

## ISAIAH 40–48: A SERMONIC CHALLENGE TO OPEN THEISM

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*Eight sermons in Isaiah 40–48 pose a challenge to Open Theism’s limitation of the LORD’s power and knowledge of the future. Rhetorical questions and declarations about the certainty of divine purpose are two literary strategies employed by Isaiah. Rhetorical interrogation and appropriate vocabulary and facts characterize the first sermon in Isaiah 40. These constitute a powerful indictment against Israel for her lack of trust in the LORD. According to Isaiah 46, He planned the creation from outside of time and history and implemented His plans within time and history. Isaiah 44 cites classic examples of His governance in world history, including His naming in advance a Persian king who would decree the rebuilding of Jerusalem. These sermons also cite the deeds of the LORD in dealing with Israel and the nations. The sermons, though addressed to Israel as a rebuke for her idolatry, also point out the error of Open Theism in that system’s demeaning of God and exalting of man.*

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### Introduction

The prophet Isaiah’s volume of eight sermons<sup>1</sup> may very well stand as a penetrating polemic against pagan idolatry, but it also stands as a challenge to any denial or substantial re-defining of the LORD’s knowledge of the future. Open Theism, when first encountered, sounded like a violation of Isaiah 40–48, or at the least it sounded as though these sermons were not taken into account. Bruce Ware’s critique, *God’s Lesser Glory*,<sup>2</sup> referred often to Isaiah’s words, supporting the observation that this new offering on understanding God in relation to the future

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<sup>1</sup>See Gleason L. Archer, “Isaiah,” in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison, eds. (Chicago: Moody, 1962) 608, for the preferred breakdown of this section into eight sermons. The sermons are as follows: 40:1-31; 41:1-29; 42:1-25; 43:1-28; 44:1-28; 45:1-25; 46:1-47:15; 48:1-22. All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Bible.

<sup>2</sup>Bruce Ware, *God’s Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2000) 169.

might have been delinquent in this respect. Eugene Merrill opened his article, "Isaiah 40–55 As Anti-Babylonian Polemic," by noting that a major adjunct to the theme of salvation in these chapters is the prophet's assault upon the religio-cultural structure of the Babylonian society from which the Jewish exiles would be delivered in the distant future.<sup>3</sup>

A proposition around which to arrange sermonically the thrust of Isaiah's sermons as it pertains to Open Theism would be: "Two literary strategies in proclaiming God that theologically block any attempt to limit His power and knowledge deliberately." The two strategies are (1) rhetorical questions, which Isaiah uses often, and (2) declarations on the certainty of divine purpose, which also frequently burst forth. Some overlap of these two categories is unavoidable since question and declaration are yoked together in the same context.

### **Key Questions Introduce Transcendence<sup>4</sup> and Immanence<sup>5</sup>**

Rhetorical questions are well-known communicative devices in all languages, because they draw in the mind of the reader or listener to adjudicate the facts and come to an obvious conclusion.

Rhetorical questions are frequently used in the Old Testament to express the absolute power, uniqueness, singularity and incomparability of a person. The rhetorical question is one of the most forceful and effectual ways employed in speech for driving home some idea or conviction. Because of its impressive and persuasive effect the hearer is not merely listener: he is forced to frame the expected answer in his mind, and by doing so he actually becomes a co-expressor of the speaker's conviction.<sup>6</sup>

Isaiah's rhetorical questions mixed with divine self-predications, imperatival clauses, reminders of past actions, and divinely authoritative predictions of what will be done deliver a powerful karate chop to the neck of Open Theism. Undoubtedly Isaiah's words captured and still capture attention, because he so graphically presents the sharp contrast between idols and the Holy One of Israel, the Lord the Almighty. Masterfully, the major contrast between idol-gods and the one and only true God is brought to the forefront of attention. This Lord of Israel, the

<sup>3</sup>Eugene H. Merrill, "Isaiah 40–55 As Anti-Babylonian Polemic," *Grace Theological Journal* 8/1 (1987):3; cf. also idem, "Literary Genres in Isaiah 40–55," *BSac* 144/574 (1987):144-56 for an identification of four types of genre, namely, disputation, lawsuit, salvation oracles, and salvation proclamation. Separate examination, however, of each type will not alter the challenge to Open Theism presented under rhetorical question and declaration of certainty.

