

Turn to Me and Be Saved

Lesson Text: Isaiah 45:18–24a **Background Scripture:** Isaiah 45 **Devotional Reading:** Deuteronomy 4:29; John 4:23

Isaiah 45:18–24a

¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ I have not spoken in secret, from somewhere in a land of darkness; I have not said to Jacob’s descendants, ‘Seek me in vain.’ I, the Lord, speak the truth; I declare what is right. ²⁰ “Gather together and come; assemble, you fugitives from the nations. Ignorant are those who carry about idols of wood, who pray to gods that cannot save. ²¹ Declare what is to be, present it—let them take counsel together. Who foretold this long ago, who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, the Lord? And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me. ²² “Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. ²³ By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. ²⁴ They will say of me, ‘In the Lord alone are deliverance and strength.’”

LESSON AIMS After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. Tell how Isaiah describes the one true God.
2. Explain why it is important for people in idolatrous eras—both ancient and modern—to believe in God.
3. To show how God’s very best for us in the future begins with our coming to Him.

INTRODUCTION

In many nations of the world, religious pluralism is on the rise. That is certainly the case in North America. Consequently, public religious events are often required to have many faiths represented.

To suggest that there is one God and that Christ alone is Savior is seen as narrow-minded and bigoted. Failure to be tolerant of opposing views will simply not be tolerated by those who demand tolerance!

As Bible-believing Christians, however, we must stand firm on the truths of God's Word. There is but one way to heaven, and that is through the Lord Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). This does not mean that we should be obnoxious or disrespectful toward people who believe otherwise, but we must not yield to the viewpoint that all religions are created equal.

Isaiah also lived in a world where religious pluralism was widespread. Each nation had its own gods, and Israel had succumbed to the lure of idolatry. They had not ceased to believe in the Lord, but they had begun to worship other gods too.

The Israelites deserved to be punished. Thus, God allowed Babylon to sack Jerusalem and exile many people. But in the process the Babylonians and others went too far and dragged the name of Israel and Israel’s God through the mud. Those whose wickedness exceeded that of Israel appeared to thrive.

So, Israel awaited vindication. The people longed for God to restore them and give the nations the judgment they deserved. In today’s passage, Isaiah anticipates this very restoration. Our confidence today is in the God who vows to vindicate the name of Jesus and His people.

LESSON BACKGROUND Time: about 700 -695 B.C. **Place:** Jerusalem

The sections of the book of Isaiah appear to address different time periods. Chapters 1–39 clearly discuss events that took place during Isaiah’s lifetime in the eighth century BC. God spoke through Isaiah in this section to warn the Israelites that if they did not repent of their sin then God would use foreign nations to punish them.

Chapters 40–66, however, assume that foreign nations already have come and punished Israel. The concern of this section is to comfort a nation that has been beaten down. This section reassured the Israelites that God had not abandoned them. He planned to restore them and use them as His vehicle of blessing to the nations. In short, God’s purpose for Israel would not fail.

Babylon's sack of Jerusalem in 586 BC (compare 2 Kings 25) was an event that was jarring beyond description. The temple was destroyed and the kingship was lost, with both commoners and prominent leaders taken into exile. In short, Israel's world was turned upside down, and the people were driven to desperation. For this reason, God commissioned the prophet Isaiah in anticipation of the time when the punishment for their sins would be complete (Isaiah 40:1,2).

This comfort takes several forms over the chapters leading up to today's passage: Israel is told that God is coming to save her (Isaiah 40:9–11); God is sovereign over the nations (40:15–24); Israel is God's chosen servant (41:8–10); God is uniquely divine (44:6–8); the idols of the nations are nothing (44:9–20); Jerusalem has a bright future (44:24–28); and God will use the Persian ruler Cyrus as His tool to release the Jews from exile and rebuild Jerusalem (45:1–13). Today's passage follows immediately after this statement of Cyrus's commission.

FORMATION OF THE WORLD (Isaiah 45:18,19)

In spite of the coming Babylonian captivity, and the subsequent return of Jews under the beneficent hand of Cyrus, there would still come an "everlasting salvation" (Isaiah 45:17) to the Jews from the Messiah who would arise from among them.

