

ISAIAH

ISAIAH 44:28-45:1, KING CYRUS; GOD'S ANOINTED, PART 1

At this point, Isaiah reveals the prophecy that Cyrus, King of the Medes and Persians was going to be the person who would free the Israelites from Babylonian captivity and not only allow them to return to Jerusalem and Israel, but assist them in that effort. One thing we will see in the midst of this truth is that God can and will use unbelieving pagans to further His plan for history when it suits His purposes to do so. We are also going to see that this King's actions are a type of the actions of Messiah when He returns at the end of the Tribulation to save all Israel and inaugurate the Messianic Kingdom. We can't ignore the typological aspects of what was happening between ancient Babylon and Israel in the past as those things relate to the future Babylonian world system and how it will relate to Israel in the future. As we have seen over and over again, Isaiah moves back and forth between these two ideas suddenly and frequently.

Through the prophet Isaiah, God announces that Cyrus will be His anointed one to restore the Jews to their native land at which time Jerusalem and the Temple will be rebuilt. We need to remember that the events Isaiah predicted were nearly 200 years into the future from the time the prophet announced them. That fact will play a role in how Cyrus reacted to all this when it was brought to his attention. This prophecy was also revealed many years before Babylon actually conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple.

This prophecy about Cyrus rouses the higher textual critics' desire to deny the truth of the Bible because they deny the ability of God or of God through the prophets to accurately predict the future; therefore, they look for any excuse to "disprove" prophecy. That is one reason why they claim that more than one person wrote the book of Isaiah. It makes it easier for them to claim that a person who lived after Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem wrote this "prophecy" and inserted it where he did to make it look like a prophecy when it was not. For example, Motyer cites a theologian named Smart who wanted to claim that Cyrus did not belong in Isaiah's prophecy at all. He claimed that a Jewish person living in the fifth-century added the information about Cyrus into the second book of Isaiah, generally referred to as "Deutero-Isaiah." [J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*, 284, 284 n. 1]. A theologian named Whybray believes this to be a prophecy, but one that was not written by Isaiah but by a prophet writing later, the author of "Deutero-Isaiah," who was living in Babylon during the reign of the Persian King Cyrus [cf. Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, 251].

I unequivocally deny the existence of a "Deutero-Isaiah" at all; Isaiah wrote the entire book himself, and it was not written as two or three separate books over a long period of time in order to backload the prophecies into the book after the fact of prophetic fulfillment. To suggest that predictive prophecy is impossible, as the higher critics do, is to suggest the Bible is not only inaccurate and therefore unreliable, it is untruthful. That is not possible; the Word of God is inspired and inerrant and completely true in everything it asserts.

In a previous Scripture in Isaiah, the argument being made against idolatry was that idols cannot predict the future; only God can accurately predict the future (cf. 41:21-29). "The centerpiece of the whole argument against the idols is that they cannot declare the future. Nothing they have said in the past can explain the present, and nothing they say now is anything but a vague rehash of what has already happened. But God not only has done so in the past, he does so now, and evidence clearly supports both claims" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 196].

"To approach the Bible with an antisupernatural bias and say that the references to Cyrus were added later, *after* he released the captives, causes the passage, as stated earlier, to lose its emphasis on God's uniqueness in predicting the future. This would mean that God is not different from idols—the very point Isaiah is disproving!" [John A. Martin, "Isaiah" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 1099].

I think it helpful to examine a bit of history concerning this Persian king.

"The name Cyrus, in Hebrew 'Koresht,' appears on ancient Persian monuments as *Kuru*, which is also the name of a river in southern Persia [known as Iran today]. It is generally assumed that the name Cyrus was derived from the name of that river" [Victor Buksbazen, *The Prophet Isaiah: A Commentary*, 380].

Cyrus was born to Cambyses I, king of Anshan, located in eastern Elam (part of what we call Iran today), and his mother was Mandane, daughter of Astyages, king of Media. When Cambyses died in 550 BC, Cyrus inherited his throne. He went to work unifying the Persian people, a task that he was able to accomplish. His grandfather's reign in Media was weak and corrupt. With the help of a Median Army general and his troops, a general whom his grandfather had wronged, Cyrus attacked Media, captured his grandfather, and conquered, without a battle, the capital city of Ecbatana in 550 BC. Cyrus successfully worked to unify Media and Persia into a single nation becoming the nation we generally refer to as Medo-Persia. At that point, he began marching west, conquering the territories before him as he went.

