

The Millennium Forecast

The Book of Isaiah

Text

Isaiah 48:1-22

Topic

The LORD makes the astonishing reveal that He loves King Cyrus of Persia who will set Israel free to return to & rebuild Jerusalem

Title

“Rebel, Rebel, How Could You Know? Cyrus, I Love Him So.”

“What if...?”

It's a question film makers like to explore. It is fiction based on alternative history exploring what might have happened if certain historical events or figures had been different. President John F. Kennedy surviving assassination is a popular topic in alternative history. Ditto the Nazis winning WW2. I asked bing for a list of live action shows that are based on an alternative history. *The list was at 65 and still growing.*

By far the most spectacular “What if...?” in human history was what Jesus proposed.

Called *The Lament of Jesus*, the Lord looked out over Jerusalem and is quoted by Matthew saying, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing!” (23:37).

There is a lament of that very sort in our text: "Oh, that you had heeded My commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, And your righteousness like the waves of the sea" (v18).

The LORD's intentions to bless them were undermined by their willful disobedience. They were rebels who would endure the 'alternative' history of captivity in Babylon. I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 Jesus Is Merciful To Anticipate Your Disobedience**, and **#2 Jesus Is Gracious To Accelerate Your Obedience**.

#1 - Jesus Is Merciful To Anticipate Your Disobedience (v1-11)

The Book of Isaiah, and the entire Bible, places the ethnic descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob center stage. The apostle Paul told us why when he wrote the letter to the Romans. "They are... God's chosen people. God showed them His glory. He made agreements with them and gave them His Law. The Temple is theirs and so are the promises that God made to them. They have those famous ancestors, who were also the ancestors of Jesus Christ" (9:4-5 CEV).

God calls Israel "the apple of His eye" (Zephaniah 2:8). Like it or not, Israel has been, is today, and always will be, the most significant nation on earth.

Despite her constant failures, God would not ever "cut [Israel] off." When necessary He would "test" them - discipline them - "in the furnace of affliction." If you have the KJV, it says, "I have **chosen** thee in the furnace of affliction." History certainly reveals that they are God's "chosen," but afflicted, nation.

The modern nation of Israel is the fulfillment of many prophecies. From 1948 forward they have been "tested." They are currently being tested. Not just by the war against Hamas, but by the majority of nations and their open antisemitism.

Israel will face its greatest testing when they are the main actor in the future 7yr 'Time of Jacob's Trouble.'

Isa 48:1 "Hear this, O house of Jacob, Who are called by the name of Israel, And have come forth from the wellsprings of Judah; Who swear by the name of the LORD, And make mention of the God of Israel, *But* not in truth or in righteousness;
Isa 48:2 For they call themselves after the holy city, And lean on the God of Israel; The LORD of hosts *is* His name:

As always the LORD looks within, to the heart:

- “Not in truth” means *deceived*. They were self-deceived into thinking that God would never allow His city and His Temple to fall. It had been standing almost 500 years. They would shortly discover that the Temple and the city were secondary to repairing His relationship with them.
- “Not in... righteousness” means they were trusting in their outward show of religious practices, in self-righteousness based on works.

Self-deceived & self-righteous are the characteristics of every person who has not believed God.

Isa 48:3 “I have declared the former things from the beginning; They went forth from My mouth, and I caused them to hear it. Suddenly I did *them*, and they came to pass.

Isa 48:4 Because I knew that you *were* obstinate, And your neck *was* an iron sinew, And your brow bronze,

Isa 48:5 Even from the beginning I have declared *it* to you; Before it came to pass I proclaimed *it* to you, Lest you should say, ‘My idol has done them, And my carved image and my molded image Have commanded them.’

It would be about a century before the rise of Babylon to the status of a world power. The LORD predicted it. We saw previously that He also predicted the fall of Babylon, mentioning by name a yet unborn king, Cyrus of Persia, as its conqueror.

Believers & unbelievers ought to look around and be stunned by the current trends that God predicted in the first century.

Isa 48:6 “You have heard; See all this. And will you not declare *it*? I have made you hear new things from this time, Even hidden things, and you did not know them.

Isa 48:7 They are created now and not from the beginning; And before this day you have not heard them, Lest you should say, ‘Of course I knew them.’

“Created now” means *done now*. The LORD was revealing something to them that was new and could not be found in any previous revelations.

Isa 48:8 Surely you did not hear, Surely you did not know; Surely from long ago your ear was not opened. For I knew that you would deal very treacherously, And were called a transgressor from the womb.

The LORD was talking directly to the future Jews. His predictive prophecies about Babylon & Cyrus could only be explained by the fact that He is the one, true God Who knows and controls the future.

