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THE CYRUS NOTATIONS OF DEUTERO - ISAIAH

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A recurring problem in our day is that of the Isaianic authorship of the entire book of Isaiah. The scope of this problem is enormous since Christ's own integrity is at stake in the question. Christ quotes from every portion of Isaiah's book and either assumes or states Isaianic authorship in each case. Therefore, to say that Isaiah is not the sole author of the book bearing his name is to undermine not only written revelation but also the personal revelation by God to us through His Son. In yet another sense the scope of this problem is awesome; so much written material is available on the subject. With respect to "Deutero-Isaiah" the problem concerning authorship centers about the geographical background, and therefore the chronological placement of chapters 40-66. To discuss this milieu of chapters 40-66 goes very far beyond the scope of this paper. But there is one particularly knotty problem which to a large measure will dictate the interpretation one gives to the background of Deutero-Isaiah. And that problem is the concern of this paper: The "Cyrus" notations of Deutero-Isaiah. In turn this paper will discuss the point of tension in the problem, several solutions that have been proposed by destructive criticism, and finally a palatable solution of the problem.

THE POINT OF TENSION

Critical attacks upon Scripture have been numerous. And the attacks are no longer simply made by those who have some claim upon scholarship. Nor are the attacks being confined to a few select places of apostasy; the attacks are now being waged through a host of Sunday school materials that have repercussions among those of the grass-roots level of Protestantism. A brief glance through the Sunday school materials of the main line denominations of America will support such an assertion.

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It is, of course, true that the Word of God has been attacked from all sides in the centuries of the Church's existence. Yet the present attack is more subtle than the attacks of the past. For one thing, many of the attacks are coming from within the ranks of the Protestant denominations. They are coming from those who purport to be theologians, those who supposedly are equipped to interpret Scripture. Another interesting fact about the present-day attack is that several assumptions are made with respect to Scripture which result in the undermining of what Scripture claims to be. One of these assumptions is that the empirical method has shown conclusively that miracles are impossible, for miracles defy the empirical method, therefore, they are impossible. Another assumption is that the critical approach to the study of Scripture, especially of the Old Testament, is the only intellectually acceptable approach of study. It therefore follows that critics who make such assumptions wish to supplant the orthodox position of the inspiration of Scripture with a notion more compatible with their own presuppositions. That notion has generally been some form dictated by the evolutionary approach to history and religion. The basic proposition of this notion is that the religion of mankind has evolved over the centuries developing from the most primitive forms of mythology, so called religion, to a more and more sophisticated, rationalized approach to God. This view believes that all the documents from the very earliest times reflect what people really thought about God. But because the more primitive peoples were unenlightened their conceptions of God were wrong.

To be sure, the variations of this evolutionary approach of the study of the Old Testament text have been numerous.¹ But in all of these variations there was a common belief: The Hegelian approach to history was the only sound approach. The view which Hegel took of history was this: "The only idea which philosophy brings with it [that is, to the contemplation of history] is the simple idea of reason, that reason dominates the world and that world-history is thus a rational process."² It is this imagination that world-history is a rational process that has so characterized the approach of the critics. As they approached the study of the Old Testament they assumed that all of ancient history must bow before the throne of reason. Therefore, when ancient documents asserted facts which would not bow before the throne of reason, the ancient documents, rather than reason, were questioned. But somehow the critics had to account for the record of the historical documents. Therefore, they posited theories of composition for the Old Testament, the end results of which would corroborate their initial assumptions.

Once the critics imagined that all the historical process would submit to their rationalization, they had immediately made a most drastic assumption: History would thus contain nothing of the supernatural. For their rationalizing method could neither account for a transcendent God who was also immanent nor recognize Him as such. All of this is not to

say that all critics are avowed disbelievers in the supernatural, but as Edward Young points out: "It must be confessed that among the advocates of recent critical theories the greater number do reject the working of God in any adequate sense in Israel's history."³ Once the critic has ruled out the possibility of the supernatural occurring in history he has positioned himself against the self-attestation of the Scriptural record.