In 539 BC, he was ready to conquer Babylon. For fourteen years, Nabonidus, the Babylonian king, had been away for reasons about which there is speculation, but no certainty exists about the matter. It is known that he went to Haran where he restored the temple of the moon god, Sin. From there, it is also known that he spent a decade or so in Arabia. His son, Belshazzar, was left in charge of the nation's affairs, and we know from Daniel 5 how that worked out. Belshazzar gave up the Kingdom to the Persian Army.

On 12 October 539 BC, Medo-Persian troops entered the city of Babylon, killed Belshazzar, and conquered the city without a battle being fought.

In terms of biblical history and our Bible study of Isaiah, the important details concerning the life and reign Cyrus obviously involve his interaction with the Israelites. Once he conquered new territories, Cyrus apparently acted in a more merciful manner (or at least in a more merciful manner for a tyrannical king overseeing an army during a time in history when ruthless brutality was standard operating procedure), which was in contrast

with the way the Assyrians and the Babylonians acted, when they conquered new nations. Those two nations deported people from their homeland as a means of breaking them away from their past and indoctrinating them into accepting a new way of life under new ruling authorities. Cyrus, on the other hand, at least sometimes, encouraged the various people groups he encountered or conquered to return to or remain in their original homelands. In the case of the Israelites, it didn't hurt that God mentioned him by name in Isaiah's book.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, recorded that Cyrus was, in fact, moved by the revelation that he had been specifically named by God through the Israelite prophet, Isaiah.

"Now God induced Cyrus to write throughout Asia: 'Thus says King Cyrus: Since the Most High God has appointed me king of the habitable world, I am convinced that He is the God whom the Israelites worship. He foretold my name through the prophets, and that I was to build His temple in Jerusalem.' Cyrus knew this from reading Isaiah's prophecies given 210 years earlier. He marveled at the divine power, and he was controlled by a desire to fulfill what was written. Gathering the most distinguished Jews in Babylon, Cyrus told them that he would permit them to return to their native land and rebuild Jerusalem and their temple. He would be their ally and would write his satraps and governors near Judea to contribute gold and silver for the building of the temple" [Paul L. Maier, trans. and ed. *Josephus: The Essential Works: A Condensation of Jewish Antiquities and The Jewish War*, 187-188, quoting from A11:1].

Ezra 1:1-2 ¹Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also *put it* in writing, saying: ²"Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

I suspect Cyrus probably learned of the prophecy in Isaiah from the prophet Daniel who was allowed to serve the Persians for a few years late in his life, although it is certainly possible that some other Jewish person provided the King with the information. Daniel, of course, did not return to Israel and served the Medo-Persians for some time after they came to power in Babylon. He would have been in close proximity to the king and could have introduced him to the Jewish Scriptures since he had studied the book of Jeremiah and knew it was time for the Israelites to return back home after 70 years of exile (Jer. 25:11-12, 29:10; Dan. 9:2). Presumably, he did not return to Jerusalem because he was too old and feeble to make an arduous trip such as that. Daniel had to be into his eighties by that time. But perhaps the reason Daniel didn't return was because God still had work for him to do in Babylon; the Scriptures simply do not provide the reason.

Isaiah 44:28 ²⁸"It is I who says of Cyrus [בֹּרֵךְ, Greek, αὐτός], 'He is My shepherd [רֹעֶה]! And he will perform all My desire.' And he declares of Jerusalem, 'She will be built,' And of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid.'"

It is Yahweh who has been speaking and continues to speak through the prophet here in this verse. God declares that this pagan king is His shepherd.

Shepherd, רֹעֶה, means to feed, to tend, to be a shepherd. It refers to a person whose occupation is tending, feeding, and guarding sheep in a pasture. This word is full of metaphorical imagery concerning the care and protection of God's people culminating in a picture of the Good Shepherd, Christ Jesus (John 10:1-18). "[K]ings were called 'shepherds' as being guardians and carers [sic] of their people. The title here signifies that the coming conqueror is the Lord's appointed carer [sic]—even, as a shepherd would, to lead them into their proper pastures" [J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*, 283-284].

