

Notes on Isaiah 44:24-45:25

Intro: In Isaiah 40-48 God emphasizes his greatness in contrast to the idols. He proves His greatness by declaring not only what He has done in the past in choosing Israel to be His servant but also what He will do in the future.

First God predicts the captivity of the Israelites to Babylon! 606 b.c.

Second God predicts the judgment of the Babylonians by military conquest at the hands of a Servant that God will raise.

Isaiah mentions him first in 41:2-4. Then later in 41:25. Now in chapter 44:28 God calls the instrument of His wrath by name. That Cyrus was a historical figure is indisputable. Two significant archaeological finds confirm that: The Cyrus Cylinder and Cyrus' tomb. Plus the Cyrus' fame and military conquests were told by various ancient historians like the Greek historian, Herodotus, who is sometimes called the father of history and who lived a few decades after Cyrus.

Isaiah predicts first Cyrus' military conquests of the ancient world: 45:1-4

In the Cyrus cylinder Cyrus claims to be the son of Cambyses, king of Anshan and grandson of the Cyrus I, king of Anshan. He refers to himself as "king of the world, great king, legitimate king, king of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akad, king of the four rims (of the earth).

Herodotus tells an interesting story that circulated about Cyrus' birth and boyhood. Whether it is factual is not certain; but you may find it fascinating. Cyrus' father, Cambyses was a Persian vassal of the Median king, Astyages. Astyages gave his daughter Mandane to Cambyses and to this union was born Cyrus. However, Astyages had a bad dream about Cyrus and ordered that he be put to death. The official entrusted to this task, Harpagus, instead gave Cyrus to a shepherd family to raise for several years. Astyages was to later find out that Cyrus was alive and wanted once again to kill him but was persuaded by his counselors to let him live. Ironically, the dream of Astyages came true; for some years later Cyrus rebelled against Astyages, capturing him in battle and made himself master of both the Medes and the Persians (550 b.c.). Hence the beginning of the Medo-Persian empire. (Note that in Daniel the kingdom is referred to in this manner, Dan. 5:28; 6:8, 15) If this story is true, it is interesting to notice how God described Cyrus in 44:28: "my shepherd". The significance, of course, is that God had entrusted Cyrus with His sheep, the Israelites!

Cyrus' conquest of the Medes also gave him their territorial rule over Assyria, Mesopotamia, Syria, Armenia, and Cappadocia. To the west lay the powerful empire of the fabulously wealthy Croesus of Lydia (the capital city, Sardis). In May of 547 b.c. Cyrus marched to Lydia acquiring the vast wealth of Lydia for himself. Again it is interesting to note the correspondence to the Biblical prophecy: Is. 45:3.

Cyrus then turned his attention to countries to the east, making Parthia a part of his kingdom and parts of India. Finally he was to turn his attention to the powerful empire of Babylonia.

At the time the government of Babylon and its empire was in the hands of Belshazzar. His father Nabonidus was still alive but had fled the city. This is significant when we read Daniel 5:29. Now we know why Daniel was made "third ruler" in the city! However, Belshazzar's proposal meant little to Daniel for God had revealed to him that that very night Belshazzar's kingdom was to be judged by none less than the Medes and Persians (v. 28). That very night, October 13, 539 b.c. one of Cyrus' generals entered the city and took control, killing the wicked Belshazzar, just as Daniel had foretold.

Herodotus tells the interesting story of how the city was captured: The Persian army made its way into the walled city by drying up the Euphrates to a depth of a few feet and entered the city unhindered while Belshazzar and his forces celebrated. It is interesting again to notice that Cyrus is the designated conqueror of Babylon. Isaiah predicted this over 150 years before it occurred!

In all this Cyrus was living out God's prophecy, though he knew nothing of the God of Israel (Is. 45:4). Cyrus was actually a polytheist. In the Cyrus Cylinder, which was found in the rubble of Babylon, Cyrus says that his rule "Bel and Nebo love, whom they want as king to please their hearts".

Upon gaining control of Babylon, Cyrus in his ascension year as king of Babylon (538 b.c.) ordered the repatriation of the various peoples of the empire that had been transported from their homeland and also the restoration of the gods to their various temples with a request that they pray for him.

Is it possible that Cyrus' policy of repatriation was prompted by the prophecy of Isaiah 44:28? Josephus in "Antiquities" writes that Cyrus came to know his destiny with respect to the Jewish people "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". Of course, Josephus was a Jewish historian who wrote long after these events. But it is certainly possible.

But how could he know? Would there be a Jew knowledgeable of God's prophecies who might have had access to Cyrus? Dan. 1:21; 6:28; 10:1.

And so Ezra 1:1 records the historical fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies of Cyrus.