<sup>4</sup>Transcendence may be defined as the uniquely otherness of the eternal God in relation to everything that exists; it speaks to His majesty and greatness.

<sup>5</sup>Immanence may be defined as the providential and personal involvement of God in His creation.

<sup>6</sup>C. J. Labuschagne, *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament*, Pretoria Oriental Series, vol. 5, ed. A. Van Selms (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966) 23.

prophet declares, still has and will continue to have power to control all that He created. He also has, concordant with that power, an unerring and unchallengeable predictive ability. Indeed, the prophet's contrast shows up the bankruptcy of pagan life and doctrine, because pagans have no one deity under whose sole direction and discretion everything is to be placed.<sup>7</sup> What so quickly emerges from the text is the total incomparability of Israel's Lord and His eschatological purposes for the nations and for Israel. In so rigorously and unremittably attacking pagan ways, Isaiah makes one conclusion inescapable: the LORD is the Lord of history, the One who is able with consummate ease to link the past with the present and the future. He acts according to His own stated goal and prescribed purpose. It is His timetable that operates and no one else's! His 'aleness' or solitariness as God points to transcendence and His constant involvement in world affairs points to immanence.

### **Appropriate Rhetorical Interrogation Slips into the First Sermon (Isaiah 40)**

A climactic "Behold your God" (Isa 40:9) presents the exclamation demanded of Israel as she contemplates and witnesses her God's activity on her behalf (40:1-8). "Who is He? What's He doing?" just might be questions echoing in response. A twofold "Behold" following (40:10) opens the brief description of her Lord's future actions and focuses attention upon the words being spoken (40:10-11). Another twofold "Behold" ("Behold . . . Look," 40:15) moves the reader out of the questions and into a concise discourse on the Lord's sovereignty over the nations (40:15-17), which is picked up a few verses later (40:23-24). To propose to deal with Israel in the world and in history is also to propose some action with regard to other peoples. Israel did not live or exist as a hermit practically cut off from contact with other groups, so that dealing with her has no effect of any sort on other nations. Obviously, the questions of the prophet do not give voice to non-involvement in Israel's affairs. Nor do they express the best of intentions, ones which still depend upon some degree of what is unknown about the future, unknown, that is, even to the Lord Himself. Doubt of His ability is far from the meaning of the prophet's sermon. This batch of nine rhetorical questions (40:12-21) appropriately underscores certainty of action and outcome.<sup>8</sup> Read in context, they evoke exclamation on the sovereign power and purpose of a personally involved deity.

### **Appropriate Vocabulary Adds Impact to the Questions Posed**

No one but the Lord has "marked off" the heavens, and no one but the Lord

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<sup>7</sup>The OT contains a surfeit of information on idolatry. Not only are idols portrayed as non-entities, but how much their devotees invested in their self-made gods is also brought out. Their deities remain on the level of comparison with each other, but never alone and wholly incomparable, notwithstanding their worshipers pompous claims to that effect.

<sup>8</sup>These questions are variously introduced: two with *מַי* (vv. 12-13), one with *אֵתְּמַי* (v. 14), two with *אֵלֵי־מַי* (vv. 18, 25) and four with *לֹהֵי־אֵל* (v. 21).

has “marked off” the Spirit (40:12b, 13a). “Who furnished the Spirit with the standard according to which all was done?” might be the way to pose it.<sup>9</sup> Such a piling up of words on power to handle and to know the created order (40:12)<sup>10</sup> as well as on self-wisdom and regulation (40:13)<sup>11</sup> renders it impossible for another candidate, no matter what his stature, wisdom, and authority, to step forward and claim the same, or confidently assert, “I can!”