The Davidic kings were supposed to be the shepherds of Israel, and David was identified as such.

2 Samuel 5:1–2 ¹Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, "Behold, we are your bone and your flesh. ²"Previously, when Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel out and in. And the LORD said to you, 'You will shepherd My people Israel, and you will be a ruler over Israel.'"

Psalms 78:70–72 ⁷⁰He also chose David His servant And took him from the sheepfolds; ⁷¹From the care of the ewes with suckling lambs He brought him To shepherd Jacob His people, And Israel His inheritance. ⁷²So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, And guided them with his skillful hands.

The ultimate Shepherd is, of course, Yahweh.

Psalms 23:1 ¹The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Psalms 80:1 ¹Oh, give ear, Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock ...

Ezekiel 34:11, 22 ¹¹For thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out.... ²²therefore, I will deliver My flock, and they will no longer be a prey; and I will judge between one sheep and another.

The ultimate and final Davidic King will be the ultimate and final Shepherd of Israel.

Ezekiel 34:23 ²³"Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd.

John 10:11, 14 ¹¹"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.... ¹⁴"I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me,

One of the interesting things about this prophecy is the fact that the foundation was the only part of the Temple that was laid while Cyrus was king which is exactly what the prophecy predicted: Cyrus would lay the foundation of the Temple. It did not say that he was going to build the Temple itself. We know he did nothing more than that because when Darius was king of Persia, due to opposition in Jerusalem they had to search the records to find the decree Cyrus originally issued that allowed for the rebuilding of the Temple. A scroll was found in the city of Ecbatana with the order to rebuild the Temple

written on it (Ezra 5:6-6:12). It was only during the reign of Darius that the Temple was rebuilt, which was in the sixth year his reign in about 516 BC. That was about 20 years after Cyrus issued his decree to rebuild it.

Ezra 5:16–17 ¹⁶‘Then that Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundations of the house of God in Jerusalem; and from then until now it has been under construction and it is not yet completed.’ ¹⁷“Now if it pleases the king, let a search be conducted in the king's treasure house, which is there in Babylon, if it be that a decree was issued by King Cyrus to rebuild this house of God at Jerusalem; and let the king send to us his decision concerning this matter.”

Cyrus is a type of this ultimate, final Shepherd King of Israel. “In a wonderfully ingenious way, just as the foreigner, Ruth, became an ancestress of David, the foreigner Cyrus typifies the Davidic Messiah” [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 197]. This connection between Ruth and Cyrus is inaccurate because Ruth is not a type with a New Testament antitype, but it is accurate to suggest that Cyrus is a type of the Messiah. Many people do not want to accept the fact that God can use a pagan king as a type of the Savior of the world, the Messiah or the Christ, but He can and He did in this situation. A number of theologians representing various theological systems have, in fact, realized this to be the correct typological view of Cyrus as God's anointed.

“Cyrus is the only Gentile king who is called God's ‘anointed.’ Since this is the translation of the Hebrew word which we spell in English as *Messiah*, Cyrus is in a sense a type of the Anointed One, the Lord Jesus Christ.... The only intended resemblance is in the fact that Cyrus was the anointed one who delivered the people of Israel from their captivity. As such he points us to the greater Anointed One who saves His people from their sins” [Thomas L. Constable, “Isaiah” in *Thomas Constable's Notes on the Bible, Volume IV: Isaiah-Daniel*, 4:129 quoting Alfred Martin, *Isaiah: The Salvation of Jehovah*, 77-78].

“Since Israel in exile had no king, Cyrus functioned in a sense as her king, (the anointed one) to bring about blessing. Like the Messiah (lit., ‘the Anointed One’) who would come after him, Cyrus would have a twofold mission: to free the people, and to bring God's judgment on unbelievers” [John A. Martin, “Isaiah” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 1099].

“Israel's election [appointment] is not for itself, and thus neither is its deliverance necessarily to be effected by itself. It is this sense in which *anointed* is used here: Cyrus has been especially chosen and empowered to carry out the purposes of God. In this sense he typifies the Messiah: he is God's chosen instrument through whom God's gracious purposes will be accomplished, especially as through him God is revealed to the world” [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 200-201].

