

10.26.2009 C&T

“Images of God in the Hebrew Bible: The Book of Psalms and the Book of Isaiah”

From Introduction – Hebrews believed in the existence of other gods; distinguishing between the belief in one god and the worship of one god.

Also Isaiah 45:5 – God clarifies that there is no other god besides Him.

- Is the belief in more than one god part of the reason that God is angry with Israel?
 - Idol-worship angered God (did they view these as “minor deities”?) even by Israel’s kings
 - Fear of gods from other nations perhaps caused them to neglect their own God

Psalms 103 – Compassion of God in comparison to what we read last time

- Is it a big jump between punishment and mercy?
 - Yes
 - The previous readings focus on vengeful God (you do bad => you are punished)
 - The psalm is more like the “New Testament idea of God”
 - Ignores some of God’s previous passage
 - No
 - This psalm is focused on a different aspect of God (focused on joy instead of fear)
 - Same message: you still need to fear God to get his love
 - God’s never been vengeful, but he’s simply disciplined his people (vengeful has a selfish motive that discipline doesn’t have)
 - Can God have a character flaw?
 - We want to explain what god does in terms of logic, though we can ascribe the actions of characters (eg Odysseus) to character flaw

Isaiah 41:14 – Jacob is a worm, Israel is an insect

- They were just disciplined, and now he’s explaining why he disciplined them
- How insignificant they are and yet He still loves them
- But the image is that of a sledgehammer vs. a worm (shows how great are the things that he is give, “throwing pearls to the pigs”)

Isaiah 40:2 – God has given Israel double for all of her sins

- Is this a slip up on Isaiah’s part? Revealing the faults of God?
- Poetic license?
- This passage perhaps is supposed to be comforting as opposed to accusing

Isaiah 45:1 – reference to Cyrus

- Historical background
 - Cyrus is Xerxes’ grandfather, king of Persia
 - Persians conquered the Babylonians who had been oppressing the Hebrews and let them start practicing Judaism again
- God uses Cyrus;

- Why is Cyrus anointed?
 - Maybe he's not: the grammar seems to imply "Thus says the Lord to his anointed [and] to Cyrus"
 - Maybe more "appointed" instead of "anointed"
 - This shows God working on the world scale instead of just in Israel
- Maybe God is working through Cyrus instead of God appearing and talking to Cyrus (you can control the course of history as an omnipotent being without directly speaking to his subjects)

Other passages we didn't discuss:

Isaiah 40:3 – Different meanings of passage

Isaiah 42:14 – stance on idol worship

General question about Isaiah – is it God talking? Who's the speaker?

Isaiah 45:18 – the idea of chaos and a refutation of it