In an earlier chapter (Isa 25:1), Isaiah had already used “to consult” of God’s having worked wonders which were planned in advance and thereafter occurred just as He delineated. Indeed, Isaiah had also referred to Him by the appropriate title of “Counselor” or “Planner” (Isa 9:6). In fact, God knows all the plans of man (Isa 29:15), not only for Himself but also those one man devises against another man (Jer 18:23). When man’s plans conflict with God’s, they are worthy of shame, not fame (Isa 30:1)! Isaiah had also emphasized earlier that the Lord had a plan against the whole earth (Isa 14:26), with a follow-up rhetorical question intensifying the certainty of its fulfillment, because no one could nullify it, or turn back His Hand from it (14:27).

To teach or instruct or to cause one to have understanding (40:14) distinctly implies that someone with more knowledge and/or experience brings another up to the standard he has not yet achieved, or has informed him of what he does not know. But that is an unthinkable assessment with respect to God! This first batch of questions tolerates no downgrading or downsizing of His knowledge. Since no one could possibly give Him direction or point Him to the right pathway in which His understanding was to move, then obviously He does not need the warning given to men not to depend upon their own understanding (cf. Prov 3:5). Self-wisdom is not defective in God, but in man it is. Thus man needs God’s wisdom by which to have his life directed or regulated and that same wisdom to know what will be. “The Bible declares,” as Bruce Ware so aptly puts it, “that part of what it means for God to be God is precisely this: *no one has ever been his counselor or has ever informed him!*”<sup>12</sup>

Two similar questions, one asked by Isaiah—“To whom then will you liken God?” (40:18)—and the other asked by God Himself—“To whom then will you liken Me?” (40:25)—stress His incomparability. The first one links the nations with the idolatry naturally attached to them, as the sarcasm on the manmade creation of non-functioning deities indicates (40:19-20). The second one breaks in pointedly after the insertion of a concise piece on idolatry and before the reassertion of facts about the Lord which should have been acknowledged from the very beginning, and

<sup>9</sup>F. Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes, vol. 7, ed. C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, trans. by James Martin (reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 148.

<sup>10</sup>‘Measured,’ ‘marked off/regulated,’ ‘calculated/comprehended,’ and ‘weighed.’

<sup>11</sup>‘Counselor,’ ‘taught,’ ‘take counsel,’ ‘instructed,’ ‘showed... understanding.’

<sup>12</sup>Ware, *God's Lesser Glory* 169 [emphasis in the original].

which is signified by the rhetorical repetition of “Have you not known, have you not heard?” (40:21, 28).

The question the Lord asked of the nation of Israel (40:27) is not so much rhetorical as it is one of accusation, an indictment of lack of trust, an ignoring of His immanence. More than that: it is also their accusation against their own Lord, who had just been called “The Holy One” (40:25) and who had just pointed out again in the sermon His power over creation. Accusation at this level from their side unveiled an idolatrous perspective: the national deity, for one reason or another, may suffer from an attention deficit disorder and just simply forgets his people.

### **Appropriate Facts Weave Their Way Between the Questions**

Since facts and questions are tied together—the questions are not irrelevant insertions—one risks unnecessary repetition in treating them separately. A few elements can still be highlighted to buttress the conclusion of incomparability in power, knowledge, and purpose.

In regards to the nations (40:15-17), Ware’s comments are pertinent:

Imagine this! The nations as a whole with all of their collective knowledge, wisdom, and insight, all taken together, constitute before God “a drop from a bucket,” or “a speck of dust on the scales.” How lofty we consider our great learning and wisdom, but how utterly insignificant it is before God.<sup>13</sup>

With respect to divine knowledge, then, the LORD holds the monopoly! Rival claims voiced of other gods are simply meaningless. “Voiced of” is advisable because nothings cannot say anything! Others, who made them, must say it for them, and that accurately reflects the uselessness of idols or foreign gods. Further, whatever stability the idols have is to be attributed to the skill of the workman (40:20; cf. 41:7) and not to the idol itself. It leaves the distinct impression that this is so very much unlike the real God. His stability arises not from what is done to make Him so, but comes from within Himself; He is steadfast in every respect. To view Him in terms analogous to idols is to demote Him and to promote man as God’s maker.