No, the Israelites were not the most powerful nation. They may, in fact, be the nation that suffers the most abuse, ridicule, and shame. But Israel is God's people chosen to usher in the Messiah. Though they walk with heads bowed into Babylonian exile, they will march out with heads held high (Psalm 126). God is their salvation and will vindicate them.

However, as already alluded to, it was their failure to serve the true God that got them into the dilemma they were now facing.

While it was certainly basic, Israel needed to be reminded that the Lord was their Creator (Isaiah 45:18). Israel's future is not to be grounded in self-achievement, but in divine promise. The God who "created the heavens" and "earth" is the guarantor. God has an impeccable, unmatched track record of accomplishments. He created the world with a purpose that will not fail. He formed it deliberately in order to fill it with vegetation, animals, and thriving civilizations. Though human sin introduced chaos into God's good creation, God has willed to bring order to this chaos through His people Israel. His will for Israel is to be done.

Since the God of Israel was the original Creator, the people of Isaiah's day also needed to be reminded that He was "*the Lord; and there is no other*" (v. 18). Similarly, Christians need to be reminded that, amid the religious pluralism so prevalent today, there is but one true God (1 Cor. 8:5,6; Eph. 4:4-6).

1. For what purpose did God save Israel (Isaiah 45:17)? Why did He mention the creation of the world (v. 18)?

For those who might have accused God of being elusive (v. 15), the Lord made it clear that He had not spoken in secret. When He speaks to His people He does so with unmistakable clarity. God spoke forthrightly to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, setting them apart as witnesses to His purposes in world history. Yet God is also clear that should the offspring of these men forsake God's ways, then He will punish them by sending them into exile (Deuteronomy 28:15–68). So it is not because of the power of Assyria and Babylon that Israel finds herself beaten, bruised, and exiled.

God means it when He promises the Israelites that He will bless both them and all nations through them (Genesis 12:1–3; Exodus 19:5,6). What He declares is true and right and will come to pass without fail. Israel does not follow God in vain. Though God appears to leave them behind, they must remember His prior promise to restore them (Deuteronomy 30:1–10).

2. How has God "spoken" to Israel (v. 19)?

FUTILITY OF IDOLATRY (Isaiah 45:20,21)

In verse 20, God summons refugees from scattered Israel as His witnesses. The Babylonians take many Israelites to Babylon, but the Israelites actually are scattered in multiple directions. Some are dispersed throughout the nations by the Assyrians (compare 2 Kings 17:6); others flee to Egypt (25:26).

God further reminds His people that these nations to which they are scattered are fountains of misinformation. God reminds them of this because the Israelites are and will be tempted to believe the lies of these nations. It may appear that

the foreigners who claim that Israel's God is powerless to save them are correct (Isaiah 36:18–20). But the foreigners are duped into thinking that false gods are not only real but more powerful than Israel's God.

As God said through Isaiah, to worship an idol was to pray to a god with no power to save. As for those who bow before various false gods throughout the world today, they face the same dilemma. Like those of Isaiah's day, they believe that these gods are real. In the end, however, they will realize *"they were not gods, but only wood and stone, fashioned by human hands"* (37:19).

"Superstitious persons know that idols need the aid and assistance of men, instead of men needing the assistance of idols, which cannot even be made to stand upright without the agency of men. ... for what can be more foolish than to address vows and prayers to wood and stone? and yet infidels run about to dead statues, for the purpose of seeking salvation from them" (Calvin).

3. Who are those who have "escaped of the nations" (v. 20)?

As if in a courtroom, God challenged the false gods to present their case. If these idols (or their prophets) needed to "take counsel together" as a group of defense attorneys might do, so be it. Of course, God knew that these idols could not consult with each other, as they did not actually exist except in the minds of their devotees. If false prophets consulted with one another, it would be as futile as it was on Mount Carmel (cf. 1 Kings 18:16-40).

In contrast to the false gods, which were powerless to do anything, the Lord could foresee from ancient times things that had yet to come to pass. Once they occurred, however, they would affirm the veracity of His word. *"I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning from the ancient times, what is still to come."* (Isa. 46:9,10). "Jehovah alone knows the future and He has demonstrated it from the beginning of time by predicting events great and small in minute detail, thousands of years before their fulfillment. Much of this was prior to Isaiah's time! There was plenty of evidence even in Isaiah's day that Jehovah's word always came to pass" (Butler, Isaiah, Vol. III, College Press).