The second sentence in verse eight can read:

- "From before birth you were called a rebel" (ESV).
- "From the moment of your birth, I knew you would rebel" (CEV).
- "Your heart was turned against me from your earliest days" (BBE).

Which was it - before birth, at the moment of birth, or from earliest days? We are sinners from womb to tomb. We call this The Doctrine of Original Sin. The good folks at gotquestions.org write,

The term original sin refers to Adam's sin of disobedience in eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil and its effects upon the rest of the human race. Original sin can be defined as "the moral corruption we possess as a consequence of Adam's sin, resulting in a sinful disposition manifesting itself in habitually sinful behavior." [We have] no ability to overcome sin apart from the [grace] of the Holy Spirit.

How does God the Holy Spirit apply grace to save us? He must either *force* you to believe, or *free* you to believe:

- In the forced case, God's grace is **irresistible** - meaning God causes you to have faith and be born again *before* you believe. Regeneration, they say, comes *before* you can exercise faith.
- In the freed-will case, God's grace is **resistible** - meaning you receive Jesus by faith and are then born-again.

There are two things that seem irrefutable to us:

1. For one, there are passages that bluntly say God's grace is resistible (e.g., Acts 7:51).
2. For two, the Bible always puts faith (believing) before regeneration (e.g., Acts 16:31).

Isa 48:9 "For My name's sake I will defer My anger, And *for* My praise I will restrain it from you, So that I do not cut you off.

Isa 48:10 Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.

Isa 48:11 For My own sake, for My own sake, I will do it; For how should My name be profaned? And I will not give My glory to another.

"For My name's sake," "For My own sake, For My own sake," for "My glory." He's not a glory-hound. His glory revealed is evangelical. He wishes to save the lost and perishing.

The LORD "restrained" Himself in the sense of not giving them what they deserved, which was to be permanently "cut off." That is mercy. Instead He "refined" them in "affliction."

This isn't the kind of refining God allows in order to purify. This is direct discipline for disobedience.

"For I knew that you would deal very treacherously." How did God know? That may seem obvious. After all, *He is God*. He must therefore have a perfect foreknowledge of the future. But does His foreknowledge of events foreordain that they **must** occur? Or is there room for us to act freely? These questions are usually worded, "Is God Sovereign, and/or Do we have free will?" Let's go to the extremes:

1. On the extreme sovereignty bandwagon are those who say, "If there is one single maverick molecule in this universe running around loose, totally free of God's sovereignty, then we have no guarantee that a single promise of God will ever be fulfilled." Before you embrace this, understand that you will be adopting a meticulous determinism by which God becomes the author of sin, responsible for every evil that happens, and that somehow it glorifies Him.
2. Beating the extreme drum for free-will are Open Theists. Because God loves us and desires that we freely choose to reciprocate His love, He has made His knowledge of, and plans for, the future conditional upon our actions. Though omniscient, *God does not know what we will freely do in the future*.

We are not 'extremists.' *Of course God is sovereign!* His sovereignty is so great that He can allow mankind to exercise genuine free will, compensating for it when necessary through His providence.

Isn't it obvious that Israel could have chosen otherwise? *Of course it is!* In fact, it says as much in v17-19. It is simultaneously true that the LORD always acts to keep the plan of redemption on track.

If you find you are changing the plain sense of the Bible so that it 'fits' into your system, you are subordinating Scripture to your own wisdom.

Jesus is merciful to anticipate your disobedience.

Jesus anticipated the apostle Peter's disobedience. He warned Peter that he was being targeted by Satan. The devil wanted permission to sift him as wheat. Peter would, in fact, deny the Lord. But Jesus had prayed for Peter and would restore him.

This is mercy. God tells us that His mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3). Why the morning? Because God anticipates our daily disobedience. He greets us with His mercies so we can get out of bed and walk with Him.

#2 - Jesus Is Gracious To Accelerate Your Obedience (v12-22)

John Newton was no one-hit wonder. The slave-trader turned clergyman said, "*I am not what I ought to be. I am not what I want to be. I am not what I hope to be. But still, I am not what I used to be. And by the grace of God, I am what I am.*" Mercy clears the deck for Jesus to engulf you in His grace.

Isa 48:12 "Listen to Me, O Jacob, And Israel, My called: *I am* He, *I am* the First, *I am* also the Last.

Isa 48:13 Indeed My hand has laid the foundation of the earth, And My right hand has stretched out the heavens; *When* I call to them, They stand up together.

The Person in these two verses is the Creator of heaven and earth. "First" and "last" mean He was not part of creation. He was not Himself a created being. He was "first" and "last," alpha and omega, beginning and end. His name is Jesus!