The preceding discussion will serve to establish more clearly exactly what the point of tension is with respect to the mentions of Cyrus in the text of Isaiah. While the mentions of Cyrus in the text of Isaiah might seem to some very insignificant, they are in fact extremely crucial to the authorship of the Book of Isaiah and, therefore, to the integrity of the New Testament. The critics have long contended that Isaiah 40-66 are quite obviously not reflective of a Palestinian milieu. Rather, these chapters are believed to reflect an exilic milieu, a Babylonian background. If this assessment of the critic be right, then quite certainly Isaiah could not have written chapters 40-66 since he lived many years before the Babylonian exile. The Seventh-day Adventist Commentary puts the whole problem nicely into focus:

One of the chief arguments of these critics for a composite authorship of Isaiah is that chs. 40-66 appear to them to be written, not from the standpoint of an author living at the close of the 8th century B. C. but from that of one who lived near the close of the Babylonian captivity. The mention of Cyrus by name (chs. 44:28; 45:1) is regarded by them as conclusive evidence that these chapters were written during the time of Cyrus, that is, in the second half of the 6th century B. C.⁴

It is this Babylonian background, which is suggested by the naming of Cyrus, that forms the greatest point of tension between conservatives and the critics. J. Barton Payne quotes Edward J. Young as estimating the importance of the point this way: "The most formidable argument which must be faced by the defenders of the unity of the book is the one which maintains that the background of chapters 40-66 is Babylonian and not that of the eighth century B. C."⁵

At this point one might be prone to think that Babylonian notations in Deutero-Isaiah must, indeed, be many in number. But the real situation is to the contrary, for these notations of a specific nature are actually very few in number. Even C. C. Torrey maintained "that if the five or so references to Babylon and Cyrus could be eliminated as later insertions, almost all of chapters 40-66 could then be assigned to a Palestinian milieu."⁶ Thus the specific notations are indeed very, very few. Why is it then that the critics are so ready to see "Deutero-Isaiah" as Babylonian?

It is clearly not because the background of these chapters is replete with specific Babylonian notations. The answer to this question is to be found in the writings of the critics. For example, Robert H. Pfeiffer in his introduction comments in this sarcastic fashion on the two Cyrus notations: "Of course this anachronism offers no difficulty to those who believe that God predicted through Isaiah's pen what was to happen two centuries later."⁷ It is, then, quite clear from Pfeiffer's own words that the thing which makes the mentions of Babylon and Cyrus so repulsive to the critic is that if the single authorship of Isaiah be maintained, then clearly the Book of Isaiah contains predictive prophecy. And to admit to the existence of predictive prophecy is to admit to supernatural intervention in history. But as already pointed out the critic because of his own assumptions could not find such intervention in the historical process. Thus he refuses to allow such and therefore must posit some alternative explanation.

The real point of tension then in the Cyrus notations is that conservatives are most willing to allow for divine intervention in history, while the critics will not allow such intervention. Hence, the conservative finds predictive prophecy quite acceptable. But the critic rejects the possibility of predictive prophecy. He claims all prophecies were written down after the fact. Having established the particular point of tension, one can now better study the several details of this problem.

THE PROPOSED SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEM

The concern of this section shall be to look very briefly at several solutions which have been proposed to answer the problem under consideration. Obviously there exists a polarity among all the solutions proposed. Either one can accept the readings of Cyrus in the Isaianic text or he can reject them. If one chooses to accept the readings of Cyrus the only possible nuances of positions in this acceptance would be the particular material one might choose to support his view. However, if one should decide to reject the readings of Cyrus in the text, he is then placing himself open to many variations of interpretation. And he may call to his "support" a host of different materials. And it is indeed true that those who have rejected the readings of Cyrus in the text have taken virtually every position possible. The thrust of this section, then, shall be to look at several of the various positions that have been taken by those who have rejected the readings of Cyrus in the Isaianic text.