Because God could faithfully and accurately foretell the future, He could then declare, *"There is no God apart from beside me"* (Isa. 45:21).

Besides being omniscient, the Lord is just, righteous, and the only source of eternal salvation. As Yahweh was the only hope for Israel, so Christ is the only hope for today's world. *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."* (Acts 4:12). That being so, we must faithfully proclaim this message to the ends of the earth (Mark 16:15).

4. Who was God challenging to "take counsel together" (v. 21)?

GOOD OFFERS SALVATION / FUTURE REDEMPTION (Isaiah 45:22-24a)

God has made His case and has offered irrefutable evidence. Now it is time for a response. In this light, He invites "the ends of the earth" to look to Him for salvation.

Although Israel had a unique relationship with the Lord under the old covenant, redemption has now been extended to the ends of the earth through the gospel. Salvation was offered first to the Jews, but once most of them rejected it, it was offered to the Gentiles (Acts 13:44-48; Rom. 1:16). As Isaiah 42:6 tells us, Israel was to be *"a light [to] the Gentiles."*

We can affirm that the one true God is the source of salvation for the entire world. Furthermore, God does not seek to save Israel from its captivity only for Israel's sake. Rather, He rescues Israel so He may continue His mission to use Israel as His vehicle of blessing to the entire world. As Christians, we affirm that people everywhere must turn to God's Son alone for salvation.

5. How does salvation come to "the ends of the earth" (v. 22)? Does this mean that everyone will be saved?

That God wants all nations to come to Him for salvation is evident from the invitation given in verse 22. To undergird this great invitation, the Lord made a solemn oath, swearing by Himself. *"Since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself"* (Heb. 6:13).

Like all of God's promises, the message of salvation will be taken to the ends of the earth. This part of Isaiah will culminate in the promise of the suffering Servant, whose sacrifice is detailed in Isaiah 53.

While Isaiah may have wondered whether his efforts at preaching God's word were futile (cf. Isa. 6:9-12), he was promised that the message would not return void but would accomplish God's purposes (55:11). Modern believers face the same predicament. We often wonder whether our sermons, lessons, and witnessing efforts are falling on deaf ears. Whether people listen should not be our primary concern, however. We have been commanded to go to all nations (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15). The results are in God's hands, not ours (Acts 16:14; 1 Cor. 3:6).

6. Why would God swear by Himself (v. 23)?

In the end, all nations will bow before the Lord and acknowledge Him as the true God. Both the idolaters of Isaiah's day and the skeptics we encounter today will ultimately bow the knee to the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:10). For those who have received Him, this will be a willing confession. For those who have rejected Him, this confession will not result in their salvation but seal their damnation!

7. When will every knee bow and every tongue confess? How is this text used in the New Testament?

Indeed, in the Lord alone is our "*righteousness and strength*" (Isa. 45:24). "As these are the two principal parts of our salvation, when believers acknowledge that they receive both of them from God, they ascribe to him the undivided praise of a happy life, and testify that by nature they do not possess that which they acknowledge that they owe to his grace" (Calvin).

8. What happens when a believer acknowledges that the Lord is their righteousness and strength (v. 24a)?

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. A person must believe in the God of the Bible, or he has no real god at all (Isaiah 45:18).
2. God speaks openly and truthfully in His Word, unlike the prophets of the false gods of Isaiah's day (v. 19).
3. God alone is able to foretell the future. The wise man will examine the clear evidence and believe (vs. 20,21).
4. Salvation is available to all who will turn to God, admitting that He alone is worthy of their worship (v. 22).
5. All men will someday bow before God, but for many it will be too late (vs. 23,24).

CONCLUSION

The Vindication of Christ

Christians continue to suffer under oppression they've done nothing to deserve. May we learn this lesson from Israel's history: as long as we fix our hope on the only one who is able to save, we will be vindicated. May we remember our Savior Jesus, who also appeared to have been forsaken by God (Matthew 27:46). He suffered a cruel death and had His name dragged through the mud of crucifixion with criminals. But God raised Him from the dead and seated Him at the right hand of the Father. There Jesus awaits the day when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that He is Lord (Philippians 2:5-11).

PRAYER

Lord God, You alone are powerful to save. You have proven yourself time and again in Scripture, in world history, and in our lives. Keep our heads turned straight toward You, in whom alone we have hope, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

God and only God saves.