With regard to God and His creation (40:22-24): His exalted status over creation interspersed with statements of His supremacy over the nations rules out both pantheism and panentheism<sup>14</sup> as suitable explanations of Israel’s Lord in

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid. Geoffrey W. Grogan, “Isaiah,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) 6:246, notes, “His absolute control over all human life is quite unchallenged. Verses 23-24 represent a great truth of course, not only about individual rulers, but also about world empires.”

<sup>14</sup>Pantheism may be defined as shutting God up in creation so that all is Him and He is all. Panentheism may be defined as every part of creation exists in Him but God’s Being is more than it. In fact, fatalism is also ruled out because it would shut God out of the world and shut up the creature under the harsh hand of an impersonal force.

association with the universe and its history. Frankly said, national leaders of whatever stature are where they are and are what they are because of His ruling, and are insignificant in the big plan and scheme of things. Pride they might have in their achievements and conquests, but power to change the course of history they did not and do not have.

With regard to God, Israel and creation (40:26-31): Although a specifically expressed syntactical linkage is absent, it is implied. The command to look at the heavens and see the celestial bodies He had made<sup>15</sup> and continues to sustain is abruptly followed by the accusing question “Why do you say, O Jacob . . . ?” (40:27). But linkage of thought does occur. The expressive “But not one is missing” (40:26) immediately preceding that accusing question lingers in the mind and, on reflection, quickly forges a connection, “So why do you say, O Jacob . . . ?” From Israel’s side the question was a despondent accusation aimed at God and concluding that He had simply forgotten the nation. Divine titles in the immediately succeeding context (40:28) signal the greatness of the Lord God and serve to intensify the illegitimacy of their accusation. “The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth” who upholds the heavens, upholds His people too, and in so doing, never grows weary.

The point to be taken is this: even if His handiwork in history seems undetected, the nation must remain convinced that their everlasting and incomparable Lord governs all He has done since eternity past. Indeed, His understanding, His knowledge, has no limitations or restrictions, clearly implying that any thought of His having forgotten them is to drag Him down to the human level, to view Him through their eyes. Making God analogous to them is wrong thinking leading to despondent reaction. To do so is to be guilty of humanizing God and ascribing to Him human limitations.

The reader has good cause to recall Ps 33:10 wherein the psalmist penned these words on the LORD’s supremacy: “The LORD nullifies the counsel of the nations; He frustrates the plans of the peoples.” In contrast the next verse asserts, “The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of His heart from generation to generation.”

### **Key Declarations Introduce the Certainty of Divine Purpose**

Overlap with some of the declarations surrounding the rhetorical questions in the first sermon may occur in this section. Repetition, however, is perhaps a notable element in the sermons and has pedagogical impact.

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<sup>15</sup>Grogan, “Isaiah,” in *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* 6:246, writes, “This passage is antimythological; for it asserts that—far from being deities in their own right—the heavenly bodies are simply the creatures of the one Creator-God, who is Israel’s Holy One. He orders their pattern, knows each in its distinctiveness and upholds them all in their being.”

### Assertions of Definite Goals and Purpose

Most apt is Grogan's heading for Isaiah's eight sermons, which captures well their overarching note and theme: "The sole sovereignty and sure promise of the Lord (40:1–48:22)."<sup>16</sup>