To be sure, some say that "Cyrus" is actually the reading in the text but certainly not as coming from the pen of Isaiah. Many are willing to concede that these two readings of "Cyrus" are quite acceptable if it is also admitted that a "Deutero-Isaiah" penned chapters 40-66. The history of criticism of the entire book of Isaiah is interesting for it shows so clearly the direction that the critic will take and the end result of his work. And

this applies directly to the critics' claims about the Cyrus notations. As early as 1167 Ibn Ezra cast some doubt on the Isaianic authorship of chapters 40-66 in what Pfeiffer refers to as "carefully veiled language."⁸ But such doubt was indeed very rare, for "until the period of the beginning of modern destructive criticism in the last half of the eighteenth century, the traditional belief in the Isaianic authorship of the entire book was practically universally held and unchallenged."⁹ This modern period of destructive criticism began perhaps with Koppe who as early as 1780 doubted the genuineness of chapter 50.¹⁰ But the first mighty blow was to fall in 1775 when J. C. Doederlein in his commentary on Isaiah suspected the genuineness of chapters 40-66.¹¹ Since that time, says the critic Pfeiffer, "it is generally recognized that it [Isaiah] comprises two distinct works."¹²

From this point onward the critics went to work. Rosenmueller, Eichhorn, Gesenius, and Ewald were leaders in the movement to find portions of the Book of Isaiah that were not really Isaianic.¹³ This critical approach proceeded until "by the middle of the 19th century some 37 or 38 chapters were rejected as no part of Isaiah's actual writings."¹⁴ Even Franz Delitzsch capitulated to the critical approach around 1880.¹⁵ But the division of a "Proto-Isaiah" and "Deutero-Isaiah" was not enough, for even "Deutero-Isaiah" began to disintegrate. Just before the turn of the 20th century men began to see a "Trito-Isaiah" in chapters 56-66. But the fragmentation did not stop there. As time passed the fragmentation multiplied until it seems to have reached a supreme expression in the work of Robert Kennett in his book, The Composition of the Book of Isaiah. After apparently detailed study of chapters 40-66 Kennett is able to say:

Unfortunately the literary criticism of these chapters shows that they are extraordinarily complex, and it is no easy matter, if indeed it is possible, to sort out the various passages according to their several authors. Nowhere has the hand of the editor done such drastic work, and it is much easier to analyze than to reconstruct. Many indeed be loth to believe that chapters of which the present effort is so beautiful can be a mere mosaic of fragments. The story of the Flood, however, in the book of Genesis is an illustration of the manner in which original documents could be rent asunder and recombined.¹⁶

Quite clearly Kennett sees a great deal of fragmentation in the authorship of Isaiah. But just how much fragmentation is there according to Kennett? George Robinson, writing in the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, analyzes the above-mentioned work of Kennett, and finds this fragmentation:

(a) all of chs. 3, 5, 6, 7, 20 and 31, and large portions of chs. 1, 2, 4, 8, 9, 10, 14, 17, 22 and 23, may be assigned to Isaiah, the son of Amoz; (b) all of chs. 13, 40 and 47, and large portions of chs. 14, 21, 41, 43, 44, 45, 46 and 48 may be assigned to the time of Cyrus; (c) all of chs. 15, 36, 37 and 39, and portions of chs. 16 and 38, may be assigned to the period between Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander the Great, but cannot be dated precisely; (d) the passage 23:1-14 may be assigned to the time of Alexander the Great; (e) all of chs. 11, 12, 19, 24-27, 29, 30, 32-35, 42, 49-66, and portions of chs. 1, 2, 4, 8, 9, 10, 16, 17, 18, 23, 41, 44, 45, 48 may be assigned to the 2d. cent. B. C. (167-140 B. C.)¹⁷

On and on goes the process of fragmentation. And this has been the history of criticism in its destructive sense, and it is apparently the only route criticism can take as it departs from a position of complete inspiration of the text.