Isa 48:14 "All of you, assemble yourselves, and hear! Who among them has declared these *things*? The LORD loves him; He shall do His pleasure on Babylon, And His arm *shall be against* the Chaldeans.

Isa 48:15 I, even I, have spoken; Yes, I have called him, I have brought him, and his way will prosper.

This is another person. The LORD "called him... brought him...[and] will prosper [him.]" He will strong arm the "Chaldeans" and conquer "Babylon." We know him from earlier in Isaiah, and from history. It's Cyrus the Great, *who was not yet born*.

Notice the phrase, "the LORD loves him." He was a loved unbeliever. God really isn't willing that any should perish. He really does "so love the world."

The LORD announces this to an assembly of His chosen. Undoubtedly you opened a gift that had some assembly required. The manufacturers definition of "some" is what frustrates me. Just put on the box, "Major assembly required by sophisticated single-purpose tools you wish you had in your man-cave."

Our God is great at assembling. I've been fascinated by the insight that any time we get together we are a unique 'assembling' of God's. When we arrive, who we see and greet, where we sit, what we hear and say... It will never be the same.

We come as living stones to be built as the Lord's Temple. Think legos. You can build a variety of things depending on the blocks you're given. Same with us. What does the Holy Spirit want to build? Depends on who assembles. Overcomers, Assemble!

Isa 48:16 "Come near to Me, hear this: I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; From the time that it was, I was there. And now the Lord GOD and His Spirit Have sent Me."

Wait; is this a clear, undeniable reference to God as Trinity?? Jesus "was [always] there," meaning for eternity. He was there with "the Lord GOD and His Spirit." Father... Son... Spirit.

The Father & the Spirit "sent" Jesus to earth in the incarnation. **It's Christmas in Isaiah 48!**

Isa 48:17 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, The Holy One of Israel: "I am the LORD your God, Who teaches you to profit, Who leads you by the way you should go.

God's direction in your life is custom designed with the intent that you will "profit" if you follow His lead.

Isa 48:18 Oh, that you had heeded My commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, And your righteousness like the waves of the sea.

Isa 48:19 Your descendants also would have been like the sand, And the offspring of your body like the grains of sand; His name would not have been cut off Nor destroyed from before Me."

God's original plan for Israel after they exodused from Egypt was for them to conquer the Promised Land in a matter of days, not decades.

Had they "heeded [His] commandments" the promises of verse 18 & 19 would have been immediate. Instead the nations of the world are still waiting for the kingdoms of this world to become the kingdoms of the Lord, and for Israel to take her proper place.

Wait a minute. How would that have worked out? Don't know. *But God said it would have.*

God's wisdom is greater, higher than ours let's not bring Him down to our level for the sake of thinking we've figured out everything.

Isa 48:20 Go forth from Babylon! Flee from the Chaldeans! With a voice of singing, Declare, proclaim this, Utter it to the end of the earth; Say, "The LORD has redeemed His servant Jacob!"

The remnant ought to think of it as a new Exodus. It was occasion for singing and shouting praises.

Sadly, many had grown comfy in Babylon and stayed put. Fear had kept them from the Promised Land after Egypt. Prosperity did after Babylon.

Isa 48:21 And they did not thirst When He led them through the deserts; He caused the waters to flow from the rock for them; He also split the rock, and the waters gushed out.

If you were the richest man in the world, it would be like having a counterfeit penny compared to the torrent of God the Holy Spirit living within you.

It's good to recall God's previous spiritual blessings. Can't think of any because you're suffering too much? Too many tears? Post a Job meme up with the caption, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him... He also *shall* be my salvation" (13:15-16).

Isa 48:22 *"There is no peace," says the LORD, "for the wicked."*

Albert Barnes wrote, *"Many of their countrymen [would choose] to remain in Babylon. They had formed connections there, amassed wealth, and refused to attend those who returned to Judea to rebuild the Temple."*

Staying in Babylon would be comfy, *but they would not experience God's peace.*

We are born knowing that rock blunts scissors, scissors cuts paper, and paper covers rock.

Peace blunts, cuts, and covers comfort. Peace comes from God; comfort is worldly. Alexander Whyte said, "You do not really care for God's mercy or His [peace] either, so long as you live in any sin. And it is well that you do not; for you can have neither. Your peace will be like a river, when you put away your sin; but not one word of true peace... can you have till then."

Ever drive a Tesla? Then you know what acceleration is. (You might find out what a lithium fire is, too). But man, it is 0-60 in lickety-split.

Walk with the Lord and His living water will become a torrent accelerating your growth.