading and/or what we present to you. My hope and prayer for each of you to take away from this lesson's reading is you have, via your faith, residing in each of you as His adopted child the power of God's love and truth. Each of us believers has been given the Holy Spirit – a co-equal member of the triune Godhead. He is the guarantee of our redemption. Ephesians 1:14 assures us of this, "*who [the Holy Spirit] is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.*" I would imagine each of you is struggling with something right now. It might be your health, a relationship, your financial situation, the inevitable consequences of aging, or countless other challenges that we all must face in this sin-drenched world.

Via the indwelling Holy Spirit, each of us has the power of God at our disposal. We have His resurrection, redemptive, forgiving, merciful, gracious, and loving powers to help us at least rise above our circumstances – if not, be it His will, to gain victory over them. Moreover, my challenge is you will, in how you treat those God brings into your life, demonstrate this power with them who are desperately deceived and in need of clear proof that God loves them. We are here today because of His saving grace. How about we tap into that beautiful and awesome power of His grace and start changing this world in how we love them. Remember, God's a promise keeper, and He promises us in 1 Corinthians 13 that love never fails. Let's pray.