Now this process of historical fragmentation has, of course, had its effect upon the interpretations of the Cyrus notations. As well, it helps explain, partially at least, the many nuances of interpretation that have been taken with respect to the problem. Now the question is: How have different men handled these two Cyrus notations (44:28; 45:1)?

Generally speaking there have been two approaches taken to explain the naming of Cyrus in the text of Isaiah. One of these two approaches has been to regard the reading l^ekôresh as containing radicals which are different from those radicals of the original text. Several of the critics have imagined that somehow the radicals in the Hebrew text are not the right ones. Wordsworth, for example, interpreted l^ekôresh as really being l^ehârêsh; hence, the Hebrew radical waw was dropped and the holem was changed to a qames and the segol to a şere; thus the text would read "the crushed."¹⁸ By this understanding Wordsworth saw the one referred to here as "the crushed one," meaning Hezekiah. Later, however, he saw phronein in the LXX and "suggested that both readings resulted from the confusion in the mind of a scribe about 540 B. C., who thought that Isaiah ought to have written l^ekhôresh rō'î instead of a probable lākh w^erāsh d^e'î rō'î addressed to Jerusalem."¹⁹

Another who has made a similar approach to that of Wordsworth was Thirtle. He held that the original radicals were l^ehōresh not l^ekôresh.²⁰ Therefore, the original text made a reference not to Cyrus but to one who was an "engraver, cutter, artificer, or craftsman."²¹ He sees, therefore, that one radical supplants two.

But it is plain to see that men such as these do not have a particularly great reverence for the radicals of the Hebrew text. Once one is willing to concede that it is possible that the radicals have been tampered with, the question becomes not one of shall one change the text but one of where shall one change the text. Clearly the limiting factor in their changing the text is their own assumption of the background of the text.

But it must also be added that whether or not l^ekôresh is the textual reading, the context surrounding 44:28 and 45:1 must be handled, for it certainly points to Cyrus. For example, in comparing Isa. 41:2 and 25 is the revelation that this political leader of whom Isaiah speaks is one who would come from the east and would invade from the north. This is exactly what Cyrus did. Again look at Isa. 46:10-11 where a similar reference to Cyrus is made. And most assuredly Isa. 45:13 is a very pointed reference to Cyrus, for he it was who built "my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward." And again the words of Isa. 48:14-15 are too pointed a reference to Cyrus to be overlooked. The point to be raised is that not only the actual mentions of Cyrus are prophetic but so are the other passages concerning him. Therefore, the critic will not help himself by allowing a change of radicals until he first has done something about the other pointed prophecies of Isaiah in which the name of Cyrus is omitted.

The second approach to the Cyrus notations is that which imagines that the name is an interpolation or a gloss added to the text to help interpret it. Nagelsbach, who wrote in Lange's Commentaries, maintained this position of interpolation. He was willing to grant that in

xliv. 28 another word stood in the place of l^ekôresh and that [in] xlv. 1 the same word was either simply interpolated (which the construction allows), or was substituted for another word. We would need then, of course, to grant also that the words bišmeka 'akann^ekā (xlv. 4), which manifestly presuppose the mention of the name, were inserted by the interpolator.²²

Exactly why it is that this author is so willing to concede to such an extensive process of interpolation in order to rid the text of Cyrus' name is not certain. It is not that he rejects the possibility of predictive prophecy. He concedes:

On the other hand the great mass of xl-lxvi are so unmistakably genuine prophecy; in fact the crown of all Old Testament prophecy, that we can ascribe them to no other than to the king among the prophets, to Isaiah. If now single passages in the last chapters bear undoubted

marks of originating in the exile, then they must be later additions to the original writing of Isaiah.²³

But how is one to decide exactly which passages "bear undoubted marks of originating in the exile?" Evidently for this author the specificity of the prophecy determines whether it is exilic. If God is able to reveal the future, of what consequence to His ability are the details of that future? There are, indeed, other details in Scripture prophesied long before they occurred. For example the naming of Josiah three centuries before he was born (I Kings 13:1f.) and the name of Bethlehem by Micah (Micah 5:2).