Young recognized the typical relationship between Cyrus and the Messiah. “At this particular point in the history of redemption a Persian king is given the task of gathering the lost sheep of the house of Israel. By the use of this designation Cyrus is greatly honored, for to shepherd God's people is the task of the Messiah, and Cyrus here stands as a type

of the Lord's Servant, the true Messiah and Shepherd of His people who gives His life for the sheep" [Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, vol. 3, 3:193].

In terms of the typical relationships between Cyrus and the Messiah, Motyer noted the similarities between the temporal deliverance from Babylon accomplished through Cyrus in Isaiah 44:24-48:22, and the spiritual deliverance of Israel by means of the work of the servant in Isaiah 49:1-53:12 (quoted in Thomas L. Constable, "Isaiah" in *Thomas Constable's Notes on the Bible: Volume IV: Isaiah-Daniel*, 128).

WORK OF CYRUS (ISAIAH 44:24-48:22)	WORK OF THE SERVANT (ISAIAH 49:1-53:12)
The task stated and the agent named (44:24-28)	The task stated and the agent named (49:1-6)
The task confirmed: to Israel and the world (45:1-7)	The task confirmed: to Israel and to the world (49:7-12)
The response: prayer (45:8)	The response: praise (49:13)
Israel's disquiet (45:9-25)	Israel's despondency (49:14-50:11)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Lord's promise affirmed (45:9-13) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Lord's love affirmed (49:14-16)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Israel and Gentiles (45:14-22) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Israel and Gentiles (49:17-26)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who find righteousness and strength in the supreme Lord and those who oppose Him (45:23-25) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Servant, the exemplar of those who find strength and vindication in the Almighty Lord (50:1-11)
The Lord's care for Israel—from the beginning through to the coming salvation (46:1-13)	The Lord's care for Israel—from the beginning through to the coming salvation (51:1-16)
Babylon: from the throne to the dust (47:1-15)	Zion: from the dust to the throne (51:17-52:12)
Redemption from Babylon (48:1-22)	Redemption from sin (52:13-53:12)

"Perform" is a verb in the imperfect tense, indicating future action, in the active voice with a causative form. That is, Cyrus is going to be caused by God to do God's will in the restoration of the Israelites back to the land. "Built" and "laid" are verbs in the imperfect tense, indicating future action, in the passive voice. Cyrus is not doing the building and the laying, but he is giving his permission and making it possible for those things to take place.

At some point in the future, Cyrus is going to fulfill God's desire to send the people back to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. God is going to see to it, to cause it to come about, in whatever way He desires to have His divine purposes revealed through this pagan king. Is Cyrus being forced to do this? No, but the circumstances that God brings about in the life of this king will lead him into doing exactly what it is that God wants him to do. Part of that refers to allowing others to perform the labor of building Jerusalem and laying the foundations of the Temple.

Unlike King Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4:34-37), there is no indication that King Cyrus ever became a believer in Yahweh. The fact of anointing him has no bearing on whether or not Cyrus was a believer. He was a tool God set apart for His use, and the king's spiritual state was immaterial.

There is an interesting factor to consider in this Scripture concerning the identity of this king that Isaiah identified as Koresh. This was a prophecy concerning a future king who was unknown and unheard of at the time Isaiah revealed this truth. No one had any idea who Isaiah was revealing here. Nothing was said about this king in terms of his origin, the time of his reign, or the extent of his kingdom and the nations he would conquer, including Babylon. At that time, the Israelites rejected any notion that God would allow their nation to be destroyed and their people taken into captivity even though Isaiah had already predicted Babylon would do so (Is. 39:6-7). Isaiah would reveal in the next few verses that this king would be a pagan who would conquer many nations and confiscate their wealth, and that he would be empowered by Yahweh himself to be successful implying that no pagan god had the power to do this incredible work apart from Him. Ezra revealed that it was Koresh, or Cyrus, who was the king that was destined to accomplish these great things, but that is, of course, after the fact revelation that Isaiah did not have.

