

Pagan Kings and God's Divine Rule

Isaiah 45:1-7

In America, we've experienced a nearly unprecedented era of continuous government. And many of our leaders have at least expressed belief in Christ, whether true or not. But what about a civic authority who is an outspoken unbeliever? Can God's will still be done? God, through the prophet Isaiah, gives us some insight into how He rules.

First, some background. The people of Israel are in captivity in Babylon due to their idol worship. But now God is going to anoint someone Israel will not expect to lead them out.

Read Isaiah 45:1-7.

Who was the LORD going to send to free Israel? Why is this so odd?

In verse 2, the LORD mentions He "will break down gates of bronze". The gates were the brainchild of Nabopolassar and his son Nebuchadnezzar. Babylon was the world's most fortified city of its day. It was surrounded by a series of walls, two of which enclosed the rectangular city. The innermost wall was 21 feet thick and the outermost was 11 feet deep. Three-hundred and sixty watchtowers were on the walls every 60-65 feet. The most famous tower, called "the House of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth", was 300 feet high. A moat-like system in front of the outer wall hindered direct attacks on the city. The Ishtar Gate opened up to a long processional way called "the enemy shall never pass". The street was bordered by 120 statues of lions, which were symbols of the goddess Ishtar, while 575 figures of dragons or bulls symbolized Marduk. Babylon was a marvel of architectural planning and construction, but its massive fortifications were no match for the LORD and His messiah Cyrus.

What might the "gates of bronze" symbolize to those in exile?

The events unfolded as follows. In 550 BC, Cyrus gained devotion from the Persian tribes with ease. In 539 BC he surrounded the city of Babylon, the priests submitted, and declared him Marduk's chosen king. Then they opened up the city gates and allowed the Persians to walk in. Cyrus had come to restore Marduk to his proper place and is therefore welcomed by Babylon's citizens.

Who freed us from eternal captivity and burst down the gates of hell?

Does Cyrus believe in the LORD? See v. 4-5.

Why is the LORD saving His people? See v. 5-6.

The LORD mentions He longs to be known. How is He most fully known to us?

V. 7 seems to indicate the LORD creates evil. Is this true?

Where else in the Bible do we see the hidden God?

What are some things from Isaiah 45:1-7 we can apply today?

What does this say about God's ruling through earthly, and often ungodly, "kings"?

Sources:

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