However, the understanding of interpolations and glosses as possible solutions to the problem of the Cyrus notations has not been limited to the segment of liberal theologians (as already indicated by the capitulation of Delitzsch). Those who would, I am certain, classify themselves in the class of conservative theologians have somehow believed that interpolation as a possible solution to the notations of Cyrus eases the problem for them. N. H. Ridderbos, professor of Old Testament at Free University, Amsterdam, admits that Isaiah 40-66 may have what he refers to as an "Isaianic core."²⁴ By this he means that Deutero-Isaiah, while having certain portions which clearly are from the hand of Isaiah, contains portions which, though not penned by Isaiah, are thematically consistent with Isaianic teaching. He does not oppose the notion that the utterances of prophets were handed down orally by a circle of Isaiah's disciples.²⁵ As the generations of his disciples passed, the kernels of thought directly from the hands of Isaiah were changed and adapted to meet the changing situations of the succeeding generations of people.

And sorry to say, even R. K. Harrison in his formidable introduction capitulates to the possibility of scribal glosses occurring in Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1. Harrison claims that there are three possible interpretations of the naming of Cyrus.²⁶ Two of these three possible interpretations are quite obvious. They are the polarities already suggested: that of seeing Isaiah 40-66 as exilic and that of letting the text read as we have it, that is with the specific mentioning of Cyrus. Yet Harrison takes a third approach to the problem. He says:

A third approach to the problem, and one which is favored by the present writer, is to regard the references to Cyrus in Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1 as constituting explanatory glosses imposed upon the original text by a post-exilic copyist. It is of some significance that these two occurrences are the only instances in Isaiah where Cyrus is actually mentioned by name, and since they are found in such close proximity it seems most probable that they

comprise scribal additions inserted in order to explain what was thought to be the real significance of the prophecy.²⁷

While Harrison is not dogmatic about his position, he does find some comfort in knowing that there may well be a palatable third alternative. It is interesting that Harrison never really gives a valid reason for refusing to accept the reading of Cyrus as coming from the pen of Isaiah. Further, he does suggest that the close proximity of the two mentions of Cyrus would tend to corroborate the idea of scribal glosses. Yet it is interesting that especially in the first mention of Cyrus (Isaiah 44:28) the context would argue for the necessary inclusion of the name of Cyrus. And it is this inclusion of the name that makes the prophecy so remarkable. Allis' analysis of Isaiah 44:24-28 still stands as a formidable objection to the position that Harrison takes. Says Allis:

The most striking and significant features of the poem favor the view that while the utterance was significant in and of itself, it was chiefly significant in view of the exceptional circumstance under which it was spoken, i. e. in view of its early date. The chronological arrangement of the poem assigns the Restoration and Cyrus to the future. The perspective of the poem, together with the abrupt change of person in the 2d strophe, argues that the future is a remote future. And finally the carefully constructed double climax attaches a significance to the definiteness of the utterance which is most easily accounted for if this future was so remote that a definite disclosure concerning it would be of extraordinary importance.²⁸

The point of Allis is well taken and must be answered by all who would delete the name of Cyrus from the text.

Having now looked at several alternative solutions that various men have forwarded, what alternative solution may one find?

AN ALTERNATIVE PROPOSAL

The proposal to be suggested here is one already mentioned and alluded to in previous sections of this paper. And it is one which admits a crass honesty with the text and one which most definitely allows for the supernatural control of history and therefore the actuality of predictive prophecy.