In the next verse, something that must have been shocking to the Israelites was Isaiah's revelation that some pagan king named Cyrus was Yahweh's anointed. The problem Yahweh had was that Israel was not fulfilling the charge they were given to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6); therefore, in this instance, He used an unclean pagan king to accomplish His purposes. To be the Lord's anointed was to be granted a title generally reserved for the prophets, priests, and kings of Israel, which probably created shock and confusion among the people. Of course, at the time this prophecy was destined to be fulfilled, Israel was going to be so weak, without a king or a nation, and they would be in captivity with no power to remove themselves from their predicament. It took a pagan king to restore them to their land, which, predicted before the fact, must have been a serious affront to the nation's misplaced confidence in the fact that they were God's appointed people and the children of Abraham who, they thought, could never be destroyed. God is going to keep His promises to Israel, but it will be by means of divine temporal discipline that uses pagans as part of the disciplinary program.

"But to call *Cyrus* the Lord's *anointed*! ... This was in particular the kingly title. It was the special dignity and sacrosanctity of Saul as king; above all it was the divinely granted status of David, of the Davidic kings and of the expected 'David' of the future. The vision of this coming Davidic king had hitherto preoccupied Isaiah's own depiction of the future—but now the coming king, the Lord's anointed, is not David at all but a pagan

named Cyrus! This was not at all what they wanted to hear or the way they hoped the future would shape out" [J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*, 285].

A lot of theologians share this type of thinking, but I think, in terms of shocking the Israelites, this may be a bit overdone. They had been warned; whether they believed it or not is another issue altogether. Earlier in Isaiah, Assyria was said to be God's instrument of punishment for Israel (Is. 10:6), and Jeremiah would later refer to God calling Nebuchadnezzar "My servant" (Jer. 25:9, 27:6). Nevertheless, it is surely a valid point to some extent.

Isaiah 45:1 ¹Thus says the LORD to Cyrus His anointed [מָשִׁיחַ, Greek χριστός], Whom I have taken by the right hand, To subdue [רָדַד] nations before him And to loose the loins of kings; To open doors before him so that gates will not be shut:

Anointed, מָשִׁיחַ, means anointed or anointed one, the Messiah. Generally, it refers to a person anointed with oil (whether literally or by figurative extension) to mark them as having authority or a special function. The anointed one refers to a person having sacred oil poured ceremonially on one's head, and so become a person with special authority and function, with the implication of one having the choice and approval of God. The word does not always have theological significance; it has uses in terms of the performance of tasks such as rubbing a shield with oil (Is. 21:5), painting a house (Jer. 22:14), or rubbing one's body with oil (Amos 6:6). While that is true, it is also rare in the biblical text. This word and its derivatives are almost always used as references to pouring a specially prepared, holy oil on a person or on an object as a means of inauguration for service. When God had someone anointed, they were entering into a divine appointment that set them apart for the Lord's purposes. In this case, Cyrus didn't know he was being set apart, but he was doing God's will despite his ignorance of that fact. Later, that ignorance would become knowledge when Cyrus became aware of this prophecy, but that was after his "ministry," if we can call it that, began by means of his successful military campaigns and conquests that would lead eventually to Babylon and the fulfillment of God's plan for him.

In the New Testament, the word "Messiah" appears 6 times, 4 times in Matthew and 2 times in John. In Matthew, it is always a translation from χριστός, and in John, the Greek text reads Μεσσίας which is a transliteration into the Greek from the Hebrew and not a translation. Of course, the majority of the time, χριστός is translated "Christ" in the New Testament, which occurs 529 times in 498 verses. The Hebrew "Messiah" and the Greek "Christ" are the equivalent words in the two languages. χριστός means to anoint, and in the New Testament it is revealed as the word describing the fulfillment of the Israelite expectation of the Messiah King of Israel. The word originally had connotations of good, beneficial, favorable, and suitable, and those carried on into the New Testament. Of the New Testament authors, Paul most frequently applied the word to divine goodness.

The anointing oil used under the auspices of the Mosaic Law was a specifically created aromatic oil that was not to be duplicated or used for any profane purposes (Ex. 30:22-33). This was the formula used to make the anointing oil used to consecrate the Tabernacle and the Aaronic priesthood. The Bible does not specifically say this was the oil used to anoint the kings, but it would be hard to visualize anything other than that

divinely ordained anointing oil being used when viewed in light of the relationship between Yahweh and His Davidic kings.

