

ISAIAH 48: FORMER AND NEW THINGS

OUTLINE OF ISAIAH 48

- I. God's glory in the former things (48:1-6a)
- II. God's glory in the new things (48:6b-11)
- III. God's purpose through Cyrus (48:12-15)
- IV. God's deliverance from Babylon (48:16-22)

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

How does consideration of the things God has done in the past influence your present life?

Do you believe that God's supreme interest is his own glory? What would the church look like if it believed that?

How does your obedience affect your enjoyment of God's (good) promises?

SOURCES CITED

- J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC, 1999.
John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, NICOT, 1998.
Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, New American Commentary, 2009.

vv17-22 “The thought of peace enfolds these verses, the peace that might have been (17-19) and the peace that cannot be (22). In between there is the great exit from Babylon (20) and the exodus-like journey home (21). The political solution—the people home from Babylon—does not recover the *peace* that might have been. It was the sin of disobedience (18) that forfeited peace, and until wickedness has been dealt with peace must remain unrealized” (Motyer 1999: 344).

vv18-19 “Obedience promises, first, *peace*, all-round well-being—Godward, manward, selfward (9:6; 26:3, 12; 32:17)—and that peace is as a constant, full reality, a *river* (66:12), not a seasonal stream; and, secondly, *righteousness*, here a life conformed to what is right before God” (Motyer 1999: 344-45).

v20 “The first two imperatives (“go out,” “flee”) involve not just a hope of a life outside of Babylonian hegemony but a rejection of their worldview as described in chaps. 47-48. They must reject and leave behind Babylon's arrogant theological claims that she controlled the world and begin again to trust in God” (Smith 331-32).

“God had promised that those who would listen to his admonitions would have peace like a river (48:18), and he had declared that he would free his people from Babylon, but those promises should offer no comfort at all to those who showed by their wickedness that they had no intention of committing their way to God” (Oswalt 1998: 284).

“To return home from Babylon, then, is not to come home to God: *there is no peace for the wicked*. A change of address is not a change of heart. Great as was the deliverance from political captivity, peace with God, deliverance from sin, is another matter altogether and has yet to be accomplished. But this too is announced here in principle. Verses 3-6b and 6c-7 deal respectively with *former things* and *new things*; in the broadly parallel sections of chapter 48 (1-11, 12-22) the matching verses supply the interpretation: the *former things* are the Cyrus plan (14-15), and the *new things* begin with the advent of the Servant (16). In faithfulness the Lord has kept the Cyrus promises, but he has yet more in store for his people” (Motyer 1999: 338-39).

NOTES

“To be sure, the appeal in chs. 40–47 has moved a step farther. In the earlier chapters [1–39] it was: if you will not trust God, destruction will come on you. Now it has become: trust God because he has unconditionally pardoned you and will break the power of those who hold you. In the same way the proofs have advanced. There it was the inability of any other agency, particularly human nations, to help Israel. Here it is the Lord’s ability as creator to master history, especially as demonstrated in predictive prophecy. But the issue is the same, says Isaiah. Will humans respond in trust? God’s trustworthiness has been demonstrated (chs. 7–39), his grace has been offered (chs. 40–48), but it is all for naught unless humans will act on it” (Oswalt 1998: 259).

v1 “God has never been greatly impressed with good actors who can play their part, repeat all the right lines, or pretend that they know and deeply love him. His truth will unmask the fraud in every person’s life” (Smith 2009: 317).

vv4-5 “He did it because of the fallen human nature. If some wonderful thing were to occur in our lives, whom would we tend to thank? God, the transcendent creator? No, *my idol ... my handcrafted image!* Why? Because the human spirit is not a blank page, equally ready to be inscribed with good or evil. It is, according to Isaiah and all the rest of the Bible, already blotted with a well-nigh incurable insistence on our own way at all costs” (Oswalt 1998: 262).

v6 “J. L. Koole...says, ‘The totally ‘new’ element will have to be sought in the full salvation (also that of Israel’s return) which is made possible by the vicarious work of the Servant of Yahweh.’ This is based on the “new things” used in the context of the Servant of the Lord in 42:9, the interpretation of 48:16 as a reference to the Servant of the Lord, and the new things said about the Servant’s ministry in the very next chapter (49:1–13)” (Smith 2009: 320).

v7 “An important point here is the insight that this verse gives as to the purpose of predictive prophecy. It is given not so we can know the future, but as confirmatory evidence that we can and should trust God. To use it for the purpose of knowing the future and thus making ourselves secure is only another form of idolatry” (Oswalt 1998: 268). Do you agree?

vv9-11 “Silver endures the crucible until all dross is gone. Were the Lord to deal with his people just like that, nothing would remain (1:22). Therefore, though he brings his people through trials, there is always a limit set: they are never treated as they deserve” (Motyer 1999: 341-42).

v15 “God is declaring to the disbelieving people of Israel in the strongest terms that the career of Cyrus will be wholly and only as a result of the hand of God at work in human history. It is neither accident nor the work of some idol-god.... Just as Isaiah had asserted that Assyria’s coming was an expression of God’s sovereign plan to punish Israel and Judah (10:6), so he insists that Cyrus’s conquests are for the purpose of delivering the people of God” (Oswalt 1998: 277).

v16 “The only Spirit-endowed person in these chapters is the Servant (42:1), and in the immediate context the divine designation ‘Lord Yahweh’ occurs in the third Servant Song as endowing (50:4), directing (50:5) and helping (50:7) the Servant. In addition, when the Servant reappears in chapters 56–66 as the Conqueror, 61:1 opens with *the Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me*. We can hardly question, then, that the present verse is an interjection by the Servant of the Lord as the Agent of the ‘new things’ announced in the matching verses 3–6b. The balance of the passages is a striking illustration of the way structure aids interpretation: former things (3–6b), new things (6c–7); Cyrus (14–15), the Servant (16). While the interjection does, of course, take us by surprise, it is far from inappropriate that the Servant should step from the shadows like this.... As the one actor leaves the stage, the other quietly reveals his presence” (Motyer 1999: 343-44).