A clear declaration occurs in the sixth sermon (46:10-11). Three participles link the content of these two verses to the parallel statements of incomparability: "For I am God, and there is no other; I am God and there is none like me" (46:9). It declared what had been rhetorically asked in the preceding context (46:5). He's not like idol-gods at all. Three participles in succession, "declaring," "saying," and "calling," move the thought from what evidently only God can do and has done to a specific purpose yet to come on the stage of history. The climax of the impotence of idols, who cannot copy it, is seen in the classic example of calling forth a specific individual, the "Man of My Purpose" (46:11), Cyrus of Medo-Persia. Note that the identification of this person is accompanied by assertions of fulfillment, three of which are prefixed with an asseveration of truth, "moreover, surely."<sup>17</sup> Assertions plus asseverations cannot but emphatically signify completion of plan and achievement of goal.<sup>18</sup> Add to this the significant swapping of past and future tenses: "Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it."<sup>19</sup> An unspoken Nike dynamic intrudes: "God will just do it!" Use of past/future tense swapping occurred earlier in the chapter (46:3-4): "have been upheld," "have been carried," and then, as though stifling any question of "by whom?," a switch to the first person follows with "I will carry you," "I have made," "I will bear," "I will carry," and "[I] will deliver you." Piling up these terms and changed tenses leaves no doubt about God's very personal aid of Israel in the past and in the future, even right then in the present. What a magnificent contrast when set against the prophetic words opening the chapter. Pagan Babylonians will carry and protect their idol-gods (46:1-2), but the LORD will carry His people from the beginning unto the very end!

A contrast of concepts may perhaps be seen in this sermon: The Lord calls

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid, 240.

<sup>17</sup>וַיִּשְׁמַע notably used three times and leaving no room for hesitancy or doubt. Translated in v. 11 once as "indeed" and twice as "also," but "surely" in lieu of "also" would not be out of order here, rendering, "Surely I will bring it to pass," and "Surely I will do it."

<sup>18</sup>Grogan, "Isaiah," in *Expositor's Bible Commentary* 251 well comments at 41:21-24, "If the gods of Babylonia and other nations have objective reality as deities, they should be able to predict the future and also to so interpret history that past and future are seen to be linked in one divinely controlled plan."

<sup>19</sup>Perhaps this is an example of merismus, i.e., the expression of a totality in an abbreviated form. See Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, JSOT Supplement Series 26, ed. David J. A. Clines et. al. (reprint; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995) 321, who notes: "The significant point is that in merismus, of whatever form, it is not the individual elements themselves that matter but what they amount to *together*, as a unit." See also Moshe Held, "The YQTL (QTL-YQTL) Sequence of Identical Verbs in Biblical Hebrew and in Ugaritic," in *Studies and Essays in Honor of Abraham A. Neuman*, ed. Meir Ben-Horin et. al. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962) 281-90, for more information on this construct.

someone forth to be part of His purpose, whereas idols cannot respond to the calls of others to come forth (46:7). Idols cannot get involved when called upon to do so, whereas the Lord is involved from the very beginning. They have no predictive ability whereas the Lord does. Ability to predict without the power and authority to ensure its success and fulfillment is hardly worthy of any attention, for it would be mere bluster. Nothing in this sermon, nor in any of the eight sermons, suggests only potentiality and uncertainty. Rather it is certainty and factuality, albeit some events are yet to occur. One does not think after reading Isaiah's words that probability is all it is, or an awaiting with bated breath, as it were, to see if it will work out as planned, if the individual and collective decisions of men involved in the events of the future are favorable or unfavorable with God's counsel and all His good pleasure (46:10).

In summation and in doctrinal reflection, the conclusion must be that the sovereign Lord planned from outside of time and history and carried out His plans within time and history. That's why He is so different—unlike men or their gods, both of whose planning is fragile because of too many variables and unknowns and because of that, they have a total incapacity to forecast the future accurately. Since He cannot be likened to men, any suggestion of faulty, incomplete knowledge will pull down the incomparable to the comparable and simply slot Him into the prevailing pantheon.