The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, s.v. "מָשַׁח," 530, identifies four theological aspects of this word. "[1] [T]o anoint an individual or an object indicated an authorized separation for God's service.... *māšāḥ*, while representing a position of honor, also represents increased responsibility.... [2] ... [W]riters speak of anointed ones as those whom the Lord anointed. Such language underscores that it is God who is the authorizing agent; that the anointed is inviolable; and that the anointed one is to be held in special regard. [3] [O]ne may infer that divine enablement was understood as accompanying *māšāḥ*.... [4] ... in the form of *māšīaḥ*, *māšāḥ* was associated with the coming promised deliverer ...

The Tabernacle and its furnishings were anointed with oil prior to assuming operational status (Ex. 40:9-11; Lv. 8:10-11), and the Levitical priests were anointed with oil prior to assuming their duties as priests (Ex. 40:12-15; Lv. 8:12, 30). The patriarchs were called "anointed ones" (1 Chron. 16:22), but there is no record of which I am aware that any of them were anointed with oil. The concept of anointing primarily refers to kings, specifically in terms of biblical significance to David and the Davidic kings. Saul was anointed king by Samuel (1 Sam. 10:1) as was David (1 Sam. 16:13). Solomon was anointed king (1 Chron. 29:22). The title "anointed one" represents what was at least supposed to be a special relationship between Yahweh and the Davidic kings of Israel.

The fact of the anointing itself is not a fact of loyalty, obedience, and godly character. Saul was disobedient as were many of the Davidic kings following David. That is also evident here in this situation involving Cyrus who was not physically anointed with oil. He was not a believer; he was a pagan, yet he was used in a very significant and powerful way by God. It is a statement that God can direct anyone He so desires to do His will in the furtherance of His program for world history. God is sovereign over nations, and kings, and He can use them in any way He sees fit to do so. In this case, this pagan king was used by God to restore the Israelites to the land for the reconstruction of Jerusalem and the Temple and for the reestablishment of the people back into their homeland.

Anointing something or someone, when done at God's behest, was a very significant act. "The act of anointing not only initiated a person or an object into a new form of service, it also set that object or person apart from other forms of service or uses.... By reason of their anointing, these objects and persons are no longer ordinary, but now partake of the holy character of God. No longer can they function as ordinary objects or as private persons. Now they must always be used and act with reference to God and his purposes" [Willem A. VanGemeren, gen. ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, s.v. "מָשַׁח," 2:1124]. That is true of the Israelites, but it is not true for a pagan such as Cyrus who was set apart by God for His use, but, as a pagan, the king carried no expectations of holiness.

This situation explains why the Israelite High Priest could not defile himself in any way including approaching the dead body of even his father and his mother. He was not

allowed to profane the sanctuary in any way because the anointing oil of God was upon him.

Leviticus 21:10–12 ¹⁰The priest who is the highest among his brothers, on whose head the anointing oil has been poured and who has been consecrated to wear the garments, shall not uncover his head nor tear his clothes; ¹¹nor shall he approach any dead person, nor defile himself even for his father or his mother; ¹²nor shall he go out of the sanctuary nor profane the sanctuary of his God, for the consecration of the anointing oil of his God is on him; I am the LORD.

Anointing was also conducted by people who were not representing God on people who had not been commanded to be anointed by God. That doesn't make it invalid on its face as an anointing, but it does preclude giving any godly or theological legitimacy to the act.

As powerful and exalted as human kings might think themselves to be, they are weak, fallible vessels of flesh animated by a sin nature that, apart from God and in rebellion against Him, are poor, blind, and worthless. Cyrus was no exception, but when serving God, whether knowingly or not, he becomes useful in terms of the divine task set before him. Cyrus had no idea that his successes as a conquering king were ordained by God for the purpose of enabling that pagan king to fulfill the destiny God set before the king in service to Him, the Creator God of Israel. "Cyrus's rule, in this sense, will not be his own, but will belong to and be guided by the Lord and His purposes" [Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer, "Isaiah" in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, 1073]. The success of Cyrus was apparently quite a marvel to the surrounding nations, but it isn't, or at least it shouldn't be, so surprising to us since God was involved with the fortunes of Cyrus and his nation at that time.