First, it is worth noting that there is no evidence in the two Dead Sea scrolls containing Isaiah that chapters 1-39 ever existed independently of chapters 40-66.²⁹ It is admitted, of course, that these documents are not from the exilic period in date, but they do reflect a very definite textual tradition. Second, "writing about 180 B. C., the author of the book of Ecclesiasticus (ch. 48:23-28), Jesus ben Sirach, credited various sections of the book of Isaiah to the prophet whose name it bears."³⁰ Third, there are the numerous attestations to the single authorship of the book by Christ himself. For example, the following passages of Isaiah are quoted or alluded to by Christ and in each case Isaianic authorship is either stated or implied: Isaiah 56:1f. (Matthew 5:3); Isaiah 42:1-4 and 41:8f. (Matthew 12:17f.); Isaiah 56:7 (Matthew 21:13); Isaiah 66:24 (Mark 9:48); and Isaiah 61:1-2 (Luke 4:17-21).

But more decisive to this particular problem, though no more crucial perhaps, is the context in which the two mentions of Cyrus occur. The principal thrust of the context surrounding chapters 44 and 45 is that Jehovah God is infinitely more worthy and powerful than any idols of men. Over and over again are found sarcastic taunts of pagan idols (somehow reminiscent of Dagon and his inability to help himself). Note as an example the taunting words of Isaiah 40:18-21:

To whom, then will ye liken God? Or what likeness will ye compare unto him? The workman melteth and casteth an image, and the goldsmith spreadeth it over with gold, and casteth silver chains. He that is so impoverished that he hath no oblation, chooseth a tree that will not rot; he seeketh a skillful workman to prepare a carved image, that shall not be moved. Have ye not known?...

And along with the taunting sarcasm is a full-blown acknowledgement of God's foreknowledge. Again and again the point is made that while dumb idols know nothing nor say nothing about the future, the true God does:

The fact, however, that Isaiah mentions Cyrus is not an argument in favor of a late date for the book, but rather an evidence of the wisdom and foreknowledge of God. Throughout the book there are predictions concerning the future.... Indeed, Isaiah sets forth God's foreknowledge as eloquent testimony to his wisdom and power (chs. 41:21-23; 42:9; 43:9; 44:7, 8; 45:11, 21; 46:9, 10; 48:3, 5-8).³¹

And if the God of Israel has this particular ability, that of foreknowledge, the prophecy including the specific naming of Cyrus is not so unbelievable. In fact it is in this very sort of context that one would expect

to find such a prophecy. The prophecy enriches to a superlative degree the infinite ability of the true God. And it is this basic proposition that Isaiah is asserting in his prophecy. On the other hand it is difficult to see what would have been accomplished by an exilic writer including the name of Cyrus, for in that case the name would be only an historical notation. And if this were the case, it would seem like an exilic writer would have included many more detailed descriptions of Babylon if he would want his historiography to have credibility. Birks seems to have this line of reasoning in mind when he says that if Isaiah 40-66 were exilic, it is strange that so little is said of exilic contemporaries (names and person).³² It is also interesting that even the critics concede that Isaiah 40-66 clearly indicates God's power to control men.³³

A last argument in support of the acceptance of the reading of Cyrus in the text has already been suggested in the words of Oswald T. Allis. J. Barton Payne gives an excellent analysis of the Isaiah 44:24 - 45:8 passage, showing that the failure to mention the name of Cyrus would destroy the obvious procedural tendency of Isaiah in the passage.³⁴ Further, against the view that Isaiah would not have included the name of Cyrus in the passage since the text calls him "my servant" (and Cyrus was the avowed worshipper of Marduk), it may be said that God's control of a man who did not worship Him makes the power of God all the more vivid. It now remains for a concise conclusion to be drawn to this problem.

CONCLUSION

The only conclusion which seems appropriate for one who reverences the text of Scripture is to assume that the reading of Cyrus in the text is the only acceptable reading. Further, it is certain that the simpler understanding of the text is that Isaiah did, indeed, write the name of Cyrus. Any other interpretation of the text must struggle against the overwhelming evidence of the context. It is, therefore, as Pfeiffer put it: "Of course this anachronism offers no difficulty to those who believe that God predicted through Isaiah's pen what was to happen two centuries later."³⁵

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