### **Classic Examples of Divine Governance**

*The Appointment with the Foreign King, Cyrus (44:24-28):*<sup>20</sup> Following hard on the heels of a magnificent poem of self-predicated transcendence and immanence (44:24-27), a daring prediction from the human standpoint darts to the forefront—the specific naming of a Persian king yet to come (44:28; 45:1).<sup>21</sup>

This king's decree to rebuild Jerusalem without fortification is evidence of remarkable advance knowledge on the part of the Holy One of Israel. Such prophetic skill is indeed formidable evidence of the certainty of the LORD's purpose seen in the decree issued in 538 B.C., one and a half centuries later, after both the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires had come and gone. It is more than knowledge of what will be. Rather it is having that king not only say what God says, but also perform what is part of His good pleasure (44:28). This is the climax of the string of nine clauses subordinate to, yet enlarging upon, the identifying declaration "I am the Lord" (44:24). These clauses, Allis notes, are

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<sup>20</sup>For a thorough analysis of its poetic form, see Jan P. Fokkelman, "The Cyrus Oracle (Isaiah 44,24–45,7) from the Perspective of Syntax, Versification and Structure," in *Studies in the Book of Isaiah*, (Leuven: Leuven University, 1997) 303-24. See also Oswald T. Allis, *The Unity of Isaiah: A Study in Prophecy* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974) 51-62, for his thorough analysis of the prophecies on Cyrus.

<sup>21</sup>Grogan, "Isaiah," in *Expositor's Bible Commentary* 249, remarks, "The revelation of the name of Cyrus is a moment of great prophetic drama."



intended to declare, describe, and prove the incomparable greatness of Him who bears this mighty and glorious Name . . . [and] are arranged in a chronological sequence the aim of which is to show that the God of Israel is sovereign in all the affairs of men, that past, present, and future events are all within His control and determined by Him.<sup>22</sup>

Neither Cyrus' decree nor his conquests were of his own accord. The poetic sermon makes it quite clear that whatever he did, he did because of God's doings which are described in some detail following the announcement of Cyrus being the Lord God's anointed one, His messiah (45:1). This special individual in God's program for that time would be divinely guided—"whose right hand I have held." More than just guidance is unveiled, for God declared what He would actually do in a series of "I will" declarations (45:2-3, 5) and in past tense declarations what He had done—He called and named (45:4). Deeds and declarations were not bereft of ordered purpose as indicated by the "that you/they may know" (45:3, 6) and "for the sake of" (45:4).<sup>23</sup> That such planning and preparation and governance of national movements was beyond the capacity of anything else is indicated by the twofold self-predication of solitariness and incomparability (45:5-6) as well as in the emphatic expression, "I, the LORD, do all these things" (45:7). His power is underscored in another emphatic expression, "I, the LORD, have created it" (45:8), followed by a more extended indication of being the sovereign creator who not only made the heavens and the earth but also man to live on earth (45:12). Upon reflection, a suggestion of teleological action is not a foreign element here. He is none less than the Maker of Israel who knows everything about their future and can answer all questions relating to them as the "work of His hands" (45:11). A play on concept occurs here as the reader is reminded that these hands stretched out the heavens too (45:12)! No problem exists then in accepting that such power can and did raise up Cyrus to do what God wanted Him to do (45:13). Note again the interplay between past tense and future tense and the sense of certainty it conveys. There's no entertaining of possibility or probability, of a "will he/won't he?" perspective. An *inclusio*, marked by "says the Lord" (45:11, 14), serves to underscore divine planning and purpose. All this portrays a divine governance which is not dependent upon outside influence or anticipation of a future decision.

*The Deeds of the LORD with Israel and the Nations:*<sup>24</sup> A dominating and repetitive note in these eight sermons of Isaiah is God's actions and plans concerning both Israel and the nations. The created idol-gods of the nations could not speak with the clarity and detail of their countries' histories to come as the LORD could of

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<sup>22</sup>Allis, *The Unity of Isaiah* 66.

<sup>23</sup>למען used two times of purpose (vv. 3, 6) and once of advantage (v. 4).

<sup>24</sup>See Michael A. Grisanti, "The Relationship of Israel and the Nations in Isaiah 40–45," Ph.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Tex., 1993.