Even though Cyrus the king is mentioned in these verses, the primary focus is not on him. The focus is on God and on His Kingdom plan for history including Israel's role in that plan. God's sovereignty is on full display here as He moves people to accomplish His will in the fulfillment of His Kingdom program. At this point in history, God's plan was to restore Israel to their homeland in preparation for the First Advent of the Messiah a few hundred years in the future. These words are primarily being spoken for Israel's benefit. When these things take place, Israel should be rejoicing and thanking God for His divine care. They are also being spoken for Cyrus's benefit so that when shown them, he will be encouraged to free the Israelites and do God's will in terms of rebuilding Jerusalem and the Temple. Finally, they were spoken for the benefit of all men so that they would know that He is God.

Taking by the right hand was apparently a pagan practice in Babylon, although the implication of the meaning of the idiom is pretty clear on its face without any reference to paganism. "Traditionally, the ruler of Babylon took the hand of Bel in the New Year's festival. Assyrian rulers coveted this affirmation of their authority. Here Yahweh claims that he has seized Cyrus by the hand and strengthened his hold on his realm" [Thomas L. Constable, "Isaiah" in *Thomas Constable's Notes on the Bible, Volume IV: Isaiah-Daniel*, 128, quoting Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 156]. Others deny this Babylonian aspect and say that it was a common Semitic expression, which seems to be more likely. As such, Isaiah used it in Isaiah 42:6 in connection with the Messiah Servant. The expression as used here implies

God's guidance, direction, and control of Cyrus, which is exactly what is being revealed. Some theologians want to add the concept of intimate fellowship to the concept of taking a person by the hand, which may be true in some contexts, but in this context, Cyrus had no concept of intimate fellowship with God. He didn't even know that God was helping him be successful, or that he was part of God's plan for history until after he conquered Babylon.

God will go before Cyrus and ensure his success as a conquering king. This will not be because Cyrus is a deserving king or a good man; He is not. There is nothing meritorious about Cyrus, quite the opposite. His success will be because God has a plan and purpose for this king that will be fulfilled. It will look to all the world as though Cyrus is a great warrior and strategist, but God, who can never be defeated, is the one ensuring his success. Subdue, *רָדַד*, means to beat out, to beat down, to subdue, to be almost gone referring to putting down by force or authority. Cyrus and his army will certainly do the work of subduing the nations set before him, but God is going to see to it that conditions allow him to accomplish the work. None of this is clear at the time Isaiah revealed the prophecy; the nations involved are not known, but it will become clear only as the prophecy is being fulfilled.

God is going to loose the loins of kings. This is an idiom referring to disarmament. Girding up the loins suggests strapping on one's weapons around the waist in preparation for battle. Conversely, loosing the loins suggests disarming someone. Whatever weaponry the foes of Cyrus possess will be rendered ineffective against the Medo-Persian army, which is part of God's work to ensure the success of the pagan king.

Finally, God will give Cyrus open doors through which he will have easy access to the nations upon which he has set his sights. The implication of open doors is there will be an easy route to victory. Closed and locked doors are meant to be an impediment to easy entry for anyone who desires to enter and render harm to those the doors are meant to protect. There is an issue concerning doors that is connected to the Medo-Persian conquest of Babylon that I will explain next week in connection with Isaiah 45:2.

"God asserts that he is the reason for Cyrus's enemies being unmanned through fear (*to loosen the loins* is to be stripped of one's weapons' belt, which in turn leave the robe hanging down freely where it can entangle the legs), and that it is because of God's activity that every city will be powerless to shut him out" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 201].

In what has been called the Cyrus Cylinder, King Cyrus exalted himself and credited Marduk for Medo-Persia's conquest of Babylon. We know the Bible presents an alternative view of that conquest which is much more in line with the truth! "[O]ne of the dramatic differences from the Cyrus Cylinder is that whereas there Cyrus's virtues, strength, and leadership skills are put forward as the reasons for Marduk's choosing him, here they do not even enter the picture. The three reasons given (vv. 3, 4, 6) have solely to do with the nature and character of God. It is not human perfectibility on which the world's hope rests, but the grace and the providence of God" [John N. Oswalt, *The New*

International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66, 200].

We need to understand that Cyrus had no idea that he was being used for God's purposes. He was simply doing what the despotic kings of that era do—plundering, killing, and conquering wherever, whenever, and whoever he wanted.