His people—and of their histories too (cf. 44:9-20). Neither could they save and deliver their people as He does His (46:7).<sup>25</sup>

A special bond between Israel and God is pervasive, not the least of which is Israel's God being called their Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.<sup>26</sup> The nation is not to fear, not only because He created and formed them, but also because they distinctively belong to Him as noted in the claims "You are mine!" or "To Me you belong!" (43:1). These recall the possessive expression "My People," about which Bullock notes, "In that pronoun was contained both election and providence,"<sup>27</sup> which indicates surety of future fulfillment. "My People" (40:1; 43:20; 47:6), "means that Israel could never be 'free' to go her own way. There was no world big enough in which she could lose herself to the watchful care of her God, whether by her own rebellious behavior or the militancy of a pagan nation."<sup>28</sup> This perhaps recalls Psalm 100 and its declaration, "Know that the LORD is God; it is He who has made us and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture."

Again they are not to fear because of what the LORD will still be doing for them, ultimately bringing them back into their land for His glory (43:5-7) and to His praise (43:21). Put this alongside "I act and who can reverse it?" (43:13), and the certainty of divine purpose and promise shines forth yet again.

One realizes after reading all eight sermons that the LORD's relationship with Israel is one of both punishment and deliverance, but without their disobedience and unfaithfulness being viewed as having thwarted His original purpose or threatening the completion of His purpose in the present. Appeals to look to the LORD and be saved do not break down the sureness of His plan of salvation being fulfilled (see e.g., 45:22-23 and 46:12-13). That He is an eternal and everlasting Lord compels one to think in terms of Him being all-knowing rather than knowing clearly only the past and the present but not so the future.

### Conclusion

Carl Henry perceptively observes: "If God's plan achieved what it did not purpose, if part of it conflicted and competed, if his purpose itself requires constant

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<sup>25</sup>Labuschagne, *Incomparability of Yahweh* 91, points out, "Through the whole of the Old Testament there is a very real and close connection between the LORD's incomparability and the fact that *He intervenes in history as the redeeming God*" [emphasis in the original].

<sup>26</sup>This divine title, the Holy One of Israel, occurs six times in this volume of sermons, but always in company with other divine appellations: 41:14 the LORD, your Redeemer; 43:3 the LORD your God . . . your Savior; 43:14 the LORD, your Redeemer; 45:11 the LORD . . . his [Israel's] Maker; 47:4 our Redeemer, the LORD of hosts; and 48:17 the LORD, your Redeemer . . . the LORD your God.

<sup>27</sup>C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books* (Chicago: Moody, 1986) 155.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

revision, then God would be neither all-wise nor all-powerful.”<sup>29</sup> He also concluded:

God’s decrees will eventuate with certainty whether they come to pass solely by his own causality or through the agency of his creatures. God, moreover implements his divine purpose throughout the course of human affairs and not just sporadically or in isolated events. All history reveals the certainty of events decreed by God.<sup>30</sup>

More from his adept pen is pertinent:

God is the God of predictive prophecy. . . . [H]e foreordains even contingent events (cf. Gen 45:8; 50:20; Prov 16:33) and knows and appoints even the duration of our lives (Job 14:5; Ps 39:4). The alternative would be a universe in which God is as uninformed and as uncertain about what will happen from moment to moment as are human beings.<sup>31</sup>

Bruce Ware’s sharp critique is a fitting one to record: “It [Open Theism] is so demeaning to God as it is so unrightfully exalting of us.”<sup>32</sup>

Rhetorical questions with divine self-predications mixed with imperitival clauses, reminders of past actions, and authoritative predictions of what will still be done deliver a powerful karate chop to the neck of Open Theism! Isaiah 40–48 cannot be overlooked without prejudice to the current doctrinal debate and argument. The prophet’s inspired sermons are most instructive!

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<sup>29</sup>Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority* (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1983) 6:84.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 85-86.

<sup>32</sup>Ware, *God’s Lesser